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Lent to me for Centennial history 1997

Louise Madeleine Leschander

3/13 3/13 1883- 8/5/77 1877

American Folklore
May 9, 1974

Holly Peer

Paper - A
final grade - A

111 McNamee

Introduction

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Louise Madeleine Leschander

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Nicholas John

 Mary Ann O'Hara because
the river falls and the electric cars were novelties
Thomas Edward 1897-1953 Anne Maria *Adopt* 1881-1973 Louise Madeleine 1883- *1977*

Elizabeth *Gargan* 1885- *1979* John Nicholas 1887- *1982* Charles Leo 1889-1915

Was born on March 13 in 1883 and she has lived in Rochester from 1891 until the present day. Her remarkable memory of people and places in Rochester provides much insight into the city and its citizens from the early 1900's. This paper will concentrate on her recollections, both of her life and the lives of a few people who influenced the growth of Rochester.

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Louise Madeleine Leschander stepped out of the New York Central Railroad Station onto Central Avenue in Rochester in 1891 when she was eight years old. With her were her mother, her three brothers and two sisters. Her mother had a "Great Time" getting the children to walk down the street because the river falls and the electric cars were novelties to these Elba, New York natives, and the children kept stopping spellbound along the street. Once they halted in the middle of the street until "a man came along and pushed" them out of the way. Miss Leschander was born on March 13 in 1883 and she has lived in Rochester from 1891 until the present day. Her remarkable memory of people and places in Rochester provides much insight into the city and its citizens from the early 1900's. This paper will concentrate on her recollections, both of her life and the lives of a few people who influenced the growth of Rochester.

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years before his death in 1921. His relations can be traced back to the Alsace-Lorraine region of France. Miss Leschander describes her father as "an easy going man who never licked any of his children-except once." This licking was provoked on the night that one of the younger children was being delivered. The doctor had arrived and was assisting Mrs. Leschander, who was in a downstairs bedroom, when a commotion started on the second floor of the house. Nicholas Leschander ascended the stairs to investigate the noise and "when he opened the door he got a pillow in his face." The pillow fight ended abruptly and Tom, who was the eldest child, had earned a licking.

Nicholas had two brothers who participated in the Civil War. Pete lived his last years in the Veteran's Home in Bath, New York. Miss Leschander's most vivid memory of Jack is the story of how he lost his leg coming home from the war. He was riding a donkey and when it bolted his foot became caught in the stirrup; soonafter, the leg was amputated. When Nicholas' brother Pete visited the Leschanders, Pete and Nicholas would go to Dixon's Hotel on Chili

**Cinder paths were the first sidewalks on the street.

Avenue for a beer or two. There "were no intoxicating liquors" in the Leschander household, partly because Nicholas didn't like the beer sold in pails because often it was stale by the time it reached its destination.

Miss Leschander's mother must have been a very strong willed person! The house on the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Wilbur Street at which the family has lived for over sixty years* is not centered on the lot because Mary Ann O'Hara Leschander, born in Picton, Ontario, wanted it set away from the road "so people couldn't peek in the windows as they passed on the sidewalks."** Accordingly, when the house was being built, several times she moved the stakes away from the road when the contractor was off the premises.

Mrs. Leschander occupied herself with the typical, but extensive, activities of a housewife of her day. She made most of the family's clothes. Miss Leschander

* Their first home in Rochester was on Briggs Street. Mr. Leschander chose the house because it had the most snow on the roof compared to the other houses on the block. Therefore, he felt it had to be the highest house. The following Spring after it was purchased, the Leschanders ordered 10 tons of fill dirt. The women in the family chose the sight on Lincoln Avenue.

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says that, "Anne's wedding dress was the first thing made out of the house." Mrs. Leschander canned fruit and vegetables, smoked sausages and cooked potatoe soup. The children were paid 5¢ for every hundred potatoe bugs that they collected from the garden. After the bugs were counted out on a tin plate, they would be burned in a can of kerosene.

Mrs. Leschander treated her children by making "nagels." They were similar to donuts but made out of bread dough and fried in different shapes. Miss Leschander says that "those were the days when fruit was given away. There would be 400 cans of fruits and vegetables in the cellar and bins of fresh fruit and vegetables."

