

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH: RICHARD MENDOZA

INTERVIEW BY: LAURA DERR

PLACE: CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

DATE: JANUARY 24, 1985

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- When were you born? Where?
- How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
- What are your parents' names?
- Where did you go to school?
- Are you married or single?
- Did you raise a family? How big?
- What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

1. Transportation

- 30-34, 48-49 --Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
- 48 --Trolleys (the Interurban)
  - Horses and First Automobiles
  - Mud roads and the seedling mile
  - Hunter Airport and the first planes
- 51-52 --Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- 52-54 --Newspapers
- 54 --Radios
  - Advertising
- 56 --Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

- 57-58 --Motion Pictures
  - Cedar Rapids Parks
  - 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
- 18-19 --Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
- Clothing
- Toys
- 58-60 --Saloons/Taverns
- Farm Life

4. Family Life

- Household Help
- 16 --Women's Roles
- 17 --Childrens' Activities/Behavior
- 19-21 --Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)
- 5-9---Lived in a boxcar

5. Ethnic/Minority Life

- 37-39 --Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.) (Mexican)
- Indians
- Segregation of Blacks
- Jobs Available

C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community

1. Education

- 10-13 --Cedar Rapids Schools
- Coe College
- Mount Mercy College
- Cornell College

2. Government

- City Services
- 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
- Banking and Finance
- Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
- 14-15,16-17--Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
- Farmers Market
- Mills on Cedar River
- Buildings Erected
- Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
- 26 --Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)
- 22-30,34-36--Working for the Railroad

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)
- Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
- 43--Bank Closings (1933)
- Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
- Public Library Murder(1921)

2. National Historic Events

- Womens' Suffrage
- World War I
- Roaring 20's
- 60-62--Prohibition
- 39-40,44--Great Depression
- 45-47--WPA



Richard Mendoza was born in Mexico City in 1909, the son of Jose and Manuala Mendoza. He came to Cedar Rapids with his family in the 1920's to join his father who was working for the Rock Island Railroad at that time. Mr. Mendoza attended Garfield and Tyler Schools. The Mendozas returned to Mexico between 1925-28, but then moved back to Cedar Rapids permanently. Like his father, he worked for the railroads as a section hand and later in the roundhouse. He also worked as part of a musical act at a tavern in the 1930's. His memories include life on the railroads, Prohibition and Depression days in Cedar Rapids.

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JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Richard Mendoza  
Interviewer: Laura Derr  
Date of Interview: January 24, 1985  
Place of Interview: Witwer Senior Citizens Center  
transcriptionist: Mary Bowden

LD: Laura Derr, January 24, 1985. I am at the Witwer Center, with Mr. Richard Mendoza. Mr. Mendoza, can you tell us when were you born, and where were you born?

RM: I was born in Mexico City, 1909.

LD: In 1909. How long have you lived in--when did you come to Cedar Rapids?

RM: In 1922.

LD: In 1922. What are you parents' names?

RM: My dad, his name is Jose Mendoza. My mother's name is Manvala Mendoza.

LD: Mr. Mendoza, where did you go to school, when you were here in Cedar Rapids?

RM: I went to school, to Garfield school, in 1920.

LD: In 1920, was that the only school?

RM: No, I went to Tyler school, about 1923.

LD: I want to ask you more about that, but let's just get some basic facts first of all. Are you married or single?

RM: Married.

LD: When did you marry?

RM: I was married in Cedar Rapids, 1930.

LD: Do you have a family?

RM: Yes, we had five children. We lost two of them.

LD: When you were here in the United States?

RM: Yes, over here in Cedar Rapids.

LD: What is your wife's name?

RM: My wife's name is Zendida, her maiden name is Cortez.

LD: How do you spell her first name? Your wife's first name, can you spell it for me or maybe write it down, for me, that might be better. Thank you.  
Do your children still live here in Cedar Rapids?

RM: Yes.

LD: What are their names?

RM: Well, I got a girl, her name Esther.

LD: Esther, E.s.t.h.e.r.

RM: Yes, and a boy named Carlos.

LD: O.K., Carlos.

RM: And, ah, another boy, by the name of Jerry.

LD: And are they here in this community?

RM: Yes, in Cedar Rapids.

LD: So they still have, they have families here now.

RM: Yes, they are married and have families.

LD: Do you have grandchildren?

RM: Oh, yes, we have four grandchildren.

LD: Four grandchildren. So you have really developed quite a family here in the community, then. What was your occupation during the years that you were living here in Cedar Rapids, before you retired?

RM: I started in '28, to work on the railroad-- on a different, you know, they didn't give you a steady job in one railroad, but we'd have to work in a different--where ever we could find a job. But I started for Milwaukee, and I just kept right on working for Milwaukee, until I retired, in 1954. Then I went to work for Quaker Oats from '54 to '64.

LD: Then you retired, suddenly.

RM: I had a stroke, and I had to retire.

LD: O.K., I would like to start today by going back and really stretching your memories to the days when you first came to Iowa, and to the United States, from Mexico. First of all, can you remember, why did your family come to Cedar Rapids, in 1922, did you say it was?

RM: 1920.

LD: 1920. Why did they first, why did they make the decision to move up here?

RM: To move over here? My dad, he used to come in the early 30's, to different railroads, and different states. He was all over the United States, and probably landed over here and he liked it over here. So, I don't know, I never had nothing to do, so I come over here with him.

LD: Now did you have several brothers and sisters, and did your mother come, or was it just you that came to join your dad?

RM: I had another sister, and then another sister was born here.

LD: I see, so your mother and you and your sister came here to join him.

RM: Yeah.

LD: And he had been working in the United States for several years then.

RM: Yes, two, three years and then he would go back and then he would come back the following year, and travel that way 'til he stuck, he began to settle down in Cedar Rapids.

LD: I see. How did you come to Cedar Rapids? Do you remember how you traveled here?

RM: How did we travel? Well, all I can figure out is that, at that time, my dad had a pass from the railroad to get us over here.

LD: Did you all come then together at the same time?

RM: Yes.

LD: Do you remember traveling up here on the train.

RM: Yes, there was only three of us, but then we are four now.

LD: You would have been about 11 years old then, right?

RM: Yes.

LD: Do you remember the first place that you lived in Cedar Rapids?

RM: Well, we used to live in a boxcar.

LD: Tell me more about that.

RM: Well, there was a lot of Mexican people, used to give them a boxcar, which they gave us coal, in winter time, and we didn't have to pay water, but we was pretty good then.

LD: The railroad then provided you with a boxcar.

RM: Provided with a boxcar.

LD: Where was the boxcar?

RM: The boxcars were-- they had some on the floor, without wheels, and some with wheels. So, it all depends how many men, and most of the families they gave them, without the wheels.

LD: Without wheels. So that they were really pretty stable places to be. Where was the yard that they were located.

RM: Rock Island. My dad was working for Rock Island, and that was by the slough or that lake.

LD: Oh, the Cedar Lake area.

RM: Cedar Lake area.

LD: O.K., so that would have been on the southwest side of the river?

RM: Well, there, it would have been the east side.

LD: On the east side.

RM: This was the slough.

LD: How long did you stay there in the boxcar area?

RM: In the boxcar, we stay about a couple of years. That was only for the working people, well on the section. All the people that don't work there, they may not stay. So my dad got a job on the roundhouse, and then he has to give up the car.

LD: On the roundhouse.

RM: Yes.

LD: O.K., what was the roundhouse?

RM: The roundhouse, well, they fixed the engines, and repair all the engines in different kinds of jobs.

LD: So when he stopped working with that particular crew you couldn't stay in the boxcars anymore.

