

Virgil Powell was born near St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1898. He was born a son of ex-slaves. His parents were born into slavery in 1861. He attended school in St. Joseph, Missouri, and graduated with honors from Barlett High School in 1909. Kansas University is where Virgil Powell attended college and played football on the freshman team. Mr. Powell moved to Cedar Rapids in 1918. He was intending to visit Cedar Rapids for only two days, but he found many opportunities here. His first job was working for Haskel Coal Yard, as a truck driver. He then operated the first auto-laundry (car wash) in Cedar Rapids. In 1924, Mr. Powell applied for a position on the Cedar Rapids Police Department. He was the first black appointed as a law enforcement officer. His first job on the police force was driving one of the emergency cars. After five years on the force, Mr. Powell was promoted to the identification bureau. He helped set up the modern identification bureau which is now considered one of the finest. Some of Mr. Powell's memories include meeting McKinley while on his campaign trail, J. Edgar Hoover's coming to Cedar Rapids, and the Douglas Starch explosion.

10-01
2005.10.66

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
Virgil Powell

Conducted by Phoebe Smith
July 16, 1985

Transcribed by Renae Blasdell

INTERVIEW TOPICS
CEDAR RAPIDS: THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1--When were you born? Where?
- 3--How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
 - What are your parents' names?
- 2--Where did you go to school?
 - Are you married or single?
 - Did you raise a family? How big?

4,5,9,12,16,17--What has been your occupation (career) during your adult
18, 19, 20,21, years?
22-31

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

- 1. Transportation
 - 3,7,8,10--Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
 - 21--Trolleys (the Interurban)
 - 20,21,22--Horses and First Automobiles
 - 5,7--Mud roads and the seedling mile
 - Hunter Airport and the first planes
 - Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- 17,18,25,27,34 --Newspapers
- 20,22 --Radios
- 17 --Advertising
- 19 --Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

- Motion Pictures
- Cedar Rapids Parks
- 15--Dances
- Carnival Week
- Chautauqua
- Community Theater
- Little Gallery
- Symphony Orchestra
- Circus
- Greene's Opera House
- Amusement Parks (Alamo)
- Camps
- Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)

2. Famous Characters

- Cherry Sisters
- Grant Wood
- Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
- Marvin Cone

3. Lifestyle

- Life before air conditioning
- Winter Activities
- Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
- Clothing
- Toys
- Saloons/Taverns
- Farm Life

4. Family Life

- Household Help
- Women's Roles
- Childrens' Activities/Behavior
- Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)

5. Ethnic/Minority Life

- Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
- 2 --Indians
- 1,2,3,8,9,13,14,15,16,17,24 Segregation of Blacks
- 3,4,5,12 --Jobs Available

C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community

1. Education

- Cedar Rapids Schools
- Coe College
- Mount Mercy College
- Cornell College

2. Government

- 20,21 --City Services
- 6 --Streets/Roads
- Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)

3. Medical

- Hospitals
- Patient-Doctor Relationship
- Broken Bones
- Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
- House Calls
- Home Delivery of Babies

4. Business and Economy

- Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
- Local Brewing Companies
- Retail Businesses /Department Stores
- Professions
- 26 --Banking and Finance
- Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
- 4,5,6,14,17 --Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
- Farmers Market
- Mills on Cedar River
- 15 --Buildings Erected
- Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
- Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

5. Attitudes/Values

- Children/Discipline
- Sex/Petting
- Charity
- Divorce
- Work
- Working women, Voting Rights for Women
- Patriotism (World War I)

D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community

1. Catastrophic Events

- Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
- 31-38 --Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
- Bank Closings (1933)
- Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
- Public Library Murder(1921)

2. National Historic Events

- Womens' Suffrage
- World War I
- Roaring 20's
- 20,21 --Prohibition
- 5,19 --Great Depression

Junior League of Cedar Rapids Oral History Project

Interview with Mr. Virgil Powell

Conducted by Phoebe Smith

July 16, 1985

PS: My name is Phoebe Smith and I have been chosen to interview Mr. Virgil S. Powell. For me, this is a special privilege, because I have known Mr. Powell for all of my 25 years. He has been a neighbor of our family and a close friend, and nearly a relative.

Powell: Thanks for those kind and wonderful words said concerning me personally. I am glad you have been chosen for this task and I am certain your sponsors will be proud of you. I am aware that some good books and articles have been written about Cedar Rapids and I'll try not to be too repetitious in my statements and yet be positive as I observe that. The many generation gaps, no doubt, will produce some little unknown facts which I hope you will be appreciative.

PS: To delve quickly into this session and carefully search for important information I wish to state that Mr. Powell is a direct son of slaves.

Powell: That is correct. I am not a grandchild but a son of ex-slaves. Both of my parents were born into slavery and both were born in the same year, 1861, about a hundred miles apart in Narvin, Missouri. Of course, they were freed by the Emancipation Act in

1863, and they, being only a couple of only two or three years old, did not realize that they were slaves. Incidentally, I, being their third child of the family, barely escaped being born into slavery myself, only by about 35 years.

PS: I understand you were born near St. Joseph, Missouri, attended school there and graduated with high honors--from Bartlet High School in 1909? Then on to KU in Lawrence, Kansas? Why are you smiling?

Powell: I was thinking about that clause handed down by the Supreme Court, separate but equal--supposed for black and white schools. Of course, all schools in the state of Missouri at this time were not integrated and the amusing situation to me at that time was the complaint of the white high school students and their parents claiming the blacks in the high school were obtaining, and ordering, and getting the supplies--even including many different styles typewriters and other equipment--not available to the white schools. Yes, it is true that I enrolled at KU and had much fun playing football on the freshman team and was able to make two trips outside of the city with this so-called fast team. Only a few months was I able to be financially interested in schools. Scholarships for black athletes at that time were as rare as hen's teeth, as some of the blacks put it. But I'll never regret the days I spent there, for it taught me the lesson that I should up-grade my education. It would have to involve home studies and rigid homework. Incidentally, we also played the football team at Ashbaugh College--that is an Indian school in Lawrence, also.

PS: Mr. Powell, since you have lived almost a century, you have no

doubt seen and observed many changes in the lifestyle of Americans, black and white, such as the progress and culture and growth of the country by the advent and introduction of new projects, new inventions?

Powell: Yes, having been born in the nineteenth century and now reflecting back on these changes in customs of the American style of life, it is almost unbelievable the rapid progress of America. For instance, in the medical field--when I was born, the common aspirin pill commonly used today was unknown at my birth. But today on my doctor's order the use of aspirin is a daily routine for me which helps relieve me of my rheumatic arthritis pain.

