

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH CLARENCE F. DUNN

CONDUCTED BY

BARBARA McCUSKEY

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Cedar Rapids, Iowa

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Clarence Dunn was born 12-11-05 in Dexter, Iowa, to Marion W. and Florence May Dunn. He spent most of his life in Cedar Rapids and Dexter. During his adult years in Dexter when he worked for the railroad as a "gandy-dancer" (section man) 1930-1932, he was involved with the Brotherhood of Maintenance Way Employees Union. When he resumed work for the Cedar Rapids Engineering Company in Cedar Rapids, he was involved with the formation of their machinists union--talks beginning in November, 1933. During this interview, Mr. Dunn also discusses his duties on the rationing board during World War II and some of the viewpoints held by people during the time of Presidents Hoover, Roosevelt and Truman.

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1--When were you born? Where?
- 20,26--How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
- 1--What are your parents' names?
- 5,9-11--Where did you go to school?
- 20,22--Are you married or single?
- 2,60--Did you raise a family? How big?
- 14-16,20--What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

- 1. Transportation
 - 13,14,30--Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
 - 2,14,42,51--Trolleys (the Interurban)
 - Horses and First Automobiles
 - Mud roads and the seedling mile
 - Hunter Airport and the first planes
 - Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- Newspapers
- 24,45,59--Radios
 - Advertising
 - Telephones
- 61--Television

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

- 26,57--Motion Pictures
- 24--Cedar Rapids Parks
 - Dances
 - Carnival Week
 - Chautauqua
 - Community Theater
 - Little Gallery
 - Symphony Orchestra
 - Circus
- 56--Greene's Opera House as skaterink
 - Amusement Parks (Alamo)
 - Camps
 - Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)
- 57-58--Sanger Bunder
- 2. Famous Characters
 - 54 --Cherry Sisters
 - 54,55-56 --Grant Wood
 - Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
 - Marvin Cone

54-55--Brucemore & Howard Hall

The Sunshine Mission

21--Daddy Ward, Mother Smith

35-37,52-53--Pres. Franklin Roosevelt

53-54--Pres. Harry Truman

36,54--Pres. Herbert Hoover

3. Lifestyle 42-43,61
 - 59-60 --Life before air conditioning
 - 4-5 --Winter Activities
 - Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
 - Clothing
 - Toys
 - Saloons/Taverns
 - 2,3--Farm Life
 4. Family Life
 - Household Help
 - Women's Roles
 - 4,5 --Childrens' Activities/Behavior
 - 58,59,60 --Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)
 5. Ethnic/Minority Life
 - 8,57-58--Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
 - Indians
 - Segregation of Blacks
 - Jobs Available
- C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community
1. Education 6, 10
 - Cedar Rapids Schools
 - Coe College
 - Mount Mercy College
 - Cornell College
 - 10-12--Univ. of Iowa
 2. Government
 - City Services
 - Streets/Roads
 - Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)
 3. Medical 61
 - Hospitals
 - Patient-Doctor Relationship
 - Broken Bones
 - Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
 - House Calls
 - 2-3 --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)
- Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
- Farmers Market
- Mills on Cedar River
- Buildings Erected

30-31,15 --Manual Labor/Types of Jobs

17-20,31-35,38-40, 48---Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

5. Attitudes/Values

- 6 --Children/Discipline
- Sex/Petting
- Charity
- Divorce
- Work

46-49 --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)
- Bank Closings (1933)
- Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
- Public Library Murder(1921)

2. National Historic Events

- Womens' Suffrage

7-8--World War I

12,22,25--Roaring 20's

23-25--Prohibition

40,2-3,20,28-29,30,36,--Great Depression

45-46,49-50--WWII

50-52--Rationing during WWII

Interview with Clarence F. Dunn
Date of Interview: June 4, 1985 at his home
Interviewer: Barbara McCuskey
Transcriber: Leslie Onthank

BM: My name is Barbara McCuskey. I'm doing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Clarence F. Dunn. The date is June 4, 1985, and I'm interviewing him at his home. Mr. Dunn, would you tell us the date of your birth?

CD: December 11, 1905.

BM: 1905. Very good. And where were you born?

CD: Dexter, Iowa, west of Des Moines.

BM: Tell me a little bit about your parents. Tell me where they came from and how they came to be in Dexter.

CD: My parents' names were Marion W. Dunn and Florence May Dunn. They were married in Ohio, apparently around Zanesville, Ohio, in the eastern part of Ohio. They came west to the western part of Illinois in a covered wagon and from there they went to Yankton, South Dakota, where my oldest brother was born. And they stayed up there until about the time that my youngest brother was born in 1898 and they came to Dexter, Iowa, where I was born.