RM: No, that was just for the section guys, on the railroad.

LD: I want to ask you more about how you lived when you were in the boxcars. Did you, did they have them set up with coal stoves, so that you could stay warm during the winter?

RM: Ah, yes, they gave us--the company had a stove--but they were not, they were pretty good to...

cook, but not to--we had to buy our own stove, and...had to buy them.

LD: And then you would run a pipe up and out of the ceiling.

RM: Yeah.

LD: What about during the--you said you didn't have to pay for your water--  
how did you get water when you were in there?

RM: We had a pump, and we had a place in there, where we could take our  
water to the boxcars .

LD: You could actually get it inside the car then, you didn't have to carry  
buckets out and get water and bring it in, or...

RM: Yeah, we had to bring it in.

LD: You had to bring it in from the outside pump.

RM: Yeah.

LD: O.K., I remember that, from when I was growing up, too. When you were  
living in the boxcars, that would have been then, early 20's, right?

RM: Early 20's, yeah.

LD: Do you remember, anything about the winter times, was it particularly cold,  
or did you manage to stay comfortable?

RM: Well, all I can remember is that the slough would freeze up, and we had  
to cross on the ice on the slough to get to Garfield school.

LD: You walked across the ice?



RM: Yes, across the ice.

LD: So, it was a pretty cold winter then. When you were living in the boxcar, did you have just one big room and one end of it was for family, or how did you--where did you sleep, how did you arrange it?

RM: Well, sometimes, they divided like in three parts, put a partition in three parts, inside of the car.

LD: One part would be for sleeping.

RM: Yeah, well, for a bedroom or another room. It all depends on if you have a big family, you make two bedrooms and that is all you can do.

LD: Sure. They're pretty big.

RM: But then, the slough was close to a bank, and that was where we started building. There was a lot of lumber that we could build, like a kitchen, and a porch and a backroom.

LD: In the back of the boxcar, and your family did that.

RM: Yeah, there was all the people started building that.

LD: So they just used the wood that was right there.

RM: There was a lot of wood there.

LD: How many families could you say were living there at that time?

RM: At that time, I would say, oh, let me see--oh, one, two, three--there was about six cars, and there were about four cars, and there were four little houses. They were staying in debt to the railroad. But different railroads, I guess, had cars. It all depends, Rock Island was one of the biggest railroad

over here at that time. They had so many steady workers--they would work all day--and the other ones would, when they would get the extras out, they would hire more men.

LD: So the numbers kind of changed, from time to time. At least maybe a dozen, twenty families probably. How many men were on a section?

RM: Well, like I said, there was, like Rock Island had about 14 men steady, and then the rest would work; they would hire more, probably for a couple months.

LD: In the regular times. When you moved here from Mexico, did anyone in your family speak English?

RM: No.

LD: Your father did not speak English.

RM: Well, maybe a little bit, my dad.

LD: A little. Did your mother learn to speak English after you moved here?

RM: Ah, no.

LD: Not very well.

RM: No.

LD: What about you as children?

RM: Oh, my children, English, no they learned English right away.

LD: Well, you learned English, I suppose through the school system.

RM: Well, no, I lost -- to learn good English and good Spanish, you had to go to school --and that's the part that I missed.

LD: Because you didn't attend school regularly.

RM: That's right.

LD: Well, you speak beautifully.

RM: Well, I have been around.

LD: You had a long time to learn, right. When you came here then, let's go on and talk a little about the schools you attended. You first walked to Jackson, from the boxcars ...

RM: To Garfield.

LD: I'm sorry, to Garfield right. Now, what grade would you have been in there, do you remember?

LD: My God, they had to put me in first grade.

LD: O.K.

RM: They didn't put me in kindergarten, when I was 15. But then I was, then I hit on another fellow, and that knew how to speak, I studied this all year, and he used to interpret me in English, because I didn't know nothing about it.

LD: So, there really, you were lucky to find someone, who could speak enough Spanish so you could understand what was happening.

RM: Yes.

LD: Do you remember, what it was like, a typical school day there. Did they have special classes that you attended to help you learn English, or did you just sit there?

RM: No, I began to figure out, when we used to live in the yards, I had to learn how to --the first thing is to, like beans, and flower-- because my mother had to send me to the store. And I had to learn how to write, so I could give it to the grocer.

LD: Count the money.

RM: Yeah. Well, I done pretty good on groceries, but I had a hard time, especially on history, after you, you know, you had to know the words and the... but the, well, I spent them years in, then we went back to Mexico, and we stayed three years up there, and I never went to school in Mexico anymore. I began to make a little money, came back in 1928, there goes my schooling days.

LD: Yeah, you're almost too old then.

RM: But, after I started working with different nationalities, of course, there was a lot of Greeks, they didn't even know how to read or write either.

LD: That were here in Cedar Rapids.

RM: In Cedar Rapids.

LD: Let me go back just a moment, to your, to what you just said. You did go back to Mexico in 1924?

RM: 25.

LD: Why did your family return?

RM: That, I don't know.

LD: You're not sure.

RM: My father said... we were going and we went, and then after one year, he came back and leave us up there, and after two more years, he sent for us, and say well, I got that money for you.

LD: So then you stayed.

RM: Then we come back.

LD: Did you, when you were here the first time, were you in the boxcars in the yards the whole time, or did you move into another place then?

RM: Did what?

LD: Did you move, when your dad you said, went to work at the roundhouse, where did you move to then?

RM: We move to, well, back of a Tyler's School.

LD: O.K.

RM: That was kind of an alley, and they had two houses, and we lived in one of them.

LD: So then you went to Tyler, too, that first time you were here. Did you, you didn't just go to Garfield. Did you go to Tyler too?

RM: Yes.

LD: At that time there were, many of the students at Tyler were black students, weren't they, was that a black ...

RM: Well, no, no, no, there were a mix.

LD: It was a real mixture.

RM: Yeah.

LD: Then I'm thinking of even later then.

RM: Yeah.

LD: How long were you at Tyler, do you remember?

RM: Oh, about a year and a half.

LD: So you probably, did you get beyond the first grade then, did you go through second or third, or, can you remember?

RM: No, I don't remember.

LD: Do you have any memories about being in the schools? Did you feel like you were included, were you a part, did you have friends in the school system?

RM: Yes, I had friends, they were all nice to me. Right now, there is still, there are a couple guys, that still live and see when... I used to pitch all their balls. They would not play like that, today, they have a lot of balls to play, and I used to fix our lunch, so we could play up there, and we used to pitchall the stuff. Well, I was a little bigger than they, older, than the guys.

LD: Did you play ...

RM: But, I used to, I made a lot friends.

LD: You would, what kinds of games would you play?

RM: Well, we would play baseball mostly.

LD: And you were a pitcher?

RM: Well, yes.

LD: I wasn't sure if you said you pitched balls or fixed balls. So, you never, you didn't feel as if you were excluded than, because of your language problem.

RM: No.

LD: Were there many other Mexican students?

RM: No, not in Tyler.

LD: Did you have friends from the Czech community? Did you know any of the Czech?

RM: Well, yes, there were, there were a few.

LD: Let's see, moving on to the years when you were here growing up. I wanted to ask you, you mentioned about going to the grocery store for your mother.

RM: Yes.

LD: Where did you go to shop for groceries in those days?

RM: There used to be, on First Street, a grocery store, there would be, on First Street, between A Avenue and First Avenue. By the riverside, there used to be a grocery store, by, what we used to call, "Farmers' Exchange".

LD: "Farmers' Exchange," now that's, is that, was that, the farmers' market that we talk about today?

RM: No.

LD: No, that was an actual store.