PS: When did you move to Cedar Rapids?

Powell: Sixty-seven years ago in March, 1918, I stepped off a railway train at a depot in Cedar Rapids for an intended two day visit. But that two day visit here has long ago expired. I am still here and call Cedar Rapids my home. I would like to point out here that 67 years was almost the National Survey of Black American Males death rate average. At that time it was just under 70 years. I would also like to point out here the importance of railway service in Iowa. At this period Iowa was classed as a Mud State with very few paved highways. More later in this session concerning railroads.

Now as stated before, I intended to visit a friend here, Roy Warren, now deceased. Then I was going to move on to another vicinity in the hope of finding a greater opportunity in some kind of work. I did not suspect that the door of opportunity had already opened for me when I stepped off the train in Cedar

Rapids. The door of opportunity was open and I took advantage of this opportunity, which I will never regret.

PS: How did you begin?

Powell: Well, this friend who I was visiting here was the head auto mechanic of trucks and vehicles at the Haskel Coal Yard, one of the big local companies here. This firm had just purchased a new, small coal truck, a Kissell model, made for the quick and small order jobs. So, the Haskell firm needed another truck driver. My friend urged me to take the job. There were several truck drivers and coal carriers working for this company and I enjoyed working here and meeting new acquaintances. All employees brought their dinner pails in and we had an enjoyable and pleasant dinner hour which was spent every mid-day as many of the employees assembled together, and many times lounging out on the parking outside the coalyard. I'll never forget one of our men who always ran to a grocery store a block away to obtain a pint of milk for dinner. He looked very much disappointed on this particular day as he came back, for he had told us a pint bottle of milk had gone up a penny. This bottle of milk now cost him six cents. He said someday milk will be selling at a dollar a gallon, and everybody laughed loud and long. But this prediction, as you know, has come true, but none of this particular group lived to see it.

PS: I understand you operated the first auto-laundry in the city, one of the first?

Powell: Yes, for nearly three years a local fellow named Bill Olivan and I operated this car wash service, and with good success. It was situated on Fifth Avenue between Third and Fourth Street. Our

service was washing, cleaning, greasing, and oiling; and we had a good auto mechanic noted for his tune-up ability. We also gave special service to several auto dealers for taking care of their demonstrating cars. Now one must remember there were many dirt roads and muddy roads in Iowa at this time. It was a pleasure to deal with the local businessmen and banks. They seemed to have confidence in me and my plans which boosted my confidence, and of course, ego. But I kept remembering a statement I had told a friend some time ago, "Don't make the mistake of trying to wash cars all your life because rheumatic and arthritis will probably catch up with you."

PS: I understand at one time the term "Parlor City of Iowa" applied to Cedar Rapids?

Powell: Yes, at this time Cedar Rapids was widely known and advertised as the Parlor City of the State of Iowa. Business firms used this slogan such as: The Parlor City Furniture Company, The Parlor City Dry Cleaners, The Parlor City Barber Shop, and several other little adjectives. This Parlor City slogan was known for many years, but after the Great National Depression Days it waned into a dying stage.

PS: I can see you were forging along and doing well, but what suddenly prompted you to take the police examination and try for a member on the police force?

Powell: Well, I suppose what really urged me on at this time was an incident which occurred in the streets and left a deep impression on me at this time that I'll never forget. Several years ago, several of our main streets were constructed with paving bricks. Now, these

are still intact but now hidden with a cement surface. There was a local firm here called the Ford Paving Company which employed many blacks in constructing these streets. One day I happened to pass by one of these streets under construction and paused for a moment to watch the busy man placing the bricks in their correct position on the street floor. He alone kept several men busy with wheelbarrows loaded with bricks dumping them off near him so his fast hands seemed never to stop the rhythm or motion of his speedy arms. Everyone seemed to be working at breakneck speed. Now down in the next block I observed a sight I will never forget--an old black man with bowed head sitting on the curb weeping. At times weeping out loud, as one would put it. It was a pitiful sight and I inquired of a man near me if the man was injured or . . . No, not injured, he said as he smiled back. He said he's probably hurting because he was just released from work. He is 65 years old, he don't look like it, though, does he? I said, "Do you mean he was fired?" "Well," he said, "Let's put it this way, the company thinks he's too old. He cannot work as fast as he used to in the past years so a younger man has replaced him." As he slowly walked away, I stood for another moment gazing at the man across the street as he unashamedly wept. Then it occurred to me that I might someday may live to be much longer than that. There were no such things as social security in those days but I had heard of a pension fund for retired police officers. So I began to look for more information in this line of work.

PS: Then this is what prompted you to apply for a position at the Cedar Rapids Police Department?

Powell: Yes, I had met several officers and motorcycle patrolmen who stopped by at times to watch me at work. An all seemed very friendly and I was able to get some good information of what was needed and expected in a written examination.

PS: You were fortunate to receive such help for I suspect many officers would be very reluctant to give out such information.

Powell: Before moving on to the police examination test, I would like to state some facts--the very history of the city at this period. It concerns railroads and railways affecting the city which would give a memo-picture of the local area at this time. There were three passenger depots to serve the traveling public in the local area and all three of these were in the downtown district. All these passenger stations were located in what we call the Loop District and were within four blocks of each other. One, the Union Station was located at Fourth Avenue and Fourth Street. The Milwaukee and Illinois Central was located at First Avenue and Fourth Street, and the Inter-urban Station, servicing several electric lines, was located at Fourth Avenue and Second Street, all on the inside.

PS: I understand that the Rock Island Railroad terminal and shops were located here in Cedar Rapids at one time?

Powell: Yes. The Rock Island operated shops and a huge railroad equipment with large railway yards which employed many railroad men.

PS: Then most of the cargo shipped at this time was by rail?

Powell: Yes, transportation of cargo, as well as for humans, was mostly by railway. The state of Iowa was still far behind many states in paved roads and highways. Many truck companies failed because

of muddy roads and vehicle troubles, and failure to deliver goods on time. Even the transportation of passenger service increased rapidly. All railways in Iowa did not miss the chance to profit by this bad situation.

PS: Were there not electric railway lines and service in Cedar Rapids?