BM: Do you happen to remember why they came to Dexter? Do you remember what the reason was?

CD: Well, my father--or rather my mother had some relatives living around Dexter that they farmed in that territory and I presume that was the reason why they settled there.

BM: That's pretty rich countryside around there.

CD: Very rich.

BM: Tell me about their farm and how they did.

CD: The farms were usually up to about 320 acres or maybe average about 320, something like that. Maybe smaller. But it was very rich land and they, of course, at that time we didn't have soybeans, but the main crop was corn and alfalfa.

BM: Did they have any animals?

CD: And clover, rather.

BM: Oh! Did they have any animals? Did they have cattle and pigs?

CD: Yes. Nearly every farm had, oh, cattle and sheep and horses. Horses was the main way of getting around and doing work and nearly every farm had lots of chickens. You don't see that on the farms any more.

BM: Okay. Now, you were born on the farm. Were you born at the house?

CD: No, I was born in town.

BM: Oh, you were born in town. Did they have a house in town then?

CD: Yes. We lived on the edge of town and one interesting part of that, of course, it came later but you probably won't want that right now.

BM: Sure.

CD: Well, during The Depression I had to leave and go out to my home town for my health and so I got a job on the railroad and my oldest daughter was born there at that time and she was born in the same room that I was born in. And one oddity of it, why, we didn't have much money at

that time during The Depression and I paid for my daughter's delivery with a cord of wood. (Laughter)

BM: That's wonderful. Did you bring that up with her later and tell her what she was worth? (Laughter)

CD: Yes, we had quite a lot of fun about that.

BM: That's wonderful.

CD: And at the same time, why, I had worked for a week on a farm and in wages they paid me with a 300 pound hog and we butchered that hog on the day she was born and my wife got quite sick because she ate some fresh pork, which she shouldn't have done.

BM: Okay, so when you were a boy you lived in town but your father farmed?

CD: No. He worked on farms but he didn't farm as such out in the. . . he didn't have a farm of his own but he. . .

BM: But he worked in the. . .

CD: He worked at relatives' farms.

BM: Well, that 360 acres in those days represented an awful big farm to be with the kind of machinery they had at that time.

CD: Yes. I may have been a little high on that.

BM: But still, I know that the farms were traditionally larger.

CD: Yes.

BM: How many brothers and sisters did you have when you lived in Dexter?

CD: I had five brothers and three sisters--four brothers and three sisters. I take that back. I made the fifth boy.

BM: Right. So there were eight of you. Eight children.

CD: Yes.

BM: What kinds of chores did you have around the house when you were a young boy?

CD: I had lots of work to do and I hated every bit of it. (Laughter) During the summer, my father was the caretaker of the cemetery and I had to mow the cemetery practically all summer long and help dig graves and things like that. In the wintertime, of course, still in the summertime we had a truck garden and I sold produce around the small town of Dexter from my little wagon. And then in the wintertime, why, we cut wood, cord wood, for. . . oh, we cut several acres of wood out on the Coon River, which is about three miles away. And then we hauled it by team in and it was my job to saw up most of this by hand. We didn't use a power saw, which we could have, but my father didn't have the money to hire one. So most of the time I sawed these logs into the proper length for cord wood and then split them afterwards. So that was one of my jobs that I hated. But I'm glad that I did now. It helped me.

BM: How was your house heated? Was it heated with wood or with. . .

CD: Yes, well, we alternated from wood and once in awhile we had some coal. But most of the time we had wood.

BM: But you had a stove rather than. . .

CD: Yes, we had a large stove that we could put about a 30 inch log in there and that would last all night long.

BM: Tell me about those cold winter mornings when you were a boy.

CD: Oh, there was very. . . in my room there wasn't any heat at all. And, of course, we had fluffy down comforters. Anyway, we would sink clear way down in. But it wasn't so bad, why, after you got in bed and got warmed up. But when you had to get up and had to come out and put the backside against the stove in order to keep from freezing. And then I had chores to do--take care of the chickens and once in awhile we would have a pig or two. But we had horses that I had to give them hay and feed. But it was cold.

BM: I know it. Tell me about the chores that your sisters did. If you were doing more traditional boy chores, what kinds of things did the girls do?

CD: Well, I don't remember too much about that because two of my sisters died earlier before I was old enough to even know them. My youngest sister, she helped my mother around the house and that's about all that I could tell you about that. But she died in 1913 and we had, both of us had diphtheria. That's a very deadly disease at that time. And the doctor thought that she might survive and they didn't think I would live. But it was just the other way around. She died and I survived.

BM: That is something that we take for granted nowadays, the toll of childhood diseases. We don't have to worry about that as much anymore. And that's a big change. Tell me where you went to school and when you started.