RM: Yes. A grocery store, and I don't know, but all the people got used to trading there.

LD: How often would you go to the store for your mom?

RM: Well, sometimes, twice, or every 15 days, we used to, they used to get paid. But, I go before a couple times.

LD: Did the store extend credit?

RM: Yes, they give us credit. Then after we pay, they give us, the people a cigar, because they pay all the bills.

LD: So they gave you an incentive.

RM: If you take the kids, they give you a sucker and a little candy, and well, they were pretty nice, I think, that guy.

LD: It was much more of a friendly

RM: And he was a Bohemian guy.

LD: He was Bohemian. Do you remember his name?

RM: Ah, no, not off hand, but I have to, I know his first name was Frank.

LD: Well, maybe somebody else could help me with that one. When you were in the railroad yards growing up did you have a garden there, did you have room to grow food, or...



RM: No, not in the 20's, not till, ah, not till we come back again.

LD: Then, in the 30's, you helped, then you grew some.

RM: Yeah, there was some.

LD: Well, I want to come back to that when we talk about the Depression years. What can you remember about the daily routine that your mother had, for instance, what did she do in a normal day? Did she stay at home, did she go out to, in the community and work or...

RM: No, she stayed at home, usually.

LD: How did she wash the clothes?

RM: How did what?

LD: How did she wash clothes?

RM: Oh, everything by hand. They used to have them, washers, you know them, to rub your clothes on.

LD: Oh, the washboard, right, she had a washboard. Then she would hang out...

RM: Oh, yeah, everybody had a, one of them.

LD: What can you remember about any businesses that were here in the 20's for instance, that aren't here anymore. Do you remember any in particular?

RM: Well, for instance, like the, we had different stores, Becker's was up there, on Second, Kresge's was, let's see, oh, no, next block, First Avenue.

LD: Five and ten cent store.

RM: Five and ten cents stores used to be pretty popular; we used to have two

of them stores. Kresge's and, a...

LD: Woolworth's?

RM: Woolworth's.

LD: And they are still here. What did Becker's sell?

RM: Becker's?

LD: Yes.

RM: That was on Second Street. Then they changed the name to Newman, they were stores that I, well, they changed the names now, and you can't remember.

LD: Where did you get your clothes? Did your mom sew, did you buy them at a store, do you remember anything about that?

RM: No, where ever we could find a little cheaper, why, we would look around.

LD: Were there second-hand stores at that time, or did people just trade clothes, that you can remember?

RM: Well, not on second hand, but we never did buy any second-hand stuff. There was a lot of places that would give you credit then, and well, like I had credit in pretty near all the stores here in Cedar Rapids. That's one thing I had, and I have a bunch of credit cards and I haven't used one anymore.

LD: Yeah, it is a different system now, that's for sure. When you were here as a youngster the first time, what can you remember about the things that you did for fun? Did your family do things together as a family for fun, did you go to parks, did you go to picnics, did you have...

RM: Well, yes, and when, you see, I had a truck and we would get different families and we would go swimming most of the, summer time.

LD: Where did you go?

RM: Well, there was a one--we had different places--where they would want to go, but swimming was, most of our activities for the families, and I used to have a truck and take about two families or three families at a time.

LD: So this must have been in the 30's, when you were grown.

RM: No, it was in 34, 35, after I had the children, you know.

LD: Right. Did you ever swim in the river?

RM: Yes.

LD: Did you use the river for canoeing, or fishing, or anything of that sort.

RM: No, not canoeing, but for swimming I did.

LD: What were the most important holidays, when you were growing up, in your family, do you remember what you celebrated?

RM: Well, 4th of July was, of course, we had a lot of firecrackers sold all over; and then when I was small, we used to go in on a firecracker, which we don't have anymore.

LD: So you liked the 4th of July.

RM: Well, yes, for those things.

LD: What days did your dad get off, was he, did he work six days, seven days a week?

RM: My God, in them years, they used to work six days a week. Sunday was the only day ; and now, you work in the roundhouse, they work seven days. The railroad has to go all week around.

LD: So he worked some seven day weeks then?

RM: Six days on the section.

LD: Yes, and seven in the roundhouse. Did he get a day off at Christmas time, or for the 4th of July?

RM: Oh, yes, they get a day for Christmas and Thanksgiving and something, but now they get more.

LD: Who was the boss in your household? Was your dad or your mother the disciplinarian?

RM: Well, that is a, my dad was a --make the money and my mother spent it.

LD: Well, who kept the children in line, was your mother the tougher one, or was your dad?

RM: I think both of them.

LD: Both of them, O.K. Did your family attend church here in Cedar Rapids?

RM: Church?

LD: Yes.

RM: Yes.

LD: Where did you go?

RM: We always, well, I say about 75 percent of the Mexican people are Catholic.

LD: Right, so when you were here did you go to one of the Catholic churches here in town?

RM: No.

LD: You didn't?

RM: I didn't a, really know. We went to a, there was a church on A Avenue; it still is in there...A Avenue and that would be Sixth Street.

LD: That was A Avenue and Sixth Street, and what was the name of it?

RM: Grace.

LD: Grace Episcopal, that was Episcopal, wasn't it.

RM: Yes.

LD: Now, why did you go to the Episcopal church?

RM: We didn't know any different.

LD: It was like a Catholic Church.

RM: But one priest finally told us, "I know you guys are Catholic."

LD: He said that was the wrong place, or was he welcoming you?

RM: Well, no, I didn't know how, why they, when we came back the second time from Mexico, then we went to I.C. And by that time, we even baptised our-- my sister was born here in Cedar Rapids--in that church.

LD: In Grace Episcopal?

RM: Yeah, then we had to baptise her back there in Mexico.

LD: Again.

RM: Again, right after we find out that it was not the Catholic church.

LD: Right.

RM: Well, of course, all the religions is pretty good, and over here is the only country that is fully equal for everybody. I have friends of every religion, and when they start in religious, I don't like it. Everybody should...

LD: Yeah, it is important. Do you remember being, did the church, for instance, the Episcopal church, did you just go to services, or did you have social events that you went to there or was it...

RM: No, because, at that time we didn't have a car, we lived up in the yards and then we moved to Oak Hill, so we...I don't know how we found out that it was not a Catholic. But after we come back, that was in 1928.

LD: That was when you started going to Immaculate Conception. Do you have any memories of toys that you played with when you were growing up?

RM: Toys? Well, I don't know. I never did have much. I kind of like-- growing up, like in sports, baseball used to be the main one.

LD: The big game. I would like to move into the topic of railroads now, because I figure that you have more information on that than anybody I know. I know that you came back in 1928 and you, at that time started to work for the railroad.

RM: For the railroad.

LD: So, you did not go back to school, because you would have been, let's see you would have been 18 years old then, wouldn't you?

RM: Yeah.

LD: Tell me about your first job for the railroad.

RM: On the railroad, was on the section.

LD: You were a section man. What did you do on the section?

RM: Used to put in ties and put in rails when they break, because the rails would break pretty easy.

LD: Where did you go, what, where did you work the sections?

RM: Milwaukee.

LD: You went from here to Milwaukee.

RM: Oh, no, that was the name of that railroad.

LD: Oh, you were on the Milwaukee Railroad. But how far did you travel, for instance, in a days work?

RM: It was just up the hill, see, Milwaukee is on the hill and about a block.

LD: So you didn't go all along the lines.

RM: Oh, you mean how long a...?

LD: Yeah.

RM: Well, I am going to tell you a strange thing, In that time, it used to be from the viaduct by the 16th, 16th Avenue west, over here to 13th Street, used to

be one section. And then from there, there used to be another one to Marion. And then from Marion, of course, there would be the same thing. But then they started taking up little by little; and they gave us the way from here to Marion, and we didn't travel anymore than to 16th Avenue, this way, but from there to Marion.