Powell: Yes, the electric railway line, and in and out of Cedar Rapids, also profited by this unique situation. There was an electric railway from Cedar Rapids to Iowa City, another one from Cedar Rapids to Waterloo, and a third one from Cedar Rapids to Mt. Vernon. Also at this time, the city of Cedar Rapids received transportation service with electric trolley street cars. At one time the city streetcar fare was three tokens for a quarter, and the public did not kick too much on the slight increase in fare. Now, many persons living today will still remember many trains on the Rock Island running through Cedar Rapids. All on the east side of the river, and at this point it is important to mention a side-track or a spur-line of the Rock Island that did operate on the west side of Cedar Rapids. This spur-line crossed the river from the main line then came back up along the river's edge and the side-track extended as far as Fifth Avenue West, to accomodate cargo shipping to several industries on the west side of the river. Now this spur railroad track crossed the 16th Avenue Bridge and on up the edge of the riverside park and the river under the Eighth and Ninth Avenue bridges. It is important to mention this spur track at this time for it will be mentioned again in the final paragraphs and words of this tape.

PS: I've heard much about the blacks that moved to Cedar Rapids from

Buxton, Iowa, when the big coal mines closed there.

Powell: Yes, then the mines closed in Buxton shutting off work for hundreds of employees, many of these black families moved to Cedar Rapids, which greatly increased the black population of Cedar Rapids. Also, there were several new firms and industries plants located in Cedar Rapids at this time which attracted families from here seeking work. This gave a noticeable increase in the community and soon this area became known as a thriving little city.

PS: So new families moving to Cedar Rapids apparently found jobs and fit in very well into the community?

Powell: Quite true. And at this period the City Fathers did not properly see or recognize the political potential of power these blacks could carry--the influence at white active voting polls if used. But this potential power did not generate or produce at all through lack of interest, little apathy, little vote registration, and other things and ills. This writer doubts if the City Fathers ever realized or knew the facts of their mistaken estimations which in fact did not affect them at all. But, the fact remains, the voting power of blacks in Cedar Rapids at this time was the greatest in the city and that includes today, in 1985. The height of the black population in Cedar Rapids was between the years 1921 and 1926.

PS: I'm sure my deceased grandfather would agree with you, yet many, such as I, would doubt that there were ever such a number of blacks residing in this city.

Powell: And speaking of political power and political issues causes me to reflect back to an incident which occurred before the turn of the

twentieth century--now that was quite a few years ago.

PS: What happened then?

Powell: You have probably heard and read about the famous man named William Jennings Bryan, who was nominated to run on the Democratic ticket for President of the United States in 1896 against William McKinley.

PS: Yes, I've heard of him.

Powell: Now, in reflecting back and reminiscing into the early life, what happened will remain indelible upon my mind. Now this incident, it has no relation to our Cedar Rapids topic of today, but you personally and perhaps many of the public would be interested in hearing this short story.

PS: Why certainly, let's hear what happened.

Powell: Briefly, my mother took me on a short train trip from St. Joe, Missouri, to Lincoln, Nebraska, for a few days to visit an old friend, a beautiful lady, named Mrs. Martin Gill. Now we went on the Burlington railroad route and I was thrilled to get my first ride on a choo-choo train.

PS: I'm sure that was exciting. I remember my last train ride when I was barely a teen.

Powell: This one day while we were in Lincoln, we were walking down the street when I noticed several people, including a few youngsters, crowded around a man who apparently was giving away little gifts or something to the crowd. I thought the gift was candy, so I broke away from my mother and Mrs. Mattie and ran toward the man to accept my gift. My mother and her friend both ran after me yelling and calling for me to stop. The man, concerned, realizing

the rumpus, turned and approached me with a wide smile on his face. He proceeded to pin upon my little blue coat a button about the size of a quarter bearing his picture. It was a campaign button revealing he was running for President of the United States. He said a few pleasant words to me which I will never forget. Mr. Bryan said, "Well, little fellow, you are too young to vote but it looks like you have the right spirit." He then turned and said a few words to the two women who had caught up with me and were standing quietly by. I did not understand the words he said to them at the time but years later my mother informed me with a pleasant smile on her face, said--he told us pointedly, "You people will not vote for me because you do not realize Abe Lincoln is really dead. But someday you may change your mind and realize the living of today."

PS: Very truly stated, for I understand the last few presidential elections only 90 percent or more of the black national vote has been Democratic. That has been a very interesting story and I'm sure glad you were able to have met a brilliant man, and famous man, Mr. Bryan.

Powell: Yes, indeed. He was a brilliant attorney. In later years I enjoyed reading of his political discussions in public concerning his views on the gold and silver problem. Also one of his famous debates when opposing the great Clarence Darrow and the famous Scope's Monkey Trial staged in Tennessee. Now we will--today, we may have a few smart alecks around who may say or try to assume there were no such things as campaign buttons as described above, before 1900. But he or she are badly mistaken because more than one century ago, this happened. I'm sorry I do not have the campaign button

of Mr. Bryan and Mr. McKinley today which I wore both in the year 1896. They would probably be worth a pretty penny today. Now we will get back to the Cedar Rapids topic with me preparing to take the police examination test.

PS: How did you feel about taking this test? Did you think that you were ready and capable of passing a rigid examination?

Powell: Yes, I felt I was ready and confident. So far while in Cedar Rapids, I had never been turned back on any job I had applied for. The door of opportunity was still wide open for me and I was still pressing forward and felt confident and lucky. So in April, 1924, came the day for the police examination for applicants designed to become a member of the Cedar Rapids police department. About a dozen young men responded to this test and I was among those feeling confident I would score high enough to be considered for the appointment. All the applicants had been warned when they received the applications that probably as many as 50 questions might be asked in the written test concerning locations of certain streets, schools, churches, buildings, and other public property. Now this brought a smile to me on that day, as soon as I looked at the test. They were not kidding when advising about many locations. In those days, there were no such things as radio squad cars in the Midwest. All emergency phone calls or help came to the station house phone or from police patrol boxes which were well scattered in the Cedar Rapids community.

PS: I'm sure you scored high on this written examination. When did you hear about the results of the test?

Powell: Police news reporters which I had previously met the week before

were the first to give me the good news. These reporters from their daily newspapers were first to inform me that same evening of my passing the grade as a high mark and was also the high man with a grade of 99. Both these veteran reporters congratulated me on being at least ten points ahead of my nearest competitor. Yet I could discern in their tone of voice, that the high scorer or the applicant was not always the one appointed to the position sought. The Civil Service Board could qualify the applicant but not appoint him to the position he sought. I still felt very confident but this door of opportunity for the first time in Cedar Rapids began to look dark and gloomy.