CD: I went to Dexter High School and I started, it must have been about 1910. And I completed. . . I graduated from Dexter High School in 1924. And then I spent two years, or a year and a half rather, down at the University of Iowa. I took an engineering course but I kind of run out of money and I had to quit. So that's as far as I got in my education.

BM: Well, I want to talk about that in a little minute but let's talk about, oh, when you were in grade school. How did you get to school? Did you walk?

CD: Yes. It wasn't very far from, oh, only about four or five blocks. We didn't mind that.

BM: And what were the classes like? I mean, what was the size of the classes and were different grades in one room together or were you with all kids of your same age? What about some of those things?

CD: We ususally had, at least those when I remember when I was in high school, I remember that our classes were approximately 15 to a class or something like that. And earlier in the earlier years in my schooling down there, I just don't remember too much about how many was in the class or not. But in high school there was probably about 15 to a class. And they was. . . we had a sports program, not that I could not and I wanted to take part in but I couldn't because I had so many chores at home that I didn't get to take part in sports except I did get out for track for one year. It was a worthwhile experience anyway.

BM: What about discipline? You know, there's so much talk right now about discipline in the schools or changes in discipline. What happened when you got in trouble, not you personally, but when a student got in trouble at school?

CD: We were sent to the principal's office and he give us a good dressing down and that was about it.

BM: That was probably enough.

CD: But it wasn't very common either, I don't think. They behaved better then, I think, then I did. I shouldn't compare but I know that they behaved real well. We, our class was just wonderful, I think, in their department so. . .

BM: So that wasn't a problem. Now you told me that you went on to college and I want to talk about that a little bit. But before I get that far, I'd like to ask you about what your memories might be about the First World War. You were a young boy but. . .

CD: Yes. I remember the papers. I don't quite recall what papers we got, I guess it was the Des Moines Register that we got in town. But I followed that since I was about 11 or 12 at the time. And I followed that where the American troops went into France and how they advanced and they. . . I was quite thrilled at the strange sounding names of the French towns and things like that. But what I remember most about the war, two things. My oldest brother was in the Navy at the time and he made seven trips across on a troop ship, the troop ship George Washington, the U.S.S. George Washington. And he made seven trips across to France in two or three different places.

BM: That's hazardous duty.

CD: Pardon.

BM: It's hazardous duty, escorting troops.

CD: It was, very much so because of the U-boats. So we was always so thankful that he got out of it safely. But the other thing I remember when the armistice was signed. They had a huge bonfire up to in the school grounds and we had roast weinies and everything, you know. I was at the height of my glory in some thing like that.

BM: You know, I have spoken with other people who have said that their strongest memories of the war is the armistice and what a day that was.

CD: Yeah.

BM: The feeling not only that the war was over but that things were settled now.

CD: Uh-huh.

BM: How long did that feeling last? I mean, there were problems in Europe immediately afterwards. I know they had some serious food problems and the devastation was so great. Were you aware of any of that as living in Iowa where we had so much plenty? What kinds of things do you remember about the stories about the problems in Europe afterwards, or do you remember any of that?

CD: About what?

BM: Well, okay. We were talking about another memory that you had right during the war and maybe afterwards. What was that?

CD: Quite often in our town, which was composed of descendants from Germany and Ireland and England and I believe that's about the main part, maybe some Scandinavians, but nevertheless during the war there was quite some discrimination practiced against some of the descendants from Germans. They had German names and consequently they thought that they were in sympathy with the Kaiser. But we all know it wasn't that but it was a sad state of affairs that some of these were discriminated against.

BM: What form did this take?

CD: I think just more or less shunning them and giving them the cold shoulder. I don't think there was any. . . there might have been a few instances of violence or something, but not too much, I don't think. But most of it was just their attitude towards those with German ancestors.

BM: Did you know of anybody that changed their name?

CD: No, I do not.

BM: Because I'm from Clinton and there are some people in my family that were German and they changed their names during the war.

CD: Yes, that could very well happen.

BM: And I knew that that had happened and I think that that's an important aspect. When your brother came back, did he have any stories about the war that you remember?

CD: Yes, he told us a lot about the terrible storms that they had in the North Atlantic and he told us on one leave that he went to in Liverpool, England, that he and the American sailors got in a riot with the English sailors and it was quite an affair.

BM: What was the cause, did he remember?

CD: Oh, well, there always a certain amount of rivalry between the two navies anyway and even today I suppose that there's certain instances like that that would be similar.

BM: Um-huh. Oh, that's great. Let's talk about. . . you said you graduated from high school in 1924. What made you decide that you wanted to go to college?