LD: So you just regularly repaired that section, in that area. How long were your days, your work days? Do you remember when you started and when you got off?

RM: We started--we had on different railroads, different times to start and different time for noon for dinner. Some they used to give half an hour for dinner and some an hour; it all depends how the people want it. They give to the workers--if you want a half an hour, you get to leave early. If you want a whole hour, you wait 'til five o'clock was the latest time--4:30 and five o'clock, different railroads.

LD: But then you would usually get to work about eight o'clock in the morning?

RM: Ah, from 7:00 to 8:00.

LD: Do you remember what your pay was on your first job?

RM: How much pay?

LD: Yeah.

RM: They had different job prices on all the railroads. Twenty-eight cents an hour on most of them. To start with, some made 25. Then 20--and like an extra gang--25 cents.

LD: So you would make then, at starting pay that would be 25 cents times an eight hour day, that would be \$4, it would be about \$20 to \$25 a week?



RM: That's all.

LD: That's all. When you were, by the time you left the railroad, how much did you make for a days' work, do you remember?

RM: On the railroad, when I went to work, I work on the section, probably '40 to '42, then I moved to the roundhouse.

LD: And in '42, I'm sure your hourly wage was a whole lot better than it was in...

RM: Well, from 39 to 42 cents, that was 2 cents more. Then, when I retired I used to make 75 cents.

LD: An hour.

RM: Then I went to work for Quaker Oats for 59.

RM: That wasn't a real improvement, was it?

RM: No.

LD: Were you, then you were working on the section until 1942, is that what you said, and then went to the roundhouse. What did you do in the roundhouse?

RM: In the roundhouse. Well, I was labor, I was shoveling cinders, which is hard work. Then I unload the coal; we had the coal to unload for the engines. So you had to unload the whole car.

LD: When you say you shoveled cinders, then you were really cleaning out the engines after the coal had burned?

RM: No, they had the cinder pit, what they call the cinder pit, and they come and clean the one or two engines, sometimes, and you had to shovel out them all, so they could clean more.

LD: So you were just getting rid of what they had just cleaned out of the engines.

RM: Well, what they cleaned out, but I did clean the engines, too. And the cinders. Some engines--all depends on what--if they're going to put them inside to work on it, you knock all the fire out. You have to leave so much steam, so you have enough steam to take it in the roundhouse.

LD: To take it on out.

RM: To take it in the roundhouse. Now to start a fire, start your fire, and then after you pick up the steam, you had to have so much steam to take it out. You had to be careful, that it is blocked so the engine wouldn't move either way.

LD: To have it blocked in.

RM: Oh, yes.

LD: Or else you could really get hurt.

RM: I done all that kind of work.

LD: Did you, were you still working when the diesel engines began to come in?

RM: Yes.

LD: Did you do anything with the diesels?

RM: Yes.

LD: What did you do for them?

RM: We had to, they have by the government, inspection for these, for Monday inspection--for two months--and yearly inspection you had to even--valves,

like a car, you know--you had to put new valves, and you had to put all the other--and you had to bring all the heads out, and do a lot of hard work in there, too.

LD: So the government took more of a role then in inspecting the diesels?

RM: Oh, yeah, the railroad--it was hard on the railroads.

LD: Were you a member of a labor union ever?

RM: The name of the union?

LD: Yes.

RM: Well, we called the, because we had a, we had been on the section union, and we had on the repairman, and we had on the fireman, and we had, whatever department they had a union in.

LD: So they were separate.

RM: They were all different, separate.

LD: Then you didn't have one big union, for all the people who worked for the railroad. What did the union do for you?

RM: Well, they do try to keep you in case they want to lay you off.

LD: Keep you working.

RM: Keep you working, and at that time, they was pretty good. They, especially the section, they gave you, if you die, \$300. But it was pretty good money in them years.

LD: If you died, your family would get \$300. What, well, there were other fringe

benefits too, weren't there, for working. Did you have, for instance, did you have a house, when you were working, after you came back?

RM: Well, I was afraid, because we never did have a steady job, not till, about 1950, I began to buy a house.

LD: But the railroad did not provide you with a home then.

RM: No.

LD: Did they provide you with any of your...

RM: No, I forgot to remind you later, when I come back from Mexico, they all, people was living up there, they turned them out from there, from the Health Department.

LD: Oh, so that whole area, where the boxcar families had been, the health department had made them leave.

RM: Yes, the Health Department.

LD: And the railroad never established anything else for people.

RM: No. Well, the railroad, they could do nothing--the Health Department.

LD: I was just interested because my grandfather, lived in a railroad house, he always worked for the railroad in Kentucky, and I thought perhaps they had provided houses for the people who worked.

RM: Of course, that be in a different, each state has got it different. I still remember, how they worked, like in 44 during the war, I was working in the roundhouse, and they came and asked me if I would go interpret. The United States bought a lot of Mexicans to come and work on the railroads.

LD: In the 40's.

RM: Ah, 43. Well, they sent me clear to Montana, and as this interpreter up there, then I could talk later with them. Then I went back up there, and up there sometimes, they would get sick and I would take them to the doctor. And I had to find out what's the matter with the person; then I tell the doctor.

LD: This was the state of Montana.

RM: Yes.

LD: How long were you there?

RM: We stayed all summer. All summer 'til about November, then we come back.

LD: What were the Mexicans doing, were they building railroads out there?

RM: Well, fixing railroads, they were raising the track up. In the meantime, they were putting in a lot of ties that weren't all right. But it was raise all that and put in sand, because you can see the railroad from now--- they pulled all the weeds then, why you had to keep it clean when I used to work in there. But in Montana, we used sand, weeds won't grow in sand.

LD: Just put the sand in and there...

RM: So they were putting sand all around, to raise the track up.

LD: To raise the track up. You went out there by yourself that summer, and your family stayed back here.

RM: Well, no, that was just extra, what do they call it, extra gangs, that is where I got the gandy dancers, on the extra gang.

- LD: The gandy dancers. Explain what a gandy dancer is. A lot of people don't know.
- RM: Well, when you tamp a tie, you use a lot of your foot and then, and take the south...I don't know if you've ever seen it...even the colored people, they began to sing a song and tamp a tie at the same time.
- LD: So the combination if singing and the tamping it down was kind of, it got to be called a gandy dancer.
- RM: Yeah.
- LD: Back to Cedar Rapids, then again. Did the railroad provide bonuses, at Christmas time, or do you remember any special things?
- RM: No.
- LD: No, they didn't give gifts to the employees?
- RM: Ah, no the only thing is right now. They provide a, that if you retire-- 65--and you worked 30 years, they give you so much bonus.
- LD: Was it like a pension?
- RM: Which they never had that before, but then I know that. And I know a couple guys who got the bonus.
- LD: But you wouldn't, you wouldn't have been there that long, would you?
- RM: No.
- LD: Did they ever help you with medical care, did they provide any medical care for you or insurance?

RM: No, you had to get your own insurance, which they have it up there, different insurance, they can tell you which one you want.

LD: You probably remember Union Station, pretty well, the railroad station that was on Greene Square.

RM: I've got a picture.

LD: You've got a picture of Union Station, I have one, that someone gave me too, and it was a beautiful building. What can you, were you over there very often, do you remember the busy times at Union Station?

RM: Well, they had the railroads over here, the Northwestern and the Rock Island, at what they called the Union Station--and we had four railroads in Cedar Rapids, which is a Illinois Central and Rock Island.