The doctor came only when a person was "real sick," so Mrs. Leschander did most of her own doctoring. She administered kerosene to the neck for a sore throat, goose oil for chest pains, lemon with honey for colds, and peppermint in hot water for stomach aches.

Although Mrs. Leschander was Irish they were not a superstitious family. However, Miss Leschander does remember one of her grandmother's beliefs that one "should never start a journey on Friday."

Miss Leschander and her sisters and brothers

started school at Holy Apostles on Lyell Avenue. The children walked an hour and a quarter two times a day to get to and from school, and Miss Leschander says that they used to argue all the way. On the way to school they would pass Holy Family School on the corner of Ames and Jay Street. Although this school was much closer they did not attend it because Miss Leschander's mother felt "that it might ruin her children's English." Holy Family was populated with German speaking people in the old Dutchtown area of the city.

One day at school Miss Leschander had her long braids cut off just above the ribbons. She was adept at quickly turning her head so her braids would hit the student sitting behind her. On that day, James Malley, who later became the Monroe County Sheriff, was sitting behind her and he was the culprit. Miss Leschander says, "The Sister fixed it up so he didn't get expelled; they were the bosses!"

In 1897 Miss Leschander was graduated from High School at the age of 14 in a class of 36. At this time there were no public schools for girls after 10 grades, except at the Free Academy which educated teachers. This building on Fitzhugh Street is the Board of Education building today.

8.

Because Miss Leschander was too young to get a good job after graduation, she remained at home for a year. In 1898 she started to work at the Savoy Hotel Restaurant where she waited on six tables in the snack bar and earned \$3.00 a week.

She then worked for six months in a Button Factory on St. Paul Street carding buttons. She didn't like the job, but she "didn't like to stay around home." Her next job was at The American Cigarette and Tobacco Company where she kept the timer for the floor lady. She smiles and says, "It was so funny to see the old people strippin' leaves." Today on the sight of the Tobacco Company's building is the Rochester War Memorial. Miss Leschander adds that "we watched more than one suicide on the Court Street Bridge.

On May 5, 1905 Miss Leschander got a job at Eastwood Shoe Company on State Street. She worked for Eastwood's until her retirement at 88 on June 1, 1971. She made \$6.00 a week to start and received a raise of \$3.00 a week when her friend, Mrs. Tousey, left work because of illness. Eastwood's is the second oldest retail business in the city. It assumed its name in 1853, "and if one wanted to be particular about origins," he could point out that the Bigelow family into which

William Eastwood married, had had a shoe business long before that. Eastwood merely took it over.¹ In 1930 the store moved into East Avenue where it is presently located.

Miss Leschander remembers William Eastwood as a "distinguished man in a Prince Albert coat. He said 'hello' to everyone, but he never came near us. He was not down to earth, it was a different proposition, a different class of society." Eastwood's son, Albert Bigelow Eastwood, was an only child, and like his father, he was a "cold proposition," but Miss Leschander stood up to him several times. When he would ask her to come up to his office on an errand she would respond with "I'm not hired to go up to the office." She says that after "the second time he knew better"...than to call her up to the office. One year at the Company's annual picnic she slapped a fellow who made a gesture which she considered too bold. Albert Eastwood, watching the scene, seemed both amused and impressed. He walked over to her and said, "I guess you can take care of yourself!" She asked him if there was any reason why he thought that she couldn't.

At Eastwood's, Miss Leschander started work as a bundle girl, wrapping shoes, and as a cashier. Through the years she became comptroller, auditor and assistant-

treasurer. She "liked everything about the job." One difference she finds disturbing about contemporary business is the lack of conscientious recordkeeping. When she first started working each of the three stores had to make a monthly report on each department. "Now there are no reports, no general ledger, no nothing!" When Miss Leschander was in a financial position to buy the business she felt that she was too old* to take on the responsibility, as she was nearly 70 years old. If the opportunity had come when she was in her 50's "that would have been a different story."