CD: Mainly because my youngest brother was a designing engineer. He took. . . he graduated from the University of Iowa in 1916 and I kind of took after him. I wanted to emulate him and so he helped me in my decision to attend the University and taking an engineering course, a general engineering course at least for the first three years and then you would specialize on the fourth year. But I didn't get that far. I was hoping to

be a civil engineer but, like I say, I kind of run out of money and I had to quite.

BM: What did your parents think of your decision to go to college? Of course, if your brother had gone ahead of you, they must have been all in favor.

CD: Oh, yes, very much so. Although my father died in 1923 so he wasn't around when I went to school. But my mother was and, of course, she was all in favor of it.

BM: Where did you get the money to go for your tuition?

CD: I borrowed it from my brothers.

BM: Did a lot of other kids from your class go on to college or do you remember?

CD: Some of them. Not as much as they do nowadays. It seems like it's a must to go to college nowadays but during that time, why, not too many of them went to school, to the university.

BM: I understand. How did you get to Iowa City from Dexter?

CD: Oh, we took the train. There was a regular Rock Island railroad runs right through Dexter and so I just go right through to Iowa City, straight through.

BM: What were your first impressions of Iowa City? Do you remember?

CD: Oh, it was scary--scary to a small town boy like me.

BM: I know. I can imagine.

CD: But I soon found some friends and everything and everything went all right.

BM: Where did you live?

CD: In Iowa City?

BM: Um-huh.

CD: I lived on South Madison Street, or let's see, in the southern part of Iowa City.

BM: Was it a house or a dorm or did you rent a room or. . .

CD: Yes, they were rented rooms. They wasn't dormitories but they was rented out to individual students.

BM: And then you'd walk back and forth to the campus?

CD: Yes.

BM: Mostly there must have been just the buildings that are right there on the Pentacrest, right? Right around the Old Capitol. Was that where the classrooms were then?

CD: Most of my classes were in the Engineering Building, which is on just south of the Capitol. But then I had two classes, I believe, up in the Field House.

BM: Oh.

CD: So I had to walk quite a little distance there to get up there. But I took ROTC training and that was one of the classes I held up there and it just seems to me like there was another one that I had to go up that far.

BM: Was the ROTC training optional or was it something that every boy did?

CD: I do not remember whether it was optional. I think it was.

BM: Um-huh. Very good. When you were in Iowa City, now this was during the Roaring '20's. (Laughter) So I'm interested if you have any stories about that. Everybody talks about prohibition and I was wondering if you have any prohibition stories? Was there any liquor around?

CD: No, not at that time. I did later when I came to Cedar Rapids.

BM: Oh, let's get on to that then in a minute. But what about in college? Was there any liquor around? Was there any at the parties or do you remember anything about that?

CD: Oh, yes. I really didn't go to very many parties. I didn't go on very many dates. I was kind of shy but I do remember one kind of amusing incident. Lots of times two or three of my buddies would cut class and we would jump out the window of the Engineering Building and go uptown and play snooker pool. (Laughter)

BM: Did any of the students have cars?

CD: Did what?

BM: Did any of the students have cars?

CD: Oh, yes, some of them did but I couldn't say to what extent. But not near like it is now.

BM: Yeah, really. How about driving, getting around in Iowa City? Did you walk mostly? Was there a bus system or. . .

CD: Walk for most of us.

BM: Very good. Now, how many years were you in Iowa City?

CD: A year and a half.

BM: A year and a half and then you decided that you. . .

CD: For three semesters.

BM: Right. And then you decided that you needed to quit. What options were open to you at that point? What did you decide that you were going to do then?

CD: Uh, that's another bad situation. Two of my buddies decided that we wanted to go to California. That's when we quit. All three of us quit at the same time.

BM: Excuse me just one second. Why did you want to go to California? Like what did you talk about that made you decide to go out there?

CD: To get a job in glamorous California, I guess. So we didn't have any mode of transportation so in the middle of the winter in January we took a freight train and went to Des Moines and we took a freight train from Des Moines to Kansas City and we rode all that way in an open boxcar in the middle of winter and it was cold. But we got out in Kansas and one of the boys had a brother living in Hutchinson so we tried to make our way there. We did miss the freight trains going in that direction. Anyway, for some reason or other, we wound up out on the prairie hitchhiking across. And so we finally made it to Hutchinson and this one boy who had a brother who lived there, he got a job in a salt mine there that he worked for the time we was there. And the other boy and I, we couldn't find work. So at the end of about two weeks we had about enough of the

way out west in Kansas, so we borrowed money from this brother of his, the one boy, and we came home in class. (Laughter)

BM: That was the end of California.

