

Mrs. Kathy Abbett, Madison Senior High School Teacher
Transcript of interview for the Madison Historical Society Oral History Project.
Interviewed by NaRenzo Gardner, Madison High School Social Studies Student
Date: February 27, 2023

NaRenzo Gardner [NG]: [Start recording] This is NaRenzo Gardner Jr. here and this interview was recorded on February 27, 2023. May you please state your name madam?

Kathy Abbott [KA]: Kathy Abbott.

[NG]: Hello, Miss Abbott. I'm here to ask you some questions about your history in Madison. Are you alright with that?

KA: Yes, I am.

NG: Okay. So, my first question is, how long have you been here in Madison?

KA: I've been teaching here in Madison, for 31 years. But, I mean, I've lived in the area all my life and actually my wedding reception was here in Madison Ingalls Hall.

NG: That's nice. Have there been any buildings that have been taken down in Madison?

KA: Yes, there have been lots, and a lot that have just changed. They took down the Dairy Queen that used to be right across--- down the block from the high school. And they've changed hands with Circle K, which used to be a Quik Trip and there used to be four schools in Madison, and now we just have two plus the special services school. I can't think of the name. There used to be another elementary; Blair Elementary was over, I guess really closer to Venice and Madison, it was on the other side of town.

NG: Was it a lot of people living in Madison during that time Ms. Abbott?

KA: There were a lot more than there is now. Absolutely. The high school when I first started here had graduating classes that were 100 or sometimes even a little more. And now the graduating classes are less than half of that. So, it was much bigger at one time.

NG: Okay, okay. What were the prices like before, like 2005, when I was born?

KA: I don't know. I didn't keep track. But they were definitely much lower. I mean, gas has gone up substantially whenever I see---- I'd be better off telling you like in the 70s and 80s than I would now, but I mean, when I started driving gas was only 50 cents a gallon. And

NG: Now it's up to like what, two something dollars? Yeah. Oh, that is, that is crazy.

KA: And, and just a lot of things were cheaper. But also, let's face it, you didn't get paid nearly as much. Starting pay here was at that time, was \$21,000 when I started teaching here. And now I think they start at about 44.

NG: Oh, double.

KA: Things changed a lot.

NG: Did you live in a different house back then?

KA: When I started teaching here, yes, I did.

NG: What was it like?

KA: A lot smaller than the one I have right now. It was actually just a very small house at that time. There was just my husband and I, and then after we had my son, we stayed there. But then when we had our daughter, it just was getting too cramped. and we bought a different house.

NG: I see, I see. Did any other family members live down here back then?

KA: Not family members. But several friends. I've had several friends that live in Madison.

NG: They like move over time?

KA: They have over time. Some have moved to Glen Carbon; some have moved to Edwardsville.

NG: Oh Edwardsville, that's "dope." I might have to pay them a visit. Did living here teach you any valuable lessons?

KA: I don't know that. I think you learn the lessons really from your parents and that it's just a matter of using them correctly. I mean, you saw differences. I actually live in Granite City and and you saw differences in the population and that but if you were taught right by your parents, none of that mattered.

NG: Right! Okay, awesome. That's nice wisdom. I'll put that on a T-shirt one day. What about the community has changed since you were younger?

KA: It's smaller. I mean, the population has dropped, and businesses have left and so I think it's really.... The economy is not nearly as good now. And especially with the steel mill. One minute, they're gonna be open, and one minute they are going to be closed, and the jobs are not as stable. So, I mean, that makes a big difference in the community.

NG: I see. I see. Okay. And let me think here. Where you said "Yeah, yeah," I was gonna ask if you were born in Madison County and how long you lived here. Do you remember any significant people while growing up in Madison County?

KA: In Madison County?

NG: Yeah, like anybody significant?

KA: Significant, like big in politics or what?

NG: Sure.

KA: Actually, not really, I mean, I didn't deal a lot with politics at all and didn't get to know very many of those people. But I mean, you knew, you knew a lot of people. I liked it, because it was a community where you knew a lot of people.

NG: Right, right. Did you ever like meet the mayor at all?

KA: Yes, actually I did. Jon Hamm when he was mayor. He actually visited the school quite frequently. He did not make himself unknown to the school, which was nice.

NG: That's good. That's good.

KA: It is good. I don't think it's good that people just kind of keep themselves closed off from the school because that is your, that's your future of your community.

NG: Right. Exactly. Yeah.

KA: And I would imagine there are kids and I, not just kids, who can't name who the mayor is right now. So...

NG: I don't think-- I forgot the mayor's name. The current mayor. Do you remember?

KA: I'm not sure either; there's been a lot of them.

NG: Have any major events occurred while you were living in Madison?

KA: Yes, I mean, major events, both national and even community wise when 911 occurred. And that was, that was a day that we were at school that day. And that was different. Yes. We had channel one at the time, and so the kids can watch on TV, as that unfolded. Oh, and that was intense. I think it was too much. By the time we hit the afternoon, I turned my TV off and said, "This is just too intense." And I don't think you need to... but it was a strange day, because all the planes were pulled out of the sky. You can sit here, and watch planes go down because they were calling them all out of the sky. It was a

different day. So that one was a big one. We've had a few times that we used to have a fence out in front of Madison, and it was not really to keep the kids in, but it was to keep people out. Oh, because you would have people come down here and try to stir up trouble in one way or another.

NG: Yeah.

KA: And, and can be very successful at it. But yeah.

NG: Did they tear the fence down, like did the people do it?

KA: The school decided that they did not want a fence; that was, it made it seem more off-putting; they wanted the school to be more open. But as the years have gone on, that's a debate that still goes on. That's why they've not torn down the pillars because it's an idea, especially now where you have to worry so much about intruders. It could happen so we have a fence again at some time.

NG: Okay, okay. Well, that's all I had to ask Miss Abbott, thank you so much for this wonderful interview. Hope you have a great day.

KA: You too. Thank you.