LD: The Illinois Central, the Rock Island, and the Northwestern.

RM: The Illinois Central, the Rock Island, the Northwestern, and the Milwaukee.

LD: And the Milwaukee, and they all came into Union Station.

RM: No.

LD: No.

RM: Northwestern and Rock Island.

LD: The Northwestern and the Rock Island came into Union Station.

RM: And Milwaukee and Illinois Central, they had another little station, that would be on First Avenue and Second Avenue and Fourth Street.

LD: I didn't realize that, so there were two stations, then, but Union was the

big one. Did all four of the train lines...

END OF SIDE ONE OF TAPE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO OF TAPE

LD: This is side two of an interview with Mr. Richard Mendoza. Mr. Mendoza, I was asking you, when we ran out of tape, about the different trains, and I think the question was, did all the trains carry passengers, all four lines?

RM: Yes.

LD: They did, and they all carried freight?

RM: Yes.

LD: Do you have any idea how many trains came through Cedar Rapids, say in the early 30's?

RM: In the early 30's, well, Rock Island had the, had about two or three, and Northwestern had even more. I don't remember yet how often, but they all come from Chicago to Omaha.

LD: Were there express trains?

RM: Ah, well, passengers--express would come with passengers.

LD: With the passengers, and did some of them go all the way out to the west coast in those days?

RM: Yeah, when, from Omaha, they would go to the west. The other way Milwaukee goes to, from Omaha to Chicago, and then to Chicago it goes to the west coast.



LD: Or the east coast. The west coast, they didn't go back west.

RM: West, they would...go up to Montana.

LD: Oh, that is how you ended up in Montana.

RM: That's how I got to Montana.

LD: Did you have a favorite train, or a favorite engine, that would, one that you would ever set your time by on your watch, when it came through, or anything like that?

RM: No, they were, most of them were sometimes late you know.

LD: So they weren't all right on time.

RM: They were not all on time, but they were all the same day, right the same.

LD: Did most of the men you worked with, work on the tracks, not in or around Union Station, I am presuming, so you...

RM: No.

LD: Did you know people who worked over at the Union Station?

RM: Well, yes, I'll be pointing out people that used to work, and they tell me how I used to do this, and say well yes. And like I have a neighbor that I didn't know till the other day that he used to work for Rock Island, on the Union Station.

LD: At the station.

RM: Yeah.

LD: Did they take tickets?

RM: Well, even in the station, there are different jobs. There would be, Rock Island had to have one guy to inspect, what we would call boxes. So you had to have oil in them, in them oil boxes for the bearings or anything that turned on your wheels.

LD: And they would check that always as you came in.

RM: Yeah, had to check, and they would touch it to see if it was hot. They put oil on them.

LD: What other kinds of jobs were there, there around the station?

RM: Well, at that time most of them were, they had to have the guy that would take all your mail out of the mail boxes, and, of course, the section used to send section guys to unload some coal for, to heat, in wintertime.

LD: Well, now, that would be at the station, to heat the station.

RM: Yeah, and like the Union Station has two waters, one on each side. One for Northwestern and one for...

LD: Big water tanks?

RM: Down in the basement, they unload the coal, and then the boiler was up there, too. I suppose they had to have a boiler guy that would take care of the water.

LD: So the station then, there were people that worked over there that weren't just working inside, involved with the tickets and the trains actually got some service there at the station, before they went onto the yard. I guess a lot of them didn't even stop, they stopped and let passengers off.

RM: That's all. They never stopped.

LD: They would check them and go right on. What was good about working on the railroad all your life, what are your favorite memories about working on the railroad?

RM: My favorite memories?

LD: Do you have any?

RM: Well, I don't have no favorite, cause it was hard work and especially in the summertime, when it is real hot and it is real hard work putting in ties and pitching rails.

LD: So it really is a wearing occupation.

RM: I don't know if you ever noticed, that the guys pushed and pumped those handcars?

LD: Yeah.

RM: Why I run one of them too.

LD: You did that too.

RM: Oh, why yes.

LD: Is that pretty hard work.

RM: Well, it was ...

LD: Now they have motors on them, don't they?

RM: No, not then.

LD: Now a days, yeah.

RM: But they, yeah, after 35, everybody had a motor car.

LD: Do you, looking back, I guess it is always hard to say what you would do differently, but if you had had a choice would you have done something else, rather than work for the railroad?

RM: Oh, yes, I would rather.

LD: Because it is so hard, physically. Do you have any memories of railroad accidents?

RM: Accidents?

LD: Yeah, crashes or workers that were hurt when you were there?

RM: No, not, I don't think I have any.

LD: Nothing really exciting.

RM: Nothing exciting, but we went to Marion one day of a wreck or something, and we had to go up there and fix the rails and put everything in line. The train could easy go off the rails and then we had to put a lot of ties and anything underneath to put them back on the railroad.

LD: How did you ever get oneback up on the railroad?

RM: Well, they have a slide made out of iron, kind of like to go up, like a wedge.

LD: A wedge that would get it back up, upright. I'll be darned, I've never seen that. I just wondered how they would ever do that. Do you have any other stories or anything else you would like to say about the railroads and about

your life and working on the railroad?

RM: No, all I can say is it provided me with my living, and I was glad of it.

LD: It was very steady work in those days.

RM: Yeah.

LD: How often were you paid?

RM: The railroad used to pay twice a month.

LD: Just like when your dad worked on it, then.

RM: Yeah. They never changed it, twice a month.

LD: Did they pay in cash?

RM: A check.

LD: Let's go on then and there are a couple of things I wanted to ask you about that are secondary, but more importantly, I wanted to ask you what it was like to be, you were married in 1930, right?

RM: I got married in 1930.

LD: Did you marry an American or did you marry a Mexican?

RM: A Mexican.

LD: Was she someone who had come here to work with, her family had come here to work for the railroads?

RM: Yes, they came, oh, I think, about a year before us.

LD: Before you had come. That would be 27?

RM: Yeah, 27.

LD: Did she speak English?

RM: Now, yes, I have been taking her all over, we've been, like we used to play music, or play at different places and we always used to take her with us.

LD: And she learned. Is she about the same age as you?

RM: Is she what?

LD: Is she the same age as you?

RM: I thought I told you, I'm six years older than her.

LD: You're six years older than her, oh, you just robbed the cradle.

RM: Well, I was 21 when I married her, how was she?

LD: She would have been 15, right?

RM: I'm six years older and I was 21.

LD: Oh, how old is she now, oh, gee, let me think. She's six years younger than you are, and you were born in 1909, so that means you're ...

RM: She was born in 1915.

LD: You're 75. So she is about 69, right? I'm not real good at math. Did you, have you, did you become an American citizen?

RM: No.

LD: You are not an American citizen. Has your wife become a citizen?

RM: No.

LD: How about your children, they're automatically, aren't they?

RM: I'm going to tell you now, yes, because you hear me talking, you can hear these guys, I like to be an American. But I never, I used to work a lot of overtime. I want to do all the work I can, and I never had a chance. And I have been learning the English, and I want to try to see if it's possible. I'm pretty old, but...

LD: You would still be interested?

RM: Oh, yeah.

LD: So you just never really had time to, the leisure to take the time to do that.

RM: And before that, I even sent, in '49 I sent for some papers from immigration and they sent them to me. All I had to look for are some, send back some pictures, and well, I looked all over, and I did find where to get some, but planned that I'll get them tomorrow, and I never got them.

LD: So, you never did do it?

RM: No, I never did.

LD: So, you needed some copies of records, or...

RM: Yes, or something.

LD: Well, it is still not too late.

