



Interview with Jane Reid Zdancewic

Under the Auspices of the
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Jane Reid Zdancewic

Ms. Zdancewic: Hello! I am Jane Reid Zdancewic. I was born in Tennent. I was the daughter of Florence Griffin and Edgar Denise Reid. My mother was born on Long Island at the Van Wyck Homestead out there in Woodbury. Her mother was Susan Jane Van Wyck, and her father was William Henry Griffin. They were farmers, as most people were in those days. Mother recalls the big old homestead as having a huge cook-in fireplace. She could sit in one corner of the fireplace when the fire was going. It was that big. She also said that she remembered seeing Teddy Roosevelt riding by on horseback past their farm. She also remembered that they had some of the earliest automobile races around the roads on Long Island. This would have been around the turn of the century. Around that same time, development was coming out to their area from New York City, so the family moved to farm in Monmouth County, and mother, while visiting one of her family there, attended Old Tennent Church, and that is where she met my father, who was the son of William Henry and Emma Taylor Reid.

He was born in the house that my grandparents built on Craig Road. That house is still standing today. He had three brothers and two sisters. They loved to do all kinds of things outdoors. They would walk around the fields and check on wildflowers, and because of that, I have a love of wildflowers, which I've inherited from my dad, and I passed it on to my kids. My Dad and Mother bought a farm when they married in 1913 on what is now Church Lane in Manalapan Township. It was a very nice home, and fairly new when they bought it, and they spent their entire married life in that house. That is where I was born in 1918. We were very fortunate in that shortly after my folks moved there, the main line for electricity and telephone came from Freehold, down Craig Road, and down Church Lane going to Englishtown for the borough of Englishtown. One of mother's good friends, a Mary Gould who was her neighbor on Long Island, was an operator of the Englishtown Telephone Office, and she was there for many years in that office when they had all the wires and all the plug-ins for telephones. I remember going there and watching them operate that part there. Our social life was connected with church and visiting families, and outdoor things. Of course, there were no such things as televisions or even radios when I was first born. We played all kinds of games as kids growing up together. Some are still playing these games: hide and seek, red lights, jump rope, hopscotch, marbles, and giant steps. There were several other games that we used to play together. As I say, our social life was visiting back and forth with families. I had cousins in Mount Holly and Pennsylvania, and we would visit them. There weren't movies to go to at first either. Our lives were quite simple. As I was growing up, my mother was quite a seamstress, and I learned to sew at a very young age. By the age of eleven, I was making all of my own clothes. I was kind of a chubby kid, so I couldn't go in the store and buy things ready made. (Laughs)



William Henry Reid II (Jane Zdancewic's brother) arrived December 28, 1913.



Jane Reid Zdancewic and brother, Bill eating apples

We were quite poor, but we were happy, and we did not realize it. I lived through the Depression when sometimes we would have some kind of a meat maybe only once a week. And the rest of the time, we'd eat the potatoes and the vegetables that we grew. Cottage cheese we made because we had a cow, which we milked, and we made butter, also. We had a few chickens, and mother could collect extra eggs, and extra cheese, and extra butter, and she would go to the store and swap it for the things that we needed like flour and sugar that we didn't have on the farm ourselves. We raised a few pigs, and that was some of the meat we had. Many times, I can remember helping my mother prepare meat. She would put it in jars and would cook it in a water bath for about three or four hours to preserve it. When we had pigs, she'd make pork sausage, and she

would cook it and put it into a crock and cover it with lard, the fat. And by doing that, it would keep.

And then many times, she did much canning, as I did all through my life and since I have retired in the last few years. I remember we had a huge white amber cherry tree in our yard, and that the branches hung over the porch roof. My dad more than once would go up into that tree, and he would pick a whole milk bucket full of cherries, and we would can those. And, oh, they were so good in the winter to eat. All these little things.