PS: I've heard it said that there was a so-called Black Block where four or five hundred blacks resided and was an entire street block located in downtown Cedar Rapids. Is this a false statement or just a rumor?

Powell: It's a fact and a fact is defined as known to be true, and that is really what happened.

PS: Can you explain in detail, and be a little more frank and explicit?

Powell: I will try to be more precise, exact and equivocally. From the First Avenue to Fifth Avenue east and from First Street to Fifth Street east is five square blocks, which much of it is known as the Cedar Rapids business district. If a mental map is drawn of this area it would reveal the northeast block which is Fourth Avenue to Fifth Avenue and Fourth Street to Fifth Street. This one entire block was called the Black Block because all residents living in this block were black. So now one can really see all the residents living in this block were living in the downtown

district.

PS: So that's why they called it the Black Block?

Powell: Correct. And furthermore, during this period several black businesses established, were located in the downtown district.

PS: Can you briefly name some of these and tell us where they were located?

Powell: As to Cedar Rapids progress, along with growth and industry there were four or five black businesses established downtown, namely, J.A. Baker operated a six or seven chair barber shop on First Street, and a pool hall. Now this was located right exactly where the I.E. building is today. And a black man name Nelson operated a similar barber shop and pool hall across the street where the city auto ramp is situated now today. And a barber shop operated by Jackson and Son was situated where the Brenton Bank is now located. And a black man operated a restaurant known as Keg's Place across from the Union station in the Black Block. There was also Marshall Perkins, well-known black man in Cedar Rapids for years. He was quite a raconteur, finished his business career of this time on north First Street where the Cedar River Tower is now located. And there was also a shoe-shine stand operated by blacks on Third Street east between Second and Third Avenue. One at the Union Station, another at the Inter-urban, and other little businesses.

PS: Those that didn't live in the Black Block, where did they live-- the black population? What section of the city?

Powell: On the street from Fifth Street to Tenth Street East and from Fifth Avenue to 20th Avenue East were mostly black-populated.

While many blacks lived on the southwest side as well as the northwest side of the river, in Time-check, a black man, named Fine, operated the Fine Laundry Company which employed several persons. And there was also a small grocery store operated by a black man in this same section also. And in the black residence district there were several small black businesses operated by blacks. There were groups of blacks like a wave of moving peasants; moving in and out of Cedar Rapids seeking jobs and security. Yet with this seemingly perpetual movement the Cedar Rapids black population appeared to remain constant during this period--and on the other hand--the busy thriving city progressed and moved ahead economically especially in the shortage of housing. Now this part, the construction of dwellings and the sale of old houses to the needy, created more jobs and work for laborers in many fields.

PS: I suppose for entertainment there was usually softball, baseball, music, and . . .

Powell: Yes, music, bands--string bands, brass bands emerged--and many public dances. The Charleston was a raving dance at this period. There was the Clog, and Schottish, the Black Bottom, Walking the Dog, Balling the Jack. Now this was a favorite jazz number for President Woodrow Wilson loved it. He really cut up with fancy steps in Omaha when the June Davis Black Military Band played this at my request. The usual serious, hard, somber face of President Woodrow Wilson broke into a broad smile as he actually went through a few fancy steps to the hot rhythm music of this, which surprised a large audience. Yes, the local public dances staged here were generally at the Lattner Ballroom. This is on

the third floor of the Lattner Building and was also at the old auditorium located at A Avenue and Eighth Street on the northeast side.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

PS: Now getting back to the appointment on the police department.

Powell: Such an appointment was a disappointment to me at that time for it was now May 1. Fifteen days after the result of the police examination and no appointment had been made as yet.

PS: Then what happened?

Powell: There had been much discussion as to why there had been no appointment by May 1 as promised. The two daily newspapers kept the issue alive with many taxpayers joining in the discussion. The police department was already six or men short on the force and now everyone knew what was holding up the decision--a black man.

PS: Was this to be a racial problem?

Powell: Well, everybody hoped not, but to me this one day the appointment appeared dark for me. It was like a race problem raising it's ugly head like a dangerous asp about to strike. The public discussion and opinions were interesting and sometimes amusing. Everybody spoke well of Powell, everybody liked him as a person, but he was black. Yes, he was still black. Was the door of opportunity closing on Powell for the first time in Cedar Rapids? This looked like the swinging door of opportunity was someone on the other side pushing back. Would it finally swing in the right direction or bring on bias tones which would lead to an ugly racial issue? The community as a whole abhorred such and did not

expect such according to the newspaper editorial. But on this day, I thought about the little poem concerning prejudice which went something like this:

Just like the very air we breathe,
Race prejudice is everywhere.
We may not see it,
We try to hide it,
But still we know it's there.

PS: That's quite a poem. What happened after this?

Powell: Well, Police Chief Benish, as well as members of his department were getting restless, much disturbed with no addition to the police force as expected. A friend of mine smiled as he said to me a few days later--"No good news is good news for you." And the other fellow said, "You have got support." He said, "Even the police department is now favoring you." And the other fellow said, "Yes, they want someone appointed even if it's the devil! They have been working overtime so much that they want some more help. The extra work is piled up on them. An appointment of some more men will give us some help, we need more men." These brave warriors braced me up and after this one dark day the confidence was back and I was eager to succeed. Then I thought of those words quoted by old Abe Lincoln himself who said, "I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives and I like to see a man live so that place will be proud of him." My pride returned. I love Cedar Rapids.

PS: When did they finally decide to appoint more men to the police force?

Powell: In the early Spring of 1924, the eligible list of applicants was

still in the hands of those responsible to name names to the police force and now the summer days were passing with no action as yet. In the meantime, on the editorial pages of both daily newspapers, individuals and organizations were expressing their views as to why the delay of more men to the police force who badly needed them. To me it was amusing, informative, and in some views, enlightening as to the why and why not. It would make one think again of that racial, biased poem recently recited. Strong words; we may not see it, we try to hide it, but still we know it's there. But I felt more confident every day that this long delay would eventually work out in my favor.

PS: What happened next?

Powell: On August 16, 1924, four months after the examination results, I received a phone call from the Chief of Police, Wesley Bennish, advising me to be in Mayor Houston's office to be sworn in as a member of the Cedar Rapids Police Department. He said, "Be there at 10:00 sharp this morning." The Chief also advised me to report for duty that same evening at 7 to begin with the night shift. And of course, I was elated and happy as I thanked him for the call and advice given me. Then I hustled to clean up and change clothes to look as neat as possible for I suspected photoflash guns to pop during the ceremony. I had only about an hour to be in the Mayor's office but I was certain that I would be there as scheduled with time to spare.