George Eastman, the founder of Eastman Kodak Company, hunted with Albert Eastwood, Miss Leschander's employer at Eastwood's. She remembers George Eastman as "a little man, not very friendly until you met him. He was an old bachelor, but he went with Eastwood's sister (in-law)." Miss Leschander remembers Eastman's suicide note, "My work is done. Why wait?" Eastman was suffering from cancer in 1932. In 1929 Kodak stock had dropped 55 points to \$192.00.² Suicide was common among successful men who lost fortunes during the Depression when "apple selling in the

* She admits that she thought she would never get old until the last few weeks when she has been feeling dizzy and weak.

streets, nationwide symbol of the Depression with the breadline, was no Monroe Country myth. Many men who had held responsible jobs sold apples to live."³

Although Eastman was not an economic failure, he shot himself on March 14, 1932, the worst year of the Depression.⁴

Miss Leschander remembers Grover Cleveland and the Depression of the 20's and 30's clearly. Her father made \$5.20 a week out of which \$1.50 a week was paid for interest on the house. She earned extra money by going into the country to weed onions and pick fruit, making enough money to purchase a bicycle for transportation. She picked fruit for a man named Schwarz who had a farm on Chili Avenue. She says that "he liked girls to work in the orchards because they were more careful of the fruit."

One popular and frequent community activity in which Miss Leschander participated as a young woman was the multitude of parades held in Rochester for many different causes. During World War I Miss Leschander describes the parade on November 7, 1917 (the false armistice) held to celebrate what was thought to be the end of the war; "All of the downtown streets in Rochester were closed and crowds (in the

Miss Leschander remembers standing for five hours at the St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York City and nearly "freezing to death even with a fur coat on."

streets) were packed like sardines in a box, like people waiting for the Pope." At the start of World War II there were Preparedness Parades in which Miss Leschander marched. The stores would close at 4:00 and the workers would parade from Goodman Street down Monroe Avenue expressing moral support for the men and country at war.

Parades not only celebrated the end of wars, holidays* and political rallies, they also served as protests to help working conditions for the employees of Rochester's retail establishments. In 1920 stores did not close until 9:00 on Saturday nights, and sometimes customers would wander through the stores so late that the clerks would often have to work until 10:00 or 11:00 at night. A parade of the clerks to protest these long working hours was organized by the famous Reverend Algernon Crapsey. He was the rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Rochester, who after a two week ecclesiastical trial on a charge of heresy, was turned out of his church in Batavia. "His offense was simple to doctrinarians, he denied the miracle of Christ's birth."⁵ Reverend Crapsey and his wife were not only active in the church and in labor movements; they started the first kindergartens in the city of

*Miss Leschander remembers standing for five hours at the St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York City and nearly "freezing to death even with a fur coat on."

Rochester, a woman's guild which sewed clothing for the poor, and the Reverend lectured at the Lyceum Theatre.

Mrs. Adelaide Crapsey wrote cinquains, such as the following taken from Hosmer's book Monroe Country:

These be
Three silent things.
The falling snow... the hour
Before the dawn... the mouth of one
Just dead.

Although Miss Leschander marched in the Late Closing Protest and the Preparedness Parades, she was not a suffragist. Concerning the vote, Miss Leschander declares, "We didn't vote for years after we got it. We didn't believe in the vote. We didn't care until men came and asked us to vote." She remembers Susan B. Anthony, the famous suffragist, who lived on Madison Street in Rochester, but she has never been active in the Woman's Rights Movement. This might seem surprising for such an independent person, but she feels strongly that one problem "with kids today is that their mothers work when they should stay home with the kids." In her youth "no married woman ever worked. They could live off their husband's wages." Usually the only time a middle class woman worked outside of the home was during a war when it was considered part of patriotic duty to work at such places as Taylor Instruments on the 5:00-11:00 shift.

When Miss Leschander worked at Eastwood's during the 1920's, a group of girls she worked with often "had parties at eachother's houses. They would have dinner at 6:00 and try to be home by 11:30. The dinners were usually simple, often pancakes and sausages, but "no matter what you served everybody was good and nice about it." After one or two glases of wine the girls would make a toast in fun to Mr. Eastwood. It was more the company than the "amount of wine that accounted for the laughs and some fun." When they were "kids they used to congregate on front porches and sing." They'd seldom go off their own streets in the evenings.