You asked me if I remembered tramps. Yes, I remembered tramps. They came around during the Depression years when food was not too plentiful. And, we were getting along lots of times on only one meal with meat in it during the whole week's time. This tramp, the one tramp that I remember, was Frank Walker. He came every summer and helped pick potatoes, which was one of those things that my father grew along with apples and peaches. Frank built himself a metal shack down behind the barn, and he had an open fireplace where he cooked his food, and he was as happy as could be. He loved it that way. He was a very interesting person, because he had been a sailor. He traveled all over the world, and every summer, he made sure that I had a hammock to swing in. He made it out of heavy cord, and that hammock was so made, that it didn't matter how many kids would swing in it, we couldn't fall out of it. Evidently, this was one of the things they had to learn when they were on shipboard when it was a rough sea. You couldn't fall out of that hammock. Anyhow, he loved to tell us stories about his trips. One of the things he did, he helped to build the Ben Franklin Bridge. He worked on the cable work on that bridge, and he told us about it. "But," Mother said, "Okay, you can go and talk with him, but you must sit out in the front of the barn where I can see you when you're talking with him there." That is how careful parents were of their children in those days. This was about the time of the sequentennial of our country. And he brought me a bank that was built like the Liberty Bell. And in it he put a note, "Remember, Jane, for every dollar you put in this bank, ten cents belongs to God." That is a touching thing for a man of his caliber to say to me. Then to go on with my life, of course, I went to a one room school in Tennent through the fifth grade. And then, I went to Englishtown for the sixth grade. And just the other day, I met my sixth grade teacher again, Erma Bennett Dorrer, and she said that is where she started teaching, and she was only twenty years old at that time. So, we had quite a reminiscing time there together. I stayed in Englishtown through the ninth grade. And then, I went to Freehold High School for my last three years of high school. I was the last class to go to the Freehold High School from Englishtown. After that, they went to Jamesburg. I remember while I was in Englishtown going to school that the road, the concrete road that came from Old Bridge and went through Englishtown to Tennent was laid while I was there in



**Jane Reid
(Zdancewic), 1923**

school. That would have probably been about 1930 or 1931, or something like that. Before that, that road was a dirt road. So, you can see how far we have gone in these few years. I can remember one of the first tractors my father bought. It was a caterpillar tractor with track onto it. While I was going to high school, I became a member of The Grange, The Monmouth Grange, which was a family oriented social group basically of farm people. And, it was a very wonderful organization at that time. One of the things that I remember a lot about The Grange is we would put on plays, we'd put on variety shows to make money, and to help pay the mortgage off on our buildings and things like that. And another thing, I was involved with The Glee Club. And that group was probably about thirty young people. And, we'd travel all over the State giving programs. It was led by Mrs. Ruth Applegate Barclay. We had a wonderful time. Of course, Atlantic City was always where the State Grange meetings were held, and we would go down there for those programs. After I finished high school, I wanted to go on to school, but I didn't have any money for that.



**Jane Reid
(Zdancewic)
graduate of
Freehold School,
1936**

Then, my mother found out there was a college in Trenton called The School of Industrial Arts that I could attend. The tuition for one semester was twenty-five dollars. I knew some people there, and this lady needed someone to come and live with her because she had lost one of her legs through cancer. She needed someone to help her with the housework. I worked with her for my board in Trenton, and I went to school for two years. After the two years with her, she said she didn't need my help anymore. So then, I was able to commute by train. The train, it was the Pennsylvania Railroad, went from Long Branch into Monmouth Junction and then from Monmouth Junction into Trenton. It turned around and it would come back. And, it made one trip in the morning and one trip at night. There were a lot of kids going to Ryder College and State Teacher's College. No others were going where I was going to school. I was the only one that went there. And, some of them went to work in Trenton. But the train only had a whistle stop in Tennent. It stopped in Farmingdale, Freehold, then Englishtown, and then Jamesburg. At that point where the station was in Englishtown, that was nothing but a freight station. And there were no houses around it. And when I would get home at night it would be six o'clock and very dark. My mother said that is no good for a young woman to be getting off a train all by herself there. So, she wrote a letter to the President of the Pennsylvania Railroad if it would be possible for that train to stop in Tennent for me. Yes, it would be if I was going to be a regular passenger. Thus, it was a whistle stop. So every night, the conductor had to see if I was on the train and blow the whistle so the engineer would stop to let me off in Tennent. Did I get a razzing about that! (Laughs) After that, I went to work down in Camp Evans, which was part of Fort Monmouth. I was helping to write books and retouching photographs that were directions for some of our early radar equipment. I worked there until I got married.



**Jane Reid marries
Henry Zdancewic in
Tennent, New Jersey
on October 23, 1943**

I met Henry through the Grange. His parents both were immigrants from Poland. He was master of Jerseyville Grange, and I was going to Monmouth Grange, and he got invited to one of our annual anniversary dinners. And that is where I first met him. And, of course, these young people that were in The Grange would have dances, and so we got better acquainted by going to dances. Not that I was ever much of a dancer. So, when I married I moved all of eleven miles from Tennent over to this farm over near Smithburg, which we later called Wood-Z-Lane Farm. At first, he had just a few cows that he milked. He grew potatoes and he had some vegetables on the farm. And, it was quite a come down for me because there was no electricity in that house. There was no running water in that house, so this was quite a deal for me to step down from where I had these things.