RM: No, I have my home over here, I own a place, and even now, another place up at the cemetery, so...

LD: So you are ready.

RM: I'm ready to stay over here.

LD: Now, when you came, this is--I'm shifting back, but I had forgotten to ask you about this, when you came to Cedar Rapids, with your family, in the 20's and stayed--was there any difficulty, did you have to have a visa, did you have a limited, temporary visa, or did you just have...

RM: Not the first time, but the second time, my dad, felt that we were going to stay over here, so we got the regular passport, and which, you're making a living, it cost \$8 a piece.

LD: \$80.

RM: \$8.

LD: \$8, O.K. and that gave you the right to stay here as long as you wanted to.

RM: Yeah.

LD: Because these days, I know there are all kinds of concerns about legal and illegal immigration, and all of that.

RM: Yes.

LD: But it was more open at that time. Well, I'm figuring then that you were married about the time that economic situation got really bad, with the Depression coming here in the 30's.



RM: Oh, yeah.

LD: How did that affect you and your new wife, in those days. Where did you, did it affect your job at all?

RM: Oh, yes.

LD: What happened to your job?

RM: Well, of course, we never, I never did, they don't hire you for full-time, like I said. And they got so many regular jobs, that work all year around, and every time they need a new job, they would hire more guys for two or three months, and then they would lay them off, and that is the way we used to do it.

LD: So, you were, were you laid off then?

RM: Yeah.

LD: How often did that happen?

RM: Oh, there were a lot of times that I got laid off, and I barely made it. Oh, but, then I had a truck, and I started working with the truck and started helping with the truck.

LD: What did you do then, in the times that you were laid off, what did you do with the truck?

RM: Well, what the railroad used to take a lot of ties, all the Mexicans used to get all them ties and we used to saw them into blocks, for wintertime. And allsummer I would haul a whole lot of ties, and in the spring, I would haul a lot of cinders; everybody had to buy a lot of cinders up there.

so what I used to do, I used to find a lot of people, who would want to buy cinders. Like in them years, they didn't use to have, like they have now; you have got your driveway nice and --well, if you put cinders on it. So a lot of driveways there were cinders, and cinders won't grow grass or nothing, but it still ...

LD: But instead of concrete, they put cinders down.

RM: Yeah, and a lot of people would buy them, so I get about a dollar for a big pile, and I get another dollar for traveling; that's the way it used to be.

LD: And that kind of helped to carry you over in the times when you didn't have a job, or when you weren't working for the railroad.

RM: Yeah.

LD: Where did you live in those days?

RM: In those days, I stayed northeast, mostly on B Avenue and C Avenue.

LD: Was it an apartment or was it a house?

RM: Well, about a house, there used to be a lot of houses in there. That's where the new road, 380 went through, went through there.

LD: 280, O.K., but, you rented a house then at that time, did your family start coming in the 30's? Did you start to have children then?

RM: What was that?

LD: Did you begin to have children, you and your wife during that time?

RM: Oh, yeah.

LD: Where did you go to, did you go to one of the local hospitals, or were the children born right there in the home?

RM: My children, I have one girl that was born at home.

LD: One was born at home, was that the oldest one?

RM: Yeah, the oldest one.

LD: Then the others were born then at...

RM: In the hospital.

LD: Where did you go, Mercy or St. Luke's.

RM: I think Mercy.

LD: Mercy Hospital.

RM: Mostly at St. Luke's, one boy was born in--let me remember this--to tell you the truth, the boy was born in St. Luke's, but the other one, I wasn't here, and I can't remember where he was born.

LD: You weren't here.

RM: That was the time I went to Montana.

LD: Oh, O.K. that was in the 40's.

RM: Yeah.

LD: The children that you lost, did they die during child birth? You said you had two children that did not survive, did they die during child birth?

RM: Yeah.

LD: Was that during the 30's?

RM: That was in 34 and 37.

LD: That was in the hospital, both of those times?

RM: Yeah.

LD: Do you remember how long your wife stayed in the hospital during those births?

RM: No.

LD: But that has changed a lot.

RM: Yeah, they used to stay longer.

LD: Did you have any other members that were living with you at that time? Were your parents living with you or were her parents, or were you just the two of you?

RM: When they died, I was living with my dad when dad died. When the two boys were born in the 40's we were living together, alone.

LD: Just the two of you. So your dad was living with you for awhile, then and your mother must not have....

RM: My mother died in 43.

LD: Was she living with you then, up until that time?

RM: No.

LD: Do you remember when the banks closed in 1933? When all the banks in town

closed?

RM: Yeah, I remember.

LD: Did that affect you, did you lose money in that time?

RM: I did have any money so, I didn't lose any money.

LD: It was no problem for you.

RM: No problem for me.

LD: Well, a lot of people around here remember that very much, because they did lose money from the banks.

RM: Oh, yeah.

LD: How did the Depression affect the people you knew around you? Were there people who were really seriously in need that could not find work? Did everybody find enough work to get along?

RM: Well, it was hard, like I tell you I had a truck and I used to work a lot, and well the county used to help us. One lady she told us, "Why don't you guys go back to Mexico."

LD: Oh, really?

RM: Yeah.

LD: This was one of the county workers? Welfare, was that a social welfare?

RM: Welfare.

LD: She thought you should return to Mexico.

RM: Well, yeah. Well, I said 'You send me'--there was a lot of serious--they'd send away, if they had a car, they gave them the gas.

LD: To send them back.

RM: To send them back, a lot of people went back.

LD: Do you think they were doing that just because of hostility, was it a sense of you should be here because you were not an American, or was it an attempt to help you?

RM: Well, I don't know, but in a way it was a help, a lot of people wanted to go back. They help them.

LD: Did you want to go back?

RM: Well, yes, and I had a truck and I had a lot of stuff, but they won't send me with a truck, they send me by train.

LD: Oh, you would have had to of left your truck.

RM: And leave my truck, but I say no. Say I can do better over here with the truck.

LD: Do you remember much about when Franklin Roosevelt started the WPA and the Federal work projects, were you able to work on any of those?

RM: Yeah, I started putting in, over here they had, what they used to call WPA?

LD: Yes.

RM: That was different jobs, we used to work for so many days, and they used to script, no money, it was script.

LD: Script?

RM: You take that and put it on groceries.

LD: Oh, then you could take that in and trade it in for groceries. Where did you work for them, do you remember? Were there parks that you worked in?

RM: Well, there were, you've seen the old Ellis Park?

LD: Yeah.

RM: We cut all them, make all that road, where Ellis Park used to go so far. But then the road, we cut that, and out there on the other side of the river, on the west side, there was another park--different job--that goes around the river.

LD: Jones Park maybe, or Thomas, or yeah.

RM: And there were a lot of streets over here, but I work up there, see, on that road, we make all that road.

LD: How did you make the roads in those days, were those just cinder roads or were they...

RM: There was a kind of a hill, and we just dump by hand from a wheelbarrow, dump all down, down, until there was so much--of course, they had engineers to measure it.

LD: So your job was just primarily to carry things in the wheelbarrow.

RM: And I was pretty good with a wheelbarrow.

LD: What did you put down for the roads, was it rock or cinders?

RM: We would cut it and I would put it down.

LD: You would cut it and put it down, so you were really cutting it by hand. Were there quarries nearby that you worked from, or where did you get the rock?

RM: Out of the same, like a hill.

LD: Oh, from the side of that hill.

RM: See, I cut it out and bring it down.

LD: That is almsot as bad as working for the railroads, isn't it?

RM: Yeah, I remember, and there were a lot of jobs over here in town, different jobs in the streets. When they were trying to fix the mud...