CD: But that was the end of our escapade out there, you might call it. But it was funny when the moment I stepped off the train in Cedar Rapids, there were all kinds of policemen around the old Union Station and there'd just been a robbery and they had chased the robber down to the Station, I guess, and they was pointing to two bullet holes up in the cement near the entrance to the Station. I don't know if they ever caught the man or not, but anyway that was a lasting impression on me to see the policemen pointing to the bullet holes.

BM: This is interesting. How is it that you came to Cedar Rapids? You left from Iowa City, went to Hutchinson and then came back to Cedar Rapids. Just because that's the way the train came or did you make a decision to come to Cedar Rapids?

CD: I did because my brother was living here at the time and he was a designing engineer for the Cedar Rapids Engineering Company and that's where I wanted to get a job, so I did.

BM: When you came to Cedar Rapids and you decided that you wanted to get a job with the Cedar Rapids Engineering Company, right?

CD: Yeh.

BM: How did you go about getting the job? Did you go down there and apply? Were they hiring?

CD: No, I must say that I got my job through my brother.

BM: Just like it is now. (Laughter)

CD: Yes. He spoke to the boss and the boss hired me.

BM: What did they make down there at that time?

CD: They, at that time, they had automotive repair equipment. Any equipment to repair an automobile, they had it. It was precision made machinery and it took some pretty good machinists to machine parts to the exacting precision that they needed.

BM: So in 1927 if they were making things having to do with the automotive industry, that was a pretty new industry then.

CD: Yes.

BM: Was it an expanding company down there, do you think? Was it busy? Was there a lot of work?

CD: Oh, we expanded, yes, quite a bit from the time that I started there until I left there--until I retired from there rather.

BM: What precisely did you do when you started? What was your first job there?

CD: My first job, I think, was on a drill press and they had jigs to put the part in and you would drill these holes through bushings. And one of the mistakes that I made in that trade, and I got a world of knowledge pretty soon, why I had this drill stuck in this jig and it went round and round and round and it finally let loose and hit me in the stomach.

BM: Oh, no!

CD: And another time I had a ring on my left ring finger and I got it caught in a little bushing, not a bushing but a little thumb screw that they had, and I almost tore my finger off that time.

BM: Was it a dangerous place to work?

CD: It was at that time, yes, very much so because it had an overhead line shaft that one large motor would turn the whole line shaft and there was belts running from the line shaft down to each individual machine. And nearly every one of those machines had an open belt that you could, if you had loose clothing, you could either catch your sleeve or something in the open belts and really hurt yourself. It was dangerous.

BM: Did the individual operator. . . how much control did the individual operator have over his machine? Like if it's run on a main belt then you couldn't turn it on and off, could you?

CD: You could turn it off with a wooden handle that they had, or lever, that connected with the power. You could turn it off but sometimes it would take quite a little while for it to quit. It wouldn't stop immediately and that's another place where I got. . . we had this one machine, it's a vertical milling machine, and it had an overhead pulley and there were three holes in the top of the pulley to make adjustments and everything. And this wouldn't stop when you would shut the lever or shut the machine off. It would take its time to slow down and we had a habit of putting our hands up there on that to kind of put pressure on it and slow it down. But I got my finger in there. You can see how I. . .

BM: Yes, I can.

CD: It's about a quarter of an inch shorter than the other one.

BM: Oh, my goodness!

CD: And I got it caught in the gears in there. So that's another lesson I learned in the machinist trade.

BM: Were accidents on the job pretty standard? I mean, did it happen frequently? I mean, you've just talked about three different incidents where you yourself were hurt.

CD: Oh, yes, we had quite often there were, oh, not real serious accidents but quite a few minor ones.

BM: What was the company's position on that when that would happen? Was there compensation for people who were injured or. . .

CD: We didn't get paid for time off unless it would have required hospitalization, I think, or quite serious. Otherwise we didn't get any compensation for it at all.

BM: Was your job secure during the time that you were off?

CD: No, because at that time we didn't have a union and it was quite a while after that that we organized. But that was one of the reasons why we organized because of the unsafe conditions in the shop and the wages and working conditions.

BM: I would very much like to talk about the union and how it got started and the reasons that it needed to get started. When you first came, it would have been about 1927, around in there?

CD: 1926, I think, when I started there full time.

BM: Okay. There was no union there then?

CD: No.

BM: Were other industries around Cedar Rapids unionized?

CD: No. Most of them, there may have been one or two, but I don't recall which ones they were, but. . .

BM: Do you have any opinion about why there was no union at that time because that, you know, that's about. . . a lot of the union organization in the country and in the eastern part of the country took place ten years earlier. Why do you think there was no union activity, or that much, here in Cedar Rapids?

CD: I presume the reason for that is they were more or less intimidated by the big boss. At least we were at our plant. He made the statement that he would never, never, never sign an agreement with the union.