Styles of clothing have changed so radically in the past decades that it is difficult to begin describing fashion trends from the 1900's. Perhaps one obvious change in fashion has been the attitude of women toward wearing hats. Miss Leschander affirms "that it was a disgrace in them days to be seen without a hat." She remembers paying \$25.00 for a fancy plume hat back in the 1940's. Her attic is filled with boxes of hats in styles from at least the last three decades. Today the millinery industry is just beginning to rejuvenate itself and styles are often patterned after those of previous generations.

Fur coats were a part of every well-dressed young woman's wardrobe. Miss Leschander paid \$125.00 for her first fur coat, and she paid \$700.00 for the last one she bought. She has owned a "kidskin jacket, a pony skin coat, cheaper than Persian Lamb, a sealskin coat, a civet cat coat, and a raccoon coat. " She feels that clothes "in between" the extreme styles are the best. She and her sister Anne dressed alike the first year that they went to school together in Rochester. She says that young women "always carried sun umbrellas and hats to cover against the sun." The suntan fanaticism of our times seems amusing to her.

The inevitable, if mundane, question about marriage was answered concisely by Miss Leschander: "You know, the longer you know people, sometimes the more disappointment there is." She says that she could have been engaged "oh, I guess a couple of times," but she decided not to get married. In contrast to the education of youth today she says, "Until I was 20, I didn't know where babies come from. If I would have married, my mother would have told me things, but since I wasn't..."

Miss Leschander The Theatres of Rochester provided quality entertainment for their patrons. Miss Leschander remembers the Cook Opera Theatre, which recently burned to the ground, for its vaudeville performances. Baker's Theatre did melodrama and The Corinthian did "Burlesque for the men." The Theatre that Miss Leschander recalls most fondly is the Lyceum Theatre. "The Lyceum was built in 1883. It lasted just 50 years. Through many of those years, its ushers were University of Rochester students, and with a nice touch hardly seen any more, they ushered in full dress at evening performances. Rochester was regarded by New York producers and playwrights as a cold, hard, calculating town that sat on its hands for everything but the very best...If a play or a musical went well here on a tryout, producers felt that it would go well anywhere."

One of the most famous pictures at the Lyceum which Miss Leschander attended was "Ben-Hur" starring A.H. VanBuren. The Theatre had two galleries and patrons often packed lunches for the evening. Lines would start at 5:30 and the doors to the theatre would open at 7:00. "The old pictures was worth lining up for" and Miss Leschander and her father went to the movies frequently. At the Eastman Theatre

18.
17. snakes laced about their bare
Miss Leschander saw "The Student Prince" and "Uncle
Tom's Cabin". Her current favorite film is "The Sound
of Music."

Henry W. Clune's book The Rochester I know
describes graphically a place called Rattlesnake Pete's.
Miss Lescahnder used to see Clune's father walking
down Linden Street to the BRP (Buffalo-Rochester-
Pittsburgh) Railroad Offices which are now the Unemploy-
ment Offices in Rochester. Clune's father "never wore
an overcoat as he must have thought that was his air
and exercise (walking to work)." People "in those
days wore more clothes when they went outside."

A combination saloon and museum of curiosities
called "Rattlesnake Pete's" was located on Mill Street.
Pete Gruber, the owner, nicknamed "Rattlesnake Pete",
had "weapons and fright masks on the walls and the stub
of a cigar of a famous murderer who was supposed to have
cast it aside a moment before he hanged. There was a
strength-testing device that spouted water up a man's
leg when he tugged at the handles; another mechanical
japery that promised a peephole view of a naked woman
and rewarded the eager voyeur with a blow from a boxing
glove." Also in the museum were glass cases filled
with live rattlesnakes that Pete had trapped himself.
He had been bitten numerous times, but his own cures had
enabled him to survive these poisonous attacks. "He
was sought by sufferers from goiter who submitted to

having harmless black snakes laced about their bare necks. The contraction of the snake's body massaged the protuberant goiter and gave temporary relief, but effected no cure."⁸

Even Pete's car carried a brass horn shaped like a boa constrictor which complimented his waist-coat and gloves made from rattlesnake skins.⁹ Miss Leschander's father took his children to Pete's establishment and she tells of the large St. Bernard dogs wandering around the saloon fraternizing with its clientele.