LD: Yeah, there was a lot of street building going on in those days. Do you remember the Seedling Mile that was built out, apparently the first mile of concrete that was built in Iowa, was built near here. That would have been between Cedar Rapids and Mount Vernon, I think, you weren't involved in that?

RM: No, we, but we went to work over here in Toddville. There is a bridge over there that we started building.

LD: You built a bridge, was this when you were working for the roads, on the roads?

RM: WPA.

LD: Did your wife have to, did she work during those days?



RM: No, she never did work.

LD: She was home with the children. Shifting to something that is a little more pleasant, or I think it would be, what are your memories then, of the trollies here in Cedar Rapids, were they running, did you use them much when you were growing up here, or in your early...

RM: All I can tell you, that we used to--the tokens they used to sell in there--they cost, they used to cost 7 cents, in them days, in the 20's, and you get four tokens for a quarter.

LD: Did you travel on them much?

RM: Yes.

LD: Where would you go?

RM: Town from Oak Hill, from Tyler school.

LD: Over to downtown.

RM: Yeah, but see, they gave me money for that, but I used to save it for something else. I was young kid, I was, I didn't want to spend the money on that.

LD: So you would walk instead.

RM: I would walk.

LD: Yeah, save your money. Did you ride the Crandic Line? Do you have memories of the Crandic that went between here and Iowa City.

RM: There was one to Iowa City and one went to Waterloo.

LD: Oh, that's right there was one that went to Waterloo, wasn't there?

RM: I don't know if it went to Waterloo or Cedar Falls, but they went that way.

LD: That is where they are putting that new nature trail now, is where that train bed used to go, isn't it?

RM: Yeah, we rode that, we used to work in the stone quarry. That was in, I guess 31 or 32.

LD: Stone quarry?

RM: Stone quarry over here between here and Waterloo, the other side of Vinton.

LD: Did you, was that when you were working with the railroad, that you would go up to the stone quarry?

RM: Well, that was the Crandic.

LD: You were working on the Crandic Line?

RM: No, I never work on the Crandic, in that stone quarry.

LD: O.K. you were working in the stone quarry.

RM: Yeah.

LD: Did you take the line to get to it or you had a pass, right?

RM: Sometimes, or sometimes, someone had a car and we gave them gas and helped them out. And we used to come every weekend home, but we work all the, we used to work twelve hours a day.

LD: Twelve hours a day, sun up till sun down, then.

RM: Yeah.

- LD: And then you would stay there and just come home on the weekends?
- RM: Yeah, they had little tents and they had the boxcars and different, but they had, it was a big stone quarry.
- LD: Were you cutting rock for the railroad beds then?
- RM: No.
- LD: What happened to the rock you cut there?
- RM: Crushed rock, well that goes for every place.
- LD: It went out to the roads and things of that sort, so that was not a railroad job, that was separate.
- RM: Oh, no. In fact, I was talking to a guy that, that he used to, if he was still living, owned that, Crawford.
- LD: Oh, yes, Mr. Crawford, yeah, well we were talking about that the other day, that he had, William Crawford, had been the head of King Crown Concrete.
- RM: Yeah.
- LD: Or King Crown Plaster, you worked for him?
- RM: Yeah, but that was his stone quarry, and well, I think, in 41, went out to, they went to dinner, and came back and found a flood.
- LD: Oh, they went to dinner and left the quarry and it flooded; it must have been an underground spring or something.
- RM: They don't know what, where the water come from, they don't know.
- LD: Was that the end of the quarry, did they pump it out?

RM: Yeah.

LD: Speaking of flooding, and this is a little off the subject, but we are talking about the river earlier, do you remember any flooding on the Cedar River, when you were here.

RM: On the Cedar River?

LD: Yeah.

RM: Two of them.

LD: You remember the flood then in, there was one in the 20's wasn't there?

RM: 29.

LD: That one got right up into the southwest side of town, didn't it?

RM: Well, I don't know how far they got, but we were, that was in 29, we were living up there.

LD: You were on the northeast side then.

RM: Yeah, we were on the boxcars then.

LD: Oh, you were still on the boxcars, well, I didn't think...

RM: Well, we could see the water in there.

LD: How did it affect you then, what happened to you?

RM: Wait a minute, no, we were living on C Avenue.

LD: O.K., I thought you had come back and, but were the boxcars all flooded out then during that?

RM: No.

LD: They were high enough.

RM: It was just a little bit of water.

LD: So your memories are just of seeing it, you weren't affected by the flood.

RM: No, and we had another one in, when, when I was working on the Quaker Oats.

LD: That late. There was another flood?

RM: Yeah, another flood.

LD: Oh, I thought they had it all dredged out by then.

RM: No, they had the sign, where the flood end in '29, and that one came pretty close.

LD: I didn't realize there had been any that recently. When you were here then, in the 30's, we were talking eariler, before we turned the tape recorder on, about the way that you got the news and the way that you heard what was happening, and you were telling a story about listening to the ballgame off of a ticker-tape from the Gazette.

RM: From the Gazette.

LD: Yes, can you tell about that again.

RM: There was, the other side of the--we were on the other side, there was more shade there--on the library.

LD: Over on the library lawn?

RM: Yeah, but then, they had these balconies out there on Third and it would be Fifth Street, and they had two balconies in there, the kind of balcony, I don't know if you will remember it.

LD: No.

RM: I don't know when they took them out, to tell you the truth, but a guy came up and tell us about every round. Or if there was, he would tell us about the fight or the ballgame. He tells us what they were doing in this round. They were receiving a tape recorder.

LD: So one of the workers then would come out.

RM: Yeah, and tell.

LD: Tell you what was happening.

RM: Yes, tell us all that happened. Well, on this inning, this guy hit this and they got them, so we were just all over there, yes.

LD: How many people would come listen to this?

RM: Oh, there was quite a few, that would come to listen to it.

LD: Would this just be on a summer afternoon?

RM: Then like I said, we had two papers over here in the early 20's. We had the Republican and the Gazette. Then the Gazette bought the Republican.

LD: Oh, they bought them out.

RM: That's what I heard, I don't know.

LD: Did you take a paper; did you take the Gazette?

RM: Right now, yes.

LD: But not then.

RM: No.

LD: Did you have a radio, in the 20's or 30's.

RM: In the 20's, you know, everybody can go to dime store and fix, what they used to call a crystal radio, I don't know if you have heard of them.

LD: I've heard of them, Crystal Sets, yeah.

RM: For \$4 or \$5 you can fix a little radio.

LD: Did you have one?

RM: No.

LD: But you had seen, you saw those.

RM: I seen them, yeah.

LD: Did you, after you were married in the 30's, did you have a radio, that you could listen to the events on?

RM: Yes, we had a radio in the, and I was listening to a lot of Mexican programs, from, clear from Mexico.

LD: You could hear them in Cedar Rapids, wow. I guess in those days, there weren't as many things cluttering up the waves, and you could probably get...

RM: You can get them now, if you are trying to work enough and you know where to get them.

LD: Yeah.

RM: But nobody ever gets them.

LD: We also talked about the fact that there were live boxing events, here in Cedar Rapids or was it in Marion, in the 30's, that you attended?

RM: We used to have two boxers, if you have to have, kind of local boxers to win the people, and we had two boxers over here that were pretty good, and that one became...

LD: This was in the 30's?

RM: Yeah.

LD: Do you remember their names?

RM: Well, we called one Joe Rivers, Johnny Fulton.

LD: Joe Rivers?

RM: Yeah, but that was not his real name, that was his fighting name, Johnny (Lopez) knows his real name.

LD: Did you go up to one of the parks to see them fight?