BM: When did he make that statement and under what circumstances?

CD: Well, that was about the time that we were thinking about organizing and we approached him in regards to a contract. And that's when he made that statement. That must have been about 1933 because we started organizing in the fall of 1933.

BM: How did the talk first start about organizing? Where did it come from? Do you remember how it got rolling?

CD: No, I don't remember exactly why because there was very few shops in town that was organized. Ours was one of the first ones to be organized. For the real reason, I couldn't say why.

BM: But there wasn't any one incident or anything that really got people thinking about it?

CD: No, no.

BM: It just seemed like a good idea.

CD: That's right, yeah.

BM: What kinds of things did you hope to have improve by being organized?

CD: I think the main thing that we thought of was, at the time, our first demand was for a more equitable wage and maybe a paid holiday if possible. We didn't have vacations until quite a while later, after we was organized. But I think the main reason was for better wages and, of course, the working conditions, I think, were quite deplorable and I think they had something to do with it.

BM: What about job security? Was that an issue?

CD: Yes, because, it certainly was because I remember one time when an employee was discharged for opening a skylight window to let some air in because there was smoke and everything all through the plant and by opening the skylight window to let that smoke out and get a little fresh air. And this man opened that when it was a little cold and the boss fired him because he said he wasn't heating the outside.

BM: Did that become an issue then, I mean. . .

CD: Well, incidents like that, and there were probably others of a similar nature that would cause us to negotiate, want to negotiate, for better working conditions.

BM: We're almost at the end of the side here. I just want to ask one more question and then I'm going to turn the tape over. I think, now I didn't realize that you didn't really get organized until 1933 and there's a big change in there between 1927 and 1933 during the crash.

CD: Yeah.

BM: It must have taken a lot of courage to organize at that time because if you lost your jobs, there must have been many men who would have been willing and happy to step in to your place.

CD: Oh, yes, very definitely. That's one of the reasons why I say we organized, we didn't organize rather, was the fear of intimidation by the heads of the company.

BM: I think I'm going to turn the tape over here so we don't talk off the end.

END OF SIDE ONE -- TAPE ONE

BM: This is side two of an Oral History Interview with Clarence Dunn done by Barbara McCuskey on June 4, 1985.

Mr. Dunn, I would very much like to get back to your union involvement in a few minutes but before we leave the 1920's behind I want to talk a little bit about the era of the 1920's and what it was like during that decade leading up to The Crash. You lived here in Cedar Rapids. Did you have a home here at that time or were you living with your brother or. . .

CD: I was living with my brother from the times that I was in Cedar Rapids from December vacation in 1924 when I was down at the university and then I stayed with him at that time and I worked at the Cedar Rapids Engineering Company during the vacation. And then in the summertime I got a job more or less full time but we, well, let's see, I can't. . .

BM: Well, I guess what I'm asking--when did you get married?

CD: We got married in 1929, January of 1929.

BM: How did you meet your wife?

CD: I met her at the old Sunshine Mission.

BM: I don't know what that is.

CD: Well, where the Federal Building is on the river right now there was some old buildings there on one side of First Avenue and the Labor Temple was on the other. I met her really through my buddy that married her sister. They went to the Sunshine Mission quite a bit. And so I met her and I went with her to the Sunshine Mission and that's where we met Daddy Ward, the proprietor of the Sunshine Mission.

BM: What was the Sunshine Mission?

CD: Where?

BM: No, what was it?

CD: It was a mission where derelicts and people of all walks of life would come and get a free meal or something but they had religious services along with it. Daddy Ward is a very fixed character in Cedar Rapids history. He was very much admired by everybody. He and Mother Smith, we called her Mother Smith, between the two of them they were very much admired by everybody. And so Sunshine Mission was one of the landmarks of Cedar Rapids.

BM: That's interesting. I don't know the story at all. Now, you're saying Daddy Ward, W-A-R-D?

CD: They called him Daddy Ward, yes.

BM: Was he a clergyman?

CD: Yes, and his son, Frank Ward, was in with him. But Daddy Ward was getting quite old when he married us but he was a wonderful man.

BM: And you were married at the Mission?

CD: No, no, we were married at my wife's home.

BM: Oh, I see. Tell me what your wedding ceremony was like.

CD: Well, we didn't have an elaborate gown or anything. We didn't have a church wedding or, you know, you have all the fancy dress and everything. We just practically lived on my. . . we got married on my paycheck. That was about all. No, we just had some close friends in at her house and we got married. I always made the statement, "It'd be a cold day in January before I'll get married," and it was! (Laughter) We had a blizzard on that day.

BM: So your family and friends were there and there was a wedding at home. Was there a party afterwards? Did you have food?