"The Silver Dollar" on West Main Street which was recently written about in "Upstate Magazine" is another saloon that had an attraction to entice tourists. In the mosaic tile on the floor were embedded silver dollars. According to the article in "Upstate" the dollars are gone, but the customers who patronized it after the end of Prohibition when it opened, are still going there. All along West Main Street in Rochester are old, decrepit storefronts like the "Silver Dollar" which make an ugly first impression to anyone entering the city from that end. Miss Leschander feels that it's a shame the way the city has let this area become so run-down.

Transportation is another factor which has changed the appearance of Rochester. Before the electric cars there were horse cars which could carry up to twenty people for 5¢ a passenger. The electric cars ran to the end of West Avenue. Miss Leschander's father would usually meet his daughters at the end of the line and walk them home after work. One night when Miss Leschander was walking home alone on the dark paths she bumped into a man coming in the opposite direction. She feels that he "was just as afraid as she was."

Miss Leschander owned two cars in her lifetime, a Model T Ford which she bought in 1921 for \$840.00, and a Willis Overland which she bought in 1924. Joe MacDonald, the Ford Dealer, taught her how to drive and the first night she drove alone was the night she brought her Model T home. She remembers stalling on Clinton Street in front of the Regent Theatre, and thinking that she "probably would have gone through the windows if she had had the gas on fullforce."

At the age of 91 Miss Leschander has mourned the deaths of many people in her family. In her family "it's peculiar, but everybody dies suddenly." Her youngest brother Charles died when he was only 26 years old in 1915. He was struck down by a train

on the New York Central Railroad Tracks. He was married only three months when he was killed and his wife was expecting their first child. The child was born the following June and it died in infancy of infantile paralysis. At the funeral of her brother Miss Leschander says that although there was a casket "no one knew whether or not there was anything in it (because of the mutilation of the body)." Mr. Eastwood came to the house the night of the funeral to pay his respects.

Nicholas Leschander became ill in the Fall of 1921. The doctor said that because he had worked so hard his body was that of a 90 year old man in spite of the fact that he was only 70. He managed to register to vote that Fall, but by November he was too weak to vote. During his illness his children would go up to his bedroom and sit "gabbing" or listen to him read from "The Fireside Companion" a magazine of continued stories. He died on Christmas Day. Before his death his friends would stop by with homemade spirits. "There was more homemade brew than any other stuff livin'." After his death his sons sampled each of the containers in his bedroom, but not "one thing was worthwhile, so they poured it down the sink."

Two years later in 1923 Miss Leschander's mother died of cancer of the bone. She was treated in Strong Memorial Hospital after a fall in the cellar and the doctors there diagnosed the disease. When she became bedridden, the doctor would come at night and apply hot towels to her back to relieve her pain. Each night her daughter Anne's son Howard would come and lift her up onto the pillows. One night he rushed down the stairs and exclaimed, "Mother, I think I've broken her arms!" Her bone tissue had deteriorated to such an extent that her bones broke from even gentle pressure. Mercifully, she lost much of the feeling in her limbs so she did not even seem to feel pain in her broken arms.

The death of Miss Leschander's sister last year occurred after a brief illness. Before her death, Anne had been blind for 10 years, but she had managed very well around the house with the help of her two sisters, Elizabeth and Miss Lescahnder.

The Church has been a sustaining influence on Miss Leschander in her 91 years. She has attended St. Augustine's Church since its opening 75 years ago. Her brother Charles was in the first class to go to the Church School at St. Augustine's. Father John H. O'Brien was the Priest at St. Augustine's for at least

town alone. He suggests that she take a "body guard."

Her fierce spirit of independence is undaunted by

25 years. "He believed in telling people what was right and it was right...in those days." He insisted that his parishioners name their children after Saints, and he lost a few parishioners for critisizing their choice of names. When hemlines were shortened Father O'Brien commented one day at Mass that he was tired of seeing "shanks" and that it was good to see people with "their limbs covered." Miss Leschander declares that he was a "wonderful man, but to tell the truth, if you lead a good life, that's all....There's only one God for everyone. Some people take things so seriously, they'll wind up on South Avenue."