There was no central heating either in that house. By the first winter, we had a bathroom in the house. There was a little pot stove down in the basement, fired by coal, and that was the trickiest doggone thing to keep running, but that is what gave us hot water for our showers upstairs. Oh, when I was growing up as a kid, many of times I took cold showers because there was no hot water, right? (Laughs) Also, I can remember my room had no heat in it. One time, I came home from a Grange meeting with some flowers that had been given to me. I put them in a vase in my bedroom, and the next morning, it was all ice. So, I slept under many quilts to keep warm. (Laughs)

After I got married, it wasn't too long, it was about a year and a half later, our son was born. Then twenty months after that, our daughter was born. They were raised on the farm. They loved farm life, which is a wonderful place to raise kids, because there is lots of space and many things to do. And very shortly after, Arthur, our son, was born. Henry had raised a bunch of heifers, and he was going to sell them when they had their calf and would start to milk. Well, he couldn't sell them. The next thing, he was milking four heifers with lots of milk. My mother-in-law came to see me in the hospital when Arthur was born and said, "I've got so much milk I could take a bath in it, and I don't know what to do with all this milk." Well, it was about the next day that Henry went to Elliott's Dairy in Freehold and asked if they could use some milk. He came home with a milk can and a strainer and that is when we started in the dairy business, which we continued for twenty-five years. When we sold out, we had seventy milking cows and about seventy young animals. So we had quite a sizable dairy. Henry had been drafted for service in World War II, but when he went to the draft board, they said go home and raise potatoes. That is more important than you going into the Army. So, that is what he did. But at the end of the war there was a



**Ann and Arthur
Zdancewic, 1950**

surplus of potatoes. They didn't know what to do with them. So the government told him to pile them up in fields and spray them with a paint so they couldn't be sold for human consumption. I guess they were going to go for alcohol or something of that nature. With that, Henry said, I don't want to grow potatoes for that purpose. I want to grow them for people to eat, so we stopped growing potatoes. We also had pigs before we had the cows, but we found out pigs could get a disease, that if you had cows on the farm, you could not sell your milk for a month after this sickness was found with your pigs. So, they went with the potatoes. Then we concentrated on the dairy herd, and it grew and so forth. By 1950, we had quite an experience. There was a hurricane came along just about Thanksgiving Day. We had just built this new chicken coop, enough to hold 1,000 birds. And, the wind came along and it took the roof off that chicken coop. Well, chickens are very funny animals. They're flighty. With that, they all piled up in two corners of the chicken coop. And half of them suffocated because they piled on top of each other. The next day the ones that survived were, of course, soaking wet. And we found out that a neighbor had an empty chicken coop, so we picked them up and moved them over there. But you know they were so upset, they never did anything. And then, it was about three or four weeks later, we discover we had tuberculosis in our herd of cows and we lost the whole herd. We didn't get to keep any of them. We had bought one cow that was evidently diseased in the spring, and in six month's time, she had infected the whole herd of cows. So, that was quite an event. The things that farmers have to go through along with fighting the weather and never getting a fair price for your food. It has been historically that way for years. We've all, a lot of us farmers, felt that farming has been controlled by the government just so that the people in the country could have cheap food.

Ms. Wikoff: After that disaster when they had to get rid of all their cows, Henry became very much involved with The United Milk Producers.

Ms. Zdancewic: Maybe I should back up a little bit. Henry started farming when he was twenty-one years old. His mother and father were both born in Poland. His father was up in the northeast corner of Poland near Lithuania and what was then Prussia. He went to school for just about two or three winters. Because at the time they were under Russian control, the schools were required to teach Russian. He had a Polish teacher. So, whenever he thought he could get away with it, he'd teach them in Polish. So, Henry's father learned both Russian and Polish. He learned some German and he learned some Lithuanian because he had friends in both of those countries. When he came to this country at the age of seventeen, in about 1900, he learned English. This man could speak five different languages. I don't know how he could do it, but he did. Henry's mother grew up in a town that was north of Warsaw, the capital of Poland. They were both farm people; both came from farm families. She came to this country following her mother. Her father had come to this country about 1898, 1897, something like that. At that time, these immigrant people worked at anything they could find, like building railroads, in the mines, things like that. He wrote letters