CD: No, no, we just a. . . we had an apartment over on First Street and that's all. We didn't have any honeymoon or anything.

BM: People love to talk about, especially people who didn't live through it, love to talk about what I said earlier, the Roaring '20's and how it was wild and everything. Now tell the truth, did women really roll their stockings down below their knees, or didn't you notice?

CD: Oh, yes. (Laughter) Yes, they were kind of shocking, I think. You know, at least we all thought at that time it was shocking.

BM: Well, shocking all has to be taken within context.

CD: Yes.

BM: It was probably not shocking to you but shocking to your parents.

CD: Yes, that's right.

BM: Absolutely. What were some of the things that you think were the biggest changes in behavior during the 1930's, you know, besides rolling stockings?

CD: Well, I just can't...

BM: Well, think of some things that your parents would have been shocked about.

CD: Well, at that time the short dresses and I know, in fact, so many people were shocked at that time. We don't think so much about it anymore. And the behavior of some of them in bootleg whiskey before we had prohibition, I mean, before prohibition went out.

BM: You said you had some prohibition stories. What was it like here in Cedar Rapids?

CD: Oh, I know my buddy and I, that was one of our vices at that time, we had two or three favorite bootleggers that we'd go and see every once in a while and...

BM: Sounds great to me. When you say you'd go and see them, how did you do it? You don't have to mention any names. (Laughter)

CD: No, I wouldn't anyway.

BM: How did you...

CD: There was some secrecy about some of them. Of course, they had to or otherwise they'd get arrested. No, we just... after the initial meeting between us and the bootleggers, why we'd always go back as long as we was careful about our conduct and everything.

CD: Yes, that's right.

BM: Absolutely. What were some of the things that you think were the biggest changes in behavior during the 1920's, you know, besides rolling stockings?

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CD: There was some secrecy about some of them. Of course, they had to or otherwise they'd get arrested. No, we just. . . after the initial meeting between us and the bootleggers, why we'd always go back as long as we was careful about our conduct and everything.

BM: What did you get from them?

CD: Wine and homemade beer.

BM: Was there anything brought in, like down from Canada, any regular whiskey or anything?

CD: No, no, all of those that we patronized was those that made their own wine and made their own bootleg beer.

BM: Were there any notorious places around town that you remember?

CD: They were probably notorious. I remember one up on the northeast side that was in kind of a good neighborhood that the neighbors would have been shocked if they knew they had a bootlegger living close to them.

BM: Was there any place that people went to drink or did they just go pick it up from the people that made it and take it someplace else?

CD: Yes, in our cases, why we just took the wine or beer out and one of our favorite pass times my buddies and I would go to either Bever or Ellis Park to the pavilions and sing. We had a kind of quartet. In fact, we sang over the original WMT a long time ago. But we would get out there and practice singing and drinking beer.

BM: I know that beer sweetens the music. I know that. (Laughter) What was, now you'll have to excuse me if this question is naive, but what was the law's real position on drinking? I mean, was prohibition really enforced or did people kind of wink at it or was it a combination of the two things?

CD: In our case I think it was mostly kind of winked at because I knew of several bootleggers in town and I knew where they lived and if I knew it, why, I'm certain that the law knew about it also.

BM: What's your opinion at this time about the Balstead Act? I mean, since you were alive when it went in in 1919 and went through the whole bit of prohibition, what do you think about it at this point as an experiment?

CD: Well, I don't think prohibition should have ever come in because it created lots of problems that, well, they were very undesirable, I think. It made crooks out of a lot of us. At that time I would have been in favor of prohibition ending any time but I changed my mind later, as we all do.

BM: Do you think there were fortunes made because of prohibition or do you think it was more sort of like a cottage industry, people just sort of making it and selling it to their friends?

CD: Oh, I think there were quite a few fortunes made because I can't say as to Cedar Rapids but I'm sure it must have been prevalent most all over. My oldest brother was telling me about a man that was running whiskey to Canada and bringing back a load of bootleg cigarettes and he made money both ways. He made a fortune in no time and he quit. He was wise enough to quit. But I presume there was a lot of them. I can't recall any certain person that I know of that made lots of money but some of them had quite a bit of wealth at the time. Now whether that was part of the reason, I don't know. I wouldn't say.

BM: Okay. I have another question that you have to understand comes through the tunnel of my education. I always had the impression of the 1920's as being a time when there was a lot of money flying around. There was a lot of industry growth and it was a period of just a lot of money around. Was that true? I mean, was it a prosperous time? Was it that prosperous here in Cedar Rapids?

CD: I never looked at it in that light because the wage that we received, why, it certainly wouldn't make us prosperous and. . .

BM: Do you mind my asking what was your hourly wage when you started?