PS: How did you do on your first night as a Cedar Rapids policeman?

Powell: Very well, according to the morning papers. The new black policeman handled himself very well. Both papers citing him as having

a good start: turning in the fire alarm at the blaze at the Chase Laundry located on the station house beat after midnight. And I also helped in stopping a drunken driver's car before too much damage occurred. I also was permitted to walk on another police beat with a ~~sargeant~~, who assisted in teaching me on many things concerning police work which was a big help for me in learning on the job. In fact, in all my years of service on the department, every officer from the Chief down helped and supported me in a great way in learning on the job. Especially when attached to the quick emergency squad cars.

PS: The sudden change in jobs must have been very exciting for you?

Powell: Yes, very exciting at this period for the next following years were to be one of the most exciting years in the 20th century. Now here are a few of the reasons; the Volstead Act (that meaning the National Prohibition Days), the many dangerous criminals on the loose such as Dillinger, Al Capone, Pretty Boy Floyd and many others, the Wall Street crash resulting in the dark Depression Days, a new president, the New Deal, the Bank Holiday, the National WPA work, and other drastic changes. Following officers all over the country were reminded the oath they took when they entered the department also affected them as a law enforcement agent in the above named national problems.

PS: Were you assigned to a special district or police beat?

Powell: Yes, I was well pleased which resulted in a permanent situation. I was selected as driver of one of the emergency cars. All phone calls to the station house, which was located on First Street SW between Second and Third Avenues, were quickly taken care of by

emergency cars of two or more officers usually gauged by the tone of the calling for help. On such calls, officers must be prepared for any sort of situation from misdemeanor to criminal offenses. So a rookie officer like me had the opportunity to learn much on such trips. I served on this task from 7 PM to midnight. Then after midnight serve with another officer in a squad car until 6 AM. During this period we spent most of it checking doors and windows on the outlying business stores in the outlying districts. One should remember that during these years there was no radio equipped squad cars in the Midwest. However, Cedar Rapids was the first city in the Midwest to operate radio equipped squad cars from their own police station which we will have more on this later.

PS: I suppose there were many miles you drove in the car each day?

Powell: Yes, and every Cedar Rapids car was an open car, usually called a touring car or model with side curtains to be used in stormy weather. Not until 1928 was Cedar Rapids Police Department permitted to operate in closed cars by order of the City Council. The City Safety Commissioners, they could not seem to forget what happened a few years ago in another state when a drunken prisoner kicked the windows out of a squad car and seriously wounded two officers and a civilian with broken glass. Therefore, no enclosed police cars were used by our city police until 1928--the advent of safety glass at this time. There was a beginning of a period shortly afterwards.

PS: Did you have heat in the squad cars: There must have been times when the side curtains alone would not keep the days of winter out?

Powell: Yes, that certainly is true. During the winter of 1924, my first year on the police department, we had at least two 18-inch snows during the fall. The Cedar Rapids Street Department was driving a squad car and jumping out of the car many times to check doors and windows at places around the edge of the city, after midnight, it was quite a task. Such deep snows before the city snow plows went to work sometimes required tire chains. That's a term rarely used today.

But another hazard was to keep a sharp look-out for fires, chimneys burning out and such, for Cedar Rapids still used wood and coal for heating purposes.

PS: Were you called very often to testify in court?

Powell: Not very often. But I'm glad you mentioned that for in 1924 the new court house at Cedar Rapids was not completed in that early year, and the district court was still held in the old Court House in Marion. Although subpoenaed twice to appear in court there on different cases, both pleaded guilty and I did not have the opportunity to take the witness stand in the Old County Court House. But I received the witness fees and streetcar fare for my appearances. The Cedar Rapids police officers were granted a dollar and a half for their testimony and 60 cents streetcar fare. Also at this time Cedar Rapids housed many bootleggers, as did cities elsewhere. The traffic in alcohol was increasing with truckloads of this illegal product passing through Cedar Rapids almost daily. And to further complicate and irritate law enforcement agencies, dangerous criminals of the Dillinger type were staging bank robberies and intercepting bootlegging trucks across the nation.

Now Cedar Rapids quickly began to prepare a defense against this lawless practice, when police rumors indicated one of the larger banks in Cedar Rapids was to be cased as a possible strike. Cedar Rapids police purchased what was later called a Battle Cruiser. It was a new sheriff's model Studebaker, supposed to be souped up for speed. It had a bullet-proof radiator, bullet-proof windshield, with a two-inch hole on the driver's side large enough for a gun barrel to enter. Strapped to the ceiling of this car were two automatic rifles of large caliber. They could quickly be brought into service as they were loaded and ready to be in the hands of experienced marksmen already trained with this particular weapon. This car was also an open car with side curtains. This so-called Battle Cruiser was 18 feet in length, bumper to bumper. I enjoyed driving this car and probably put more miles on it than any other driver in over five years in which this was the property of the police department.

PS: When did Cedar Rapids obtain the radio squad cars?

Powell: About 1929 or 1930 we were fortunate to have a young fellow named Boukicheck. Well-versed in radio and an acquaintance and friend of Arthur Collins, a master of radio which still carries the company name, no doubt was a great aid when Boukicheck was given permission by the city to do a little experimenting in setting a small emission set at the local police station with receiving sets.

PS: Then his work was a success?

Powell: Very much so. The City Council soon became interested and provided funds to broaden his excellent plan. This was quickly done and soon all around the cars were equipped with receiving sets. Cedar

Rapids was proud to know that the Cedar Rapids department was the first in the Midwest to have a station. Such big stations as Chicago, St. Louis, Omaha, and others in the Midwest, they were broadcasting emergency calls to squad cars in their cities, but from commercial radio stations. None of these cities owned their own broadcasting system as did Cedar Rapids at this time.

PS: In making fast emergency calls for help, there always lies some danger.

Powell: That's quite true but not always danger for the officers. I had been on the job only a few weeks when a situation arose I'll never forget. I was glad that a detective and a sergeant in a uniform was along on this call. Now a drunken man with a very young child in his arms had ran to the fourth floor of the Allison Hotel and was threatening to throw the baby out the window if his demands were not met.

PS: My, what happened?

Powell: Soon after the mother of the child was on the scene along with many other sightseers. I started blocking them out of the room as the drunken man kept warning the officers not make another move towards him or if so he would throw the child out the window. I noticed the window was raised high as possible, and the mumbling, drunken man admitted raising the window for that purpose. "Just make another move and I'll show you." As he rocked the child back and forth in his arms.