back to his wife in Poland frequently, and I assume probably sent her money, too. Well, anyhow, these letters ceased to come. And so, Henry's grandmother left Poland and came to this country trying to find her husband. She settled in Jersey City where there was a group of Polish people living. She did as much research as she could, and she found out that her husband had been working on a crew that was building a railroad in western New York State, and that there had been a bad accident, and many of them were killed. They didn't keep records, so they didn't know who it was who was killed, and so she always figured that is what happened to her husband, but there was never any trace of him afterwards. She worked hard. She was working in a laundry in Jersey City, and was getting two or three dollars a week for her twelve hours a day work. Talk about your slave labor. Anyhow, she earned enough money so that she was able to bring her two daughters to this country. And, Henry's mother was thirteen, and his aunt was eleven, when they came to this country. They were put on boats without any family with them, only with some people that they were acquainted with, and that was it. When you stop and think about all these immigrants that came to this country and still are trying to come, they leave their home, their families behind, and they know they are not going to go see them again, at least back in those days. Today, they are a little bit more mobile and do get home once in a while. So, that was Henry's background. So, at the age of twenty-one, following the death of his father from tuberculosis, which could be cured now, back then it couldn't, he took all of the responsibility for this eighty-some acre farm, and his mother, his three younger brothers, his grandmother, who lived in the home with them, and a great grandfather who lived in the home, too. So, that was quite a responsibility for a twenty-one year old. After I married him, and we were running the dairy, he was a member of the Monmouth County Milk Producer's Association, which was affiliated with the state organization, which was called United Milk Producers of New Jersey. Within about three or four years of being a county director, he became a state officer, and then he finally became a state president. And, he held that office for seven years. During that time, he traveled. There were county organizations all over the State of New Jersey with the exception of the very urban counties. So, I can remember traveling with him many times up to Sussex County, down to Cumberland County and all the counties in between, all these annual dinners that they would have. And then, a few times when he would be attending a meeting in Syracuse representing New Jersey up there at the Dairyman's League meeting, I would go to these other meetings without him. And then many times, I didn't go to these meetings, I stayed home and helped to run the dairy with the help of a hired man and our family. My two children were quite instrumental in helping us raise cows, with the milking and so forth. But our son was not cut out to be a dairyman. He could not tolerate cows. So, and also about that same time, dairying was a very poor business to be in. And, both my children decided there were better ways of making a living than to milk cows, and we couldn't argue with them about that.

Ms. Wikoff: Jane, weren't you about the last dairy herd in Monmouth County to close?

Ms. Zdancewic: No. When Henry first became a dairyman, there were 143 dairies in Monmouth County. There are none today. When we sold our cows, I think it was in 1970, there were probably seven or eight farms that were still operating at that point. Some of the last ones were up around Allentown area. There were two or three up there, and then the last one of all was the Search Farm that sold out. And there are no potatoes grown in Monmouth County and haven't been for several years. These things are too labor intensive for this area of the country. You have to have the kind of farming that can be done with just one or two people running big equipment. And even then it's not very lucrative.

Ms. Wikoff: You still didn't tell how you would milk the cows.

Ms. Zdancewic: Actually, I never milked cows. My chore was to feed calves, and you know, help with the raising of the calves. I would check cows to find out when it was time to breed them. And, I kept all the records on their breeding, on their milk production, on calving dates. We also had a registered Holstein Friesian herd, and I was responsible for registering these animals. So, I did all the bookwork and the financial end of the business. As far as milking cows, what I did, I would wash the cows' udders to make sure they were clean before the milking machines were attached to them. And also by washing them like that, you stimulated their utters so they would let their milk down a little more easily. But, I never really got so I could milk a cow. I don't know, it wasn't my knack to do that. (Laughs) We soon learned that we had to have a generator, because if the power went off, and those cows were used to being milked with a milking machine, you could not milk them by hand anymore. And, also, when you hand milked they were bred with very large teats and then later on it wasn't necessary. So, we wanted them to have smaller ones so that they wouldn't step on themselves and hurt themselves that way.

Ms. Wikoff: I never knew that, Jane.

Ms. Zdancewic: Then we had one cow. This was before we had many registered Holsteins. She was one of the ones we bought after we lost that herd of cows to tuberculosis, which by the way, was the last herd in the state I think that was lost to tuberculosis. This cow got tangled up with a piece of barbed wire somewhere. And, she had a slit about four inches long in her utter and when I went to her to start washing her, she decided she wasn't going to be touched, and she turned around, looked at me, she kicked, and she landed on my leg and broke it. So, I couldn't do any milking help for six months after that.

Ms. Wikoff: That isn't such a proud memory is it, Jane?

Ms. Zdancewic: No, but Henry was going to sell that cow before that happened, and he sure sold her after that. (Laughs) It took two of them to milk her after that. We can't blame her for not wanting to be handled when she had had a bad sore like that on her. I forget what they did with her.