RM: I wish I was an athlete, I like to do that.

LD: You would like to do that.

RM: In fact, right now, I ain't got no car, I would have went to, we can go to all these high schools for nothing.

LD: Oh, that is right, senior citizens can, can't they.



RM: I used to have a friend, that used to take me, but now, he would rather watch it on TV and I think, well, he is doing wrong, because TV is getting him down.

LD: Yeah, you just sit there. The other thing that we were talking about briefly, were telephones. Did you have a telephone in the 30's? When you first set up housekeeping?

RM: No.

LD: You didn't.

RM: Not till, about 40, close to 50.

LD: Then how did you, if you wanted to talk to somebody, how did you do it?

RM: Well, we had to find, we had some, well, I had a sister, and sometimes we would go and talk to her, or sister-in-law, she had a phone.

LD: And you would go use the phone or else just visit.

RM: Yeah. Till the wife got sick and then we had to have a phone.

LD: When your wife became sick.

RM: Yeah.

LD: You kept it in then for medical reasons, to call the doctor and that.

RM: Yeah, but then we got a two-party line and that was pretty hard, because sometimes they, then finally we got a private, and up till now.

LD: When I was growing up, we had an eight-party line, boy do I remember that. What can you remember about the amusement movie houses, here in Cedar Rapids

in the 30's, did you often go to the movies?

RM: Well, yes, in the 30's, well, like we said, we heard the first, and I saw the first all-talkies.

LD: You saw the first talking movie here?

RM: In 29.

LD: Do you remember the name of the movie?

RM: Ah, "Father Knows Best."

LD: Where was that, which movie house?

RM: Well, in that time it was the "Capital," and right now it is the "Paramount."

LD: Oh, it is now the "Paramount." I didn't know that. Did you have favorite stars?

RM: No, and....I can agree with, a lot of people that were our favorites, they lost their, because they can't talk very good over the mic.

LD: Oh, the people that you like in the silent movies, they didn't sound very good. Did you go to vaudeville? During the 30's?

RM: Oh, yeah, I used to love them.

LD: Where did you go, where were the vaudevilles.

RM: The Majestic.

LD: Can you describe, how long would you stay, and how many shows would there be when you went?

RM: I used to go to two shows, and I used to spend 25 cents a week. I go to two shows and buy an ice cream cone, a big ice cream cone.

LD: And you could do that for 25 cents?

RM: All for 25 cents.

LD: Now when would that have been, would that have been in the late 20's?

RM: Yes, around there.

LD: Did you go to vaudeville much after you were married?

RM: Well, no not much, because they didn't have very many after that, but still they had, they had some at the Paramount and some at the Iowa.

LD: So when did they go out, was it in the 30's then, that the vaudeville kind of stopped coming through?

RM: By golly, I don't remember that, but I used to love the vaudeville.

LD: When you were married and here in the 30's when, what did you do to go out and have a good time?

RM: What did I do?

LD: Did you and your wife go out and do things together?

RM: Yeah. Well, then, not till 34, we start playing and going to the taverns and play.

LD: That's what I wanted to ask you about, and I have managed to let us get so far into the afternoon, without doing that, tell about your musical career.

RM: Well, we enjoy the--that was in the early 30's and Johnny and me, we got to start in music, trying to play. We had two instruments, we had a guitar and a mandolin. Sometimes we would change off.

LD: You both played both instruments.

RM: Yeah, both of them. So we change, and we get tired of the music, we played checkers. We get tired of checkers, we play chess.

LD: You mean you would go to the taverns and you would take your instruments...

RM: No, not until we learned the music.

LD: Oh, this is when you were just learning.

RM: Then in 34, we knew already when they start coming in. We didn't start playing, I think until, 36, 37 around there.

LD: Then you would play and be paid for going to--where would you go?

RM: We play over here in one tavern, that will be on A Avenue and First Street, it is right on the corner.

LD: Do you remember the name of it?

RM: Oh, they changed the name since, I can't remember. We, then when we play one year.

LD: You played a whole year there?

RM: Yeah, everyday, except on Sunday, that wasn't open on Sunday.

LD: Would you go in during the evening and play, after you had worked?

RM: At night, yeah.

LD: You work all day and then you would go, how late did you stay?

RM: Just twelve o'clock.

LD: My gosh, that is really a long day. What did they pay you for that?

RM: Give us one dollar apiece.

LD: One dollar, per night. Well, that is not so bad. Did you have a favorite bar or a favorite tavern here in the 30's?

RM: No, all the beer tastes the same.

LD: Well, at least you could get beer in those days, right. Do you have any memories of during the Prohibition years, how people managed to get a drink if they wanted one?

RM: Oh, yeah, we used to make our own beer.

LD: You used to make your own beer, your family did?

RM: Well, yes, all the families.

LD: And did you just have a, how did you do that? Did you have a bucket that you brewed it in or...

RM: One of them crocks, they were all the way from ten gallons, you know. They were a lot bigger and it all depends on what you want, but the regular size I can't even remember. Anyway, you make one, and they take a can of syrup. They already had what you put in there, how many pounds of sugar.

LD: So you put in sugar, you would put in, what was the syrup?

RM: Then your hops and ...

LD: Where did you get the hops?

RM: Well, in that can, I said.

LD: It came in a can, and you could just buy that here in Cedar Rapids?

RM: Well, they had, all the stores had them.

LD: So you could buy all the ingredients to make your own beer?

RM: Oh, yeah, the stores they have them all.

LD: You just couldn't go out and buy beer, but you could buy the ingredients and make your own?

RM: That's right.

LD: And everybody did that?

RM: And we had to bottle and...

LD: Wait a minute, how long did it take for it to brew?

RM: To brew, well, they got so much time to ferment, you have to put yeast on it. Well, I think so many hours, so you leave that thing, that crock.

LD: O.K., real quickly, I got to find out about this beer now.

RM: They got so much time to do that, then you have to bottle. About three days after you bottle, you had to ferment that too, and then you can.

LD: After about, you put it in the bottles and then after about three days, you could drink it.

RM: Yeah.

LD: I didn't realize that that was how people managed to get along, that's great. I know that there are a million things that I haven't covered with you, and I may just have to think about some of them and come back again, but just to sum up for now, if you had to compare the Cedar Rapids that you lived in here in the 30's and the Cedar Rapids that you live in today, here, how would you compare the two?

RM: How would I compare the two? Well, you know when I came over here we used to go buy, it would be \$15, you never eat all the stuff, and we used to spend \$15 to buy food, groceries for 15 days. Right now, you can't buy that. How much money you can spend to buy food for 15 days?

LD: It would take almost, close to \$100.

RM: Now we talk about everything, yeah, how we got everything, we got phones, we never used to have a phone, but we never, you never used to, why you don't miss them. Right now, you need everything, you miss it.

LD: Things are more complicated today, aren't they.

RM: Yeah, more complicated, now all I miss right now is our car.

LD: Are the things that you miss, that are different in Cedar Rapids today, than they used to be?

RM: Well, all I said, I made a lot of friends of every age. I don't care, and we are in a country where we are all equal, and don't make any difference if you are Catholic, so we're happy we are here, but not all the countries are the same.

LD: That's is for sure. So, you are glad you stayed here then?

RM: Oh, yes. Today, I have my home and my home in the cemetery.

LD: Right. Well, I sure hope that, if you the desire...

RM: That I go up there?

LD: No, no, I don't want you to go there for a long time, but I hope you have the opportunity to do what you want to do with the rest of your days, sounds to me like you have worked awafully hard.

RM: Well, I am pretty happy, and I'm pretty happy.

END OF SIDE TWO - END OF INTERVIEW