Briefly stating, between the swinging of the child and the detective, gave me just enough time to help him with the drunk. A second or two and the uniformed man was on him with me jumping

into the melee. We soon had him subdued and on the way to the jailhouse. The child not yet two years old, was unharmed and finally seemed amused at all those crowding around him. Now the Assistant Chief of Police, Mr. Clary, and the Captain of Police, they pointed out to me the valuable information which I stored away for future use. They pointed out to me the first call to the station was just a drunken man disturbing the peace. It looked as though it was just another arrest of a drunken man. But when we were on the way the station received more calls so what appeared to be a simple summons for help could have resulted in more criminal charges. When the officers were called out on a worker's strike or a neighborhood disturbance, or any large group disturbing the peace, there were certain things that happened.

PS: When officers were called to a worker's strike scene or neighborhood disturbance, how were you treated individually by the group, and did you ever have any racial utterances called at you?

Powell: That's a good question and I am ready with a quick answer. Being the first black appointed as a law enforcement officer on the force, one might expect such action but I can freely state during all of my years on the department as a policeman in uniform I was generally respected as such. And the opposing crowd of rowdies usually knew how far they could go before being grabbed and thrown into the slammer. But today such a uniformed officer, black or white, generally would not have such a privilege. Only two times in all of my years was a white usually drunk and threw such slurs at me. Now believe me or not, over this period of years I heard more slurs and innuendos and nasty remarks aimed at me from blacks

than any other group of people.

PS: I notice you have a Handgun Marksman Ribbon presented to you by the police department and I am aware you have another one in a frame.

Powell: Yes, I was an excellent shot with a handgun long before joining the police department. I was taught early how to squeeze the trigger of a handgun rather than pull the trigger. So with pride I never feared being in any gunfight while on the force. The old saying that crooks usually get the first shot at an officer, but then if he misses the target then it's too bad for the crook. I never feared killing any person with a gun for several reasons. I was always confident I could quickly disable him, if necessary, with one shot.

PS: I suppose you had much target practice with guns?

Powell: Yes, and here's a shocking statement that people will ponder today. I have before me a newspaper clipping. It is an item from a local newspaper. It was from my wife's scrapbook who collected many articles concerning my police activities. This one reads, "The City Council granted the State Commissioner \$40 to be paid to Virgil Powell for his task in preparing target ammunition for the police practice". Now briefly, I was saving the hundreds of caliber empty shells fired in our target practice by the officers. I had purchased an ideal reloading kit for the purpose of reloading these shells again for target practice. For almost two years I supplied officers these target shells, preparing them at home and in my own time, the city bearing the expense.

PS: Of course, you know, Mr. Powell, that this tape is being made for the historical Douglas estate now called Brucemore. I suppose you

know something about this beautiful place and its surroundings?

Powell: Yes, the first time I stepped upon the property of Brucemore was when President Herbert Hoover was here for the first time as a guest. Now Roy Warren, remember my old friend who was the cause of me visiting Cedar Rapids in the first place, was working for the Hamiltons. They were high officials at the Merchants National Bank. Roy was the chauffeur who drove the car carrying President Hoover and his party to the Douglas residence. Now this car was a Pierce Arrow, one of the highest price models made at this time. And Roy was working at this time for the Hamiltons.

PS: I understand that many famous people have been guests at the Brucemore estate?

Powell: Quite true. And incidentally, during this period a large Chicago banking firm needed a certain amount of cash immediately. It was my old friend, Roy again, who drove the car from a local bank under heavy guard to a Chicago bank which needed this cash.

PS: I understand that you are retired from the police department as Head of the Identification Department. I see you have a diploma which represents you as a finger print expert. When did you become interested in the art of finger printing?

Powell: Now this is another topic strange and unbelievable today. But the United States knew nothing of the art of finger prints and the classification of such. In fact, America was one of the last major powers to adopt the mode of identification. And remember this was the beginning of the 20th century. During the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1903 and 1904, finger prints were introduced to America by England's Scotland Yard. A sergeant from the Yard

was sent to the World's Fair to explain, reveal, and demonstrate the value of finger print identification and the classification of such prints. The public was astonished and amazed as they observed results of such demonstrations before their eyes. Another person miles away reading the Sunday St. Louis Globe Press was also amazed at this new form of positive identification. That person was this writer who immediately became determined to study the new subject which later affected Cedar Rapids and me personally. I began to read more and more concerning this weird subject. Of course, these articles and books were written in England and Germany. I was 14 years old when my parents came into the room as I was reading another article from the Globe Democrat concerning finger prints. I suddenly burst out to them that I was going to become a finger print expert. I suspected to hear a loud laugh or something discouraging but it never came from my parents nor from my older brother who was in the room. Suppose I had said, "President of the United States." There would have been a roar of laughter. But I should point out here the word finger print expert had a new meaning and defined in a different manner in the old dictionery. The word finger print expert did not appear in those books. In fact, I was announcing to my parents that I intended to become a finger print expert when there was no such Americans, black or white, in America. My father supported me in what I intended to become and said later, "If you become a finger print expert, be one of the best." Years later, my parents visited me in Cedar Rapids, and my father, now deceased, noticed that I was all smiles after he talked to a local police sergeant who

said, "Remember son, I told you years ago." He said, "You are one of the best."

I kept up my homework on finger prints and finally schools began to be established in America. In 1916, (just think of that date) there was by then a finger print school established in Chicago. The next year, 1917, was the World War which served as a good lesson for the United States to learn the value of positive identification. After serving five years on the Cedar Rapids Police Department, I was promoted to the Identification Bureau and helped set up the modern Identification Bureau which is now considered one of the best.

PS: I suppose you were happy to be assigned to this well deserved position?

Powell: Yes, I was eager to demonstrate my ability to classify any set of finger prints, and I did not have long to wait for this opportunity.

PS: How did this come about?

Powell: In the Chief Detective's room, headquarters, I observed a detective, in fact, it was Detective Marshall, he was pointing to a wanted poster. He kept stating that this picture looks like a young man wanted along with other suspects. There was no other description than just the picture of this fellow, and no finger prints. But Detective Marshall, kept saying that this alarm card looks so much like a young fellow wanted. So the Chief Detective said, "Why not pick him up and bring him over and we'll have him fingerprinted." Now this fellow was working at this time at the Quaker Oats Company. The Chief wanted Marshall to bring him in. I fingerprinted this man, then quickly classified. . .