Henry was very civic minded. He was on the Board of Education. He belonged to The Republican Club, and he served on the Election Board for years and years in Manalapan Township. Through his acquaintances in the United Milk Producers, he got acquainted with people who were involved with the Farmers' Mutual Fire Association in Flemington, NJ. They wanted a director from this area of the country, so they asked him if he would do it, and he did. He served there for thirty-five or forty years, I don't recall exactly how long. Following the death of some of the older members, a man came on as president. And Henry came home from a meeting one time and said, "Gee, I could run a meeting better than that man. That man didn't want to be president." The next time they had an election, Henry got elected, and he served as their president for many years. Of course, when he was going to all these different meetings, you know who was home taking care of the farm and the dairy and so forth. But it all worked out pretty well. I got interested in wildflowers, and when I bought a new camera, that was something that he sort of encouraged me to do. I collected photographs, slides of as many wildflowers as I could find, and being on a farm like that I had access to a lot of different kinds. On our farm in Smithburg was one of the little streams that started the Manasquan River. We were on a ridge, as that area of Manalapan Township is. One way, the waters ran toward the Manasquan River, the other way they ran up to the Manalapan Brook, which eventually ran into the Raritan River and the Raritan Bay. So on the other side, on the south side of the Manasquan River, is the Pine Barrens with your scrub pine and entirely different flowers and plants from the north side where the ground was heavier. So I had access to all of that for my photographs. Back in the 1970s and 1980s I could go down a road twenty miles per hour and look for things like that, and stop if I wanted to and take pictures. Today, your life would be in your hands if you tried to do that. When I first married Henry, the hard-top road went as far as Smithburg. If you were to go any further south on Route 537, which now goes through Holmeson, down through Great Adventure, and on down to Mount Holly, why it was a real adventure. It was just a sand-track road which you could easily get stuck in. That was from Smithburg on when I first married Henry in 1943. And see how long ago that's been, and that road has grown, and the whole area has grown. So I have seen tremendous changes in this area.

Ms. Wikoff: Jane has pleased many people with her slideshows and lectures on wildflowers. I'll bet she hasn't kept track of how many organizations that have benefited from her talks, and they are wonderful. I have seen them and enjoyed them, and I just know that it has given so much pleasure to so many people.

Ms. Zdancewic: It has given me a lot of pleasure to me to be able to share them. Because if you don't share something like that, what's the use of it?

Ms. Wikoff: Jane also has been active in the restoration of the Village Inn, in which the Battleground Historical Society was formed thirty years ago. It has done many good things over the course of its years, and I do think Jane has

been the treasurer almost all of those thirty years. And thank goodness she still is, because we need her very much.

Ms. Zdancewic: Yes, that's true. Well, after we sold our dairy in 1970, it was kind of my turn to be active in statewide things. I was appointed by Governor Byrne to be a member of the New Jersey Historic Sites Council, and that required traveling here and there, all over the state to various places. We would try to meet in historical places as we held our meetings, and toward the end of the time we could only meet in Trenton. Our chore was to basically monitor things that were encroaching on historic places. Things like people trying to tear down a house that was on the Historic Register for a road. We also helped to determine whether places, houses, and sites were appropriate to be on the historic sites list. So it was quite an interesting thing. I got into such places as the ferry terminal up in Jersey City before any development was done and we were prowling around in some of the craziest places up there that you ever wanted to see. I was also in the ferry terminal in Hoboken, again when there were no improvements done to it. I've been down as far as Cape May and, as I say, up in Jersey City, and Hoboken was another. We visited many places all over the state, and that was very interesting. And then I was a trustee of the New Jersey Museum of Agriculture in New Brunswick. I got on their membership committee--this was long before there was any building or anything else up there--and I served as a trustee for twelve years up there. How are people going to know what farm life was like if there wasn't a place like this museum? My goal was to help them get the museum set up so that there would be some way of showing people in this world what farm life was about. When I was young, at least fifty percent of the people in this country were farm people. Now, there's about two percent that are farm people, and they are able to grow enough food for the other ninety-eight percent. So my background as a farm person, growing up on a farm and marrying a farmer, has pushed me into doing these kind of things.

Ms. Wyckoff: I think you have accomplished an awful lot in these few short years. (Laugh) It's really been remarkable, and I think that our whole population in this area should be appreciative to what you and Henry contributed over the years. It's been wonderful.

Ms. Zdancewic: That's one of our purposes of being here on this Earth, is to leave it in a better shape than you found it.

Ms. Wikoff: Wonderful. Thank you so much for the interview.



**Jane and Henry Zdancewic,
October 1987**