Today Father Neil Miller comes once a month to administer Holy Communion to Miss Leschander and her sister, Elizabeth. He is young, and it takes time "to get used to a priest wearing a windbreaker," but his friendliness is reciprocated by these two gracious women. Mrs. Elizabeth Gargan is a widow of 87, who, like her sister, is remarkably young and spry.

Another routine visitor to their Lincoln Avenue home is Dr. Rosario Stagnitto. He visits every other Wednesday to check on his two cheerful patients. When Miss Leschander asks him if it's O.K. to go downtown alone, he suggests that she take a "body guard." Her fierce spirit of independence is undaunted by

physical frailty and people respect her for it. That is why Dr. Stagnitto charges her less for a house call. He knows that sometimes she'll walk to his office two blocks away on Chili Avenue.

At 91 she still takes the bus downtown to do her shopping, go to the dentist (she has all of her own teeth), and have lunch with her friends. She enjoys listening to baseball on the radio, and, of course, the Red Wings are her favorite team. She corresponds by letter and telephone with dozens of people and friends drop in frequently for chats. She enjoys reading mystery stories and at the age of 88 when she retired from Eastwood's she started to learn how to cook. She grows impatient waiting for the boy next door to rake the twigs off the lawn, so she goes out and rakes it herself. She is vibrant and avidly interested in the people around her. She dresses meticulously; her new red-checkered coat and dress go well with her lovely white hair. Her looks have often been compared to Mrs. Harper Sibley. "Of course," she quips, "she was much heavier than I!"

Slides

1. Miss Leschander, April, 1974. She is never without the pearls!
2. Elizabeth Gargan. Miss Leschander's sister with whom she is now living on Lincoln Avenue.
- 3-4. The stained glass window which was made in Rochester when the house was built over 60 years ago. It was to make sure the upstairs hall was not visible from the street.
5. Miss Leschander and the combination coal and gas stove. During W.W.II she had to get a permit from City Hall to buy it.
- 6-8. The House on 207 Lincoln Avenue.
- 9-11. Miss Leschander's hand painted china.
12. Miss Leschander at 80.
13. The Madonna given to Miss Leschander over 50 years ago.
14. Miss Leschander's father, Nicholas. The flag is pasted on the glass. Why, no one seemed to know.
15. Miss Leschander as a young girl.

Footnotes

1 Hosmer, p. 220.

2 Clune, p. 85.

3 Ibid., p. 86. Rochester I know. Doubleday and
Company, Inc. New York, 1972.

4 Ibid., p. 84. Orange County. Flower City Printing.
New York, 1971.

5 Ibid., p. 286. "Dance". April 28, 1974.

6 Ibid., p. 288.

7 Ibid., p. 106.

8 Ibid., p. 299.

9 Ibid., p. 108.

McMann
Aug 1977

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Company, Inc. New York, 1972.

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New York, 1971.

"Democrat and Chronicle". April 28, 1974.

Louise Madeline Leachman
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Holly Peck
paper - A
find grade - A

Leschander, Nicholas & Mary (O'Hara) ^{Origin} (Alsace-Lorraine)
1891 Moved to Rochester from Elba, N.Y.
Six children

Thomas 1879-1953.

Anne Marie 1881-1973

Louise 1883-1977

Elizabeth 1885-1979

John 1887-1982

Charles 1889-1915 (in first class ~~graduated~~ from school 1898)

Nicholas - one of 4 men who went to Bp. McQuaid to ask for a combined church & school to be built at St. Augustine's

His children were walking from Briggs St. (behind #44 School) to Holy Apostles School on Lyell Avenue. It took them $1\frac{1}{4}$ hrs. to walk the distance twice a day.

Holy Family was much closer but the German language was in use for all ^{religion} teaching. Mary, mother of the children, did not want her children to lose out on the English language, so they walked the extra distance.

Charles Leschander was in the first class to attend St. Augustine's Church-School in 1898.

^{Gargen}
Personal Interview with Helen M. Namara
[Nicholas & Mary's g-dtr

10/31/95