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE I

My formula of the classification must be the same as the one on file at the FBI. So I was about to enter the chief's office to report my formula to the chief when I heard a scuffle in the room going on. When I opened the door the chief and several others were holding the young man that had been brought in. He had suspected my classification would match those of the FBI. And, of course, this was a dead giveaway. The young man had broke down and confessed that he was wanted for several burglaries in several different cities. But it was fortunate in the pick up of this person, for he had been finger printed before and therefore, there had been some found. After the confession, Toledo, Ohio, was notified, who gladly sent some officers to pick him up.

Soon afterwards, a similar case came up but this time a picture and a good description of the man was given on the alarm poster, which was why the officers picked him up. Although the fingerprint formula was available, after printing the subject, I quickly classified them and they were the same formula that the Western Union had sent out. I had much fun in listening over the phone how the Chief was trying to explain how my fingerprint formula should appear on a telegram. When trying to describe the figures and the key, or the letters, on the denominator line, when he talked to the operator at the Western Union he said, "Wait until I get out my arithmetic again." They finally sent it off written as I had suggested. It was only a few hours later when we got the reply, "Hold that man."

In the reply the FBI said, "Hold that man for St. Louis Police

Department, who has already been advised and the officers are on their way to pick him up for murder. They had been informed by the FBI that Cedar Rapids was holding him. In the meantime, another town in a different state also wanted this man but St. Louis preceeded them because their charge was murder. There were several more cases where wanted criminals were apprehended in Cedar Rapids by the alarm poster and exposed by classification of their fingerprints. But today it is a lot different than forty years ago which we have the technology and the machines and the computers of today. The apprehension of criminals and missing persons and so on, are much quicker today. But in a way I'm amused for I never dreamed of ever expecting to be employed and receive wages for such an intersting subject.

Now when J. Edgar Hoover accompanied Clyde Tolson (now here's something Cedar Rapids listeners ought to take careful. .) Cedar Rapids' Tolson was the right-hand man of Edgar Hoover. When Mr. Tolson's father died at Cedar Rapids, who was Merchant Policeman here, J. Edgar Hoover accompanied his right-hand man to Cedar Rapids for the funeral. After the funeral, Mr. Hoover later visited the Cedar Rapids Police Department where he thoroughly examined the filing system of the local Bureau of Identification. Now there were many anxious newsmen, reporters, present from all over the state here to hear what he had to say about the filing system. But Mr. Hoover, he smiled and said, that he was well pleased with the system here and surprised everyone by stating it was in good order and at the moment one of the best in the Midwest. He also pointed out that the filing system here was very similar to the

one in Washington, DC, and he stated he could quickly retrieve any fingerprint on file here locally by the classification formula just the same as you would in his own file in Washington, DC.

Of course, I was very much pleased with this because I had done all of the filing in this particular bureau. Now today, in 1985, I understand, as a happy man to report, that the Local Bureau of Identification is still one of the best in the Midwest.

PS: You've accomplished a great deal in your lifetime and I guess you should count your blessings.

Powell: Yes, but I am fearful of counting my blessings.

PS: We've heard the words of your success on this tape, on the job, positions, and progress you've made since moving to Cedar Rapids 67 years ago. Nothing can beat success. On all these strides to move ahead you've counted your blessings. On the other side of the ledger the same has been true, survival, living to succeed, being able to live through the many near disasters without receiving a bodily scratch or any harm. This, too, is success and must be added to your ledger of counting your blessings.

Powell: Yes. Now the fear of counting my blessings--mine are so numerous that I fear I would widely misstate some. Here are a few of my briefly stated surviving such things as tornadoes--two tornadoes. The near drowning in the Missouri river; pulled from a railroad train wreck (pulled out of a window with the car coach laying on its side); survival of a terrible hurricane storm at sea aboard an excursion ship in the Carribean (that was between Jamaica and the Dominican Republic); and many close calls with death while serving on the police department.

PS: I suppose the most fearful of all was the standing so close to the building on the tragic day when the Douglas Starch Works exploded and took so many lives?

Powell: It was a terrible disaster. When asked to make this tape of early Cedar Rapids for the Brucemore Museum, I immediately consented which quickly came to my mind the relationship of Brucemore and the Douglas Works at this time, in 1919. Here was the opportunity for me to again relate in detail the disaster of this plant as an eye witness. Yes, as an eye witness to the big building within 100 feet of it, then see it suddenly disappear with a loud blast. Now there are several reasons why it is more painful for me today to speak of this tragic thing than it was 50 or 55 years ago. One important reason; there is no one living today who can vouch for me as the one standing in this same spot as stated. Only the good Lord knows I was standing there in this plot in this position at the said time of the explosion. And now, never again do I intend to repeat this portion or discussion of subject with anyone for it is now too sentimental and sacred; too agonizing and distressing for my personal feelings.

PS: Why were you so close to the building at that time? You did not work there, but I am aware that we had many blacks employed at the building. Why were you there?

Powell: Now that is one reason why, when we go back 66 years to 1919, we have spoke of generation gaps and the changes and the occurring of each one. Now 65 years ago the Red Cedar River running through Cedar Rapids and Linn County was a fisherman's paradise for those who loved this sport. There are many different species of fish

as well as abundant of game fish in the streams at this time. I enjoyed catching Blue-Channel Fish, as they were called at this time. It was a long, slender fish, usually from 15 to over 20 inches long, good eating fish and a very solid fish. There were not nearly as many salt fish in the Cedar River as now. Just below the Eighth Avenue bridge and extending down the river, a pair of small islands about a block long were near the west banks of the river. This left a sort of channel of about 20 feet or so between this little island and the west bank of the river. A friend of mine knowing my wishes, he directed me to this spot and I decided to try my luck there on this day. This is why I was in the vicinity on this tragic and fateful day. Now reflecting back to the early days, something happened which disturbed me and followed me like a shadow throughout my life. Briefly stating, this happened many years ago when I was around 10 or 12 years old. It happened in my neighborhood in which an elderly man who everyone called "Uncle" was found dead in his home where he lived alone. The medical examiner reported no foul play, a natural death, probably a heart attack and that he had been dead several days before discovery. He died alone, that was the cry the doctor gave and that stuck with me all my life. He died alone. I was still about this age when hunting alone for rabbits with my .22 caliber pistol near the edge of the town when this happened. I was barefooted walking along through the thicket and was just about to step on a Copperhead snake. I jumped back and stared at him. It was not over two feet long, and I never seen a Copperhead snake in my life but I'd heard it described many times. I stood there and I

watched this Copperhead. I only had heard of it before but I knew this was one with his glistening, shining, fat head as the sun came through the thicket and his beady eyes shined at me as if he knew and recognized my fear. And after some time it appeared that I heard a voice and the voice seemed to say, "You will not die alone." That stuck with me. I stood there for several minutes and watched this so-called poisonous viper crawl slowly away. I never even thought of bringing my pistol in view or in shape to stop him, which I could have done. I only stood there and watched him crawl away as the voice kept saying to me, "You will not die alone."

Now on May 22, 1919, just before 6:30 PM the explosion at the Douglas Starch Works in Cedar Rapids caused many deaths and injuries. It is interesting to me to note the headlines at this time appearing in the newspapers referring to the destruction of this plant. Some of the headlines said, "Hundreds die in the explosion; Explosion rips up the Cedar Rapids plant." But the Chicago Tribune was the one that took my eye because it stated, "The Cedar Rapids blow-up took hundreds of lives." This last headline was very befitting because it said it blew up. I was an eye witness and that was exactly what happened. This plant blew up. After baiting my hook on the line and throwing it in as I talked to a fellow for a few minutes who went on up, the time seemed to escape me. I started up the bank from the river across the Rock Island tracks and I remember--I stated before about these Rock Island tracks--and I expected to try to converse again with Gene Warren, a relative of Lee Warren. A few days before, I had played

a few games of pool with him and I expected him to be wanting another game or so. It was what he hollered out of his window. But I knew not just what he wanted and I crossed these tracks this time. It was now after 6:00 and the shift had changed there. This Gene Warren and those associates as I knew them were not in the building at this time. The shifts had changed and they had to go on home.

I am not trying to prove or disprove anything but I hope that I am pardoned for using my friend's deceased name in telling how this thing happened again. I was standing in this area mentioned when these fellows at the open window at this time had been hollering at me. They were now home, it was after 6:00 and I was still there looking at this building when it happened.

There was a loud boom. The earth under my feet actually moved about two feet, just a big shock all at once, throwing me to my knees. I quickly came up and stood on my feet and this one spot I did not move. I very quickly rose and watched. It must have started in the basement for every floor of the building blew upward. I mean these entire floors blew upwards with the outside walls standing as though guiding these buildings and debris upward just as though shot out of a cannon. Then later, the outer walls fell inward and outward before falling to the ground. I stood up and I remember saying, "My, my!" as I looked upward into the sky with this mass of humans, timbers, debris, metals filling the darkened sky. Believe me folks, the sky became dark. Then I stood still and as it seemed like a long time from this explosion debris began falling back to earth again and falling in

places blocks away which had never been disturbed before. The explosion had not disturbed these blocks away but they were now getting it after the explosion just like a thunderstorm; the clap of thunder, then the raindrops fall. Now this was the same day, the explosion had occurred an hour later (before). Here was the fallen debris. It was terrible. That seemed like a long time before this came down, and nothing touching me at all. All of the stuff falling around me. I'll never forget, not even one piece touched me. I winced, I know, when a big timber, a heavy thing, with one end of it falling within a foot of me. I did not move. I felt strange at this time because I could not help but think of that disturbing phrase, "You will not die alone". I sure would not be dying alone if I was dying with this large group for there were many dying right here at this time. This was a terrible disaster, terrible, as I breathed a prayer to my Maker. Even today I marvel at the great height that this went into the air before falling to earth. I turned to see an old acquaintance running across the Eighth Avenue bridge yelling and hollering. This fellow was Herb Alnaught, yes, I knew him well. He went running across the bridge and then went on down to the water where I was standing. He was soon hollering again, "My brother is in there!" As he ran towards me he kept saying, "My brother is in there!" I heard the words and understood. He was hollering, "My brother Dewey is in there!" Yes, I knew Dewey. And he pointed to a spot and ran there and started jerking bricks and debris and stuff away. Then I made a move, ran over to help him jerking bricks and stuff away. Pretty soon sure enough a hand appeared, and then an arm. And on this

arm was clothing. We knew it was Dewey. We kept jerking bricks away and pulled him out alive. Alive! And we just kept on digging and digging timbers and stuff away. And we began to get out more bodies as Dewey rushed. . .

Now in the meantime, Herb was right, because we were working right in the right spot. Right under this same window where I had been watching these boys, where Gene and these other boys I knew had been standing, these boys coming on the other shift had taken the place right there. Now Cedar Rapids is and was proud of the quick appearance of the Fire Department, Cedar Rapids Police Department, and soon the Red Cross. Believe me, the Red Cross was soon on the scene. I kept busy with many others who appeared there and were soon trying to uncover the buried bodies who--we could hear some of them calling for help. I will not forget the gruesome scenes that came up. In fact, a nurse fainted and had to be led away and I almost fainted when I looked at that same spot and scene that she was looking at. Believe me, it was not a very pretty sight. But over a month passed before enough glass could be shipped to Cedar Rapids to replace the broken windows and glass and stuff in the area.

Now as far as downtown Cedar Rapids, the big, large display windows were broken and this was eight to ten blocks away across the river where these glasses broke. This was quite a blast. Even at this early date there was some talk about shatter-proof glass, but it was all talk. There was no such thing at that time. Leroy Warren, who was the cause of my first visit to Cedar Rapids, was a long, true friend of mine and was a long-goier of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church, he, as I mentioned before, was a great friend of the church

and I knew it. I have mentioned in my will a donation to this church in his honor. I hope it will be fulfilled. That voice and the words which were impressed upon me the long years that have subsided.

The influence of fear and deep respect and reverences with the mixed feeling of awe and wonder have long been with me. And for 22 years when I was protecting others it reminds me Who was protecting me. I was committed for 22 years to protect others but who protected me? But now I have the knowledge of Who protected me and why I have this knowledge and I have counted my blessings. It is clear to me now that I will not die alone. Now, thanks, Miss Smith, for your excellent cooperation in making this tape, which is intended for a very worthy cause. In trying to answer all these questions, my statements were frankly and truthfully given as I observed them over the long years. I hope this information will be helpful to those interested in early Cedar Rapids history and its progress during this 20th century. And as for me personally, Cedar Rapids was and is a good, good place for me and I hope it will also be the same for you. I thank you.

PS: Thank you, Mr. Powell, for this opportunity for me to interview you.