CD: I started at 35 cents an hour.

BM: Flat? Were there any benefits or. . .

CD: No. No overtime or anything. If we worked overtime, we still got the 35 cents an hour.

BM: Wow. Keeping that in mind. . . well, let's go off on one little short tangent before we leave the 1920's behind. I always like to talk a little about popular culture in the 1920's. Movies. Did you go to movies very much, movie theaters, or would you remember any particular movie stars that left an impression on anybody that you know. You were older. You weren't very impressionable at that time.

CD: Well, no, we didn't go to movies too much. Really, in my own case, why, I didn't care for them very much. That's quite strange.

BM: No, that's not strange. I'm interested. Why was that?

CD: I don't know. I thought, well, that's a land of make believe and I would rather deal with practical things.

BM: Well, it is kind of make believe and the problem is that for a lot of people like myself, that's our only view into what life was like then is those old movies.

CD: Yes.

BM: And that's not accurate.

CD: You must realize that in a small town there's not an awful lot going on anyway. I'm sure if we were in a larger town, why, of course, that was when I was leading up to 1933. From then on I was in Cedar Rapids, but. . .

BM: Do you remember when Valentino died?

CD: Oh, yes. Yes, I do remember that. Yes, that was quite a sad thing for the girls around.

BM: Do you remember anything specifically about that?

CD: Well, I guess that we didn't care much for him, us boys, but we liked Hop-A-Long Cassidy and Harry Carey and some of those. We did go to a lot of westerns. That was about all we cared for.

BM: Yeah. I can understand that. How come you didn't like Rudolph Valentino?

CD: Well, he was too suave and too slick. (Laughter)

BM: Getting back to the 1920's and prosperity or lack of it, no matter what anybody's position was at the time of the 1920's, The Crash brought about a big change, I'm sure. What do you remember about the day in October of 1929 when the stock market crashed?

CD: I don't remember exactly the date but I remember my first impression of it was that my mother had quite a bit of, well, I don't say it would be quite a bit by today's standard but it was quite a bit back in those days, and she had quite a bit of money in the bank and. . .

BM: The bank in Dexter?

CD: Yes. And I think she only realized about ten cents on the dollar of what she had.

BM: How long did it take before she got that return? I mean, I know that didn't happen right away, did it?

CD: No, that took quite some time. I couldn't say exactly how long it took. And then a lot of our friends and neighbors, why, they lost money in The Crash as well.

BM: Were you in Dexter or in Cedar Rapids at the time of The Crash?

CD: I was in Dexter because, now wait a minute. That started in October of. . .

BM: 1929.

CD: Well, I was in Cedar Rapids then. I didn't go out to Dexter until 1930, in April of 1930.

BM: Why did you return home to Dexter, you and your wife?

CD: Well, I was able to get my job back. At the time I wanted to get my job back but The Depression had hit so I couldn't get back. But fortunately in 1933 I was called back. I wasn't called back to work, my brother told him that there was an opening there in June of 1933 so that's when I came back.

BM: Now when we were talking earlier you told me that you had to leave your job because of health.

CD: Yes.

BM: Right. And then you went home to Dexter for a few years.

CD: Yes.

BM: And then you were able to come back in 1933.

CD: Yes.

BM: What did you do in the interim in those years in between?

CD: I teamed up with an old man. He was about 70 years old at that time. He was a good friend of the family. We did odd jobs. Anything you could imagine, we did. We dug graves, we fixed, repaired fences, we cut wood and just a little bit of everything you could think of.

BM: This was in Dexter then?

CD: Yes. And if I hadn't of been living at my mother's home, why, it would have been much harder on us because if we had been in Cedar Rapids it would have been much harder. But as it was, we lived at our home place and we didn't have any rent to pay or anything like that so we did fairly well. But I know I did a lot of hunting and trapping. On the hunting we had as high as 16 to 20 rabbits hung in a building out where it would be cold and we ate rabbits, you might say, that whole winter.

BM: You said it was easier on you because you were living at home. I bet it was easier on your mother too because she would have had you to help, you know, provide for her and things.

CD: That's right.

BM: Did you see a lot of that during the early years of The Depression, a lot of families banding back together to pool their resources?

CD: Yes, yes, they certainly did.

BM: What else did you do in Dexter during those years? You told me earlier that. . .

CD: I was fortunate to get a job. Now this was in The Depression, you might say. It was April of 1930. Almost immediately I got a job on the railroad section on the Rock Island Railroad. I worked there until 1930, 1931, 1932. In 1932 I was bumped, so I lost my job.

BM: Now when you say "bumped", what do you mean?

CD: Well, somebody with more seniority than I had on the section took my place because they was cutting out section after section. We used to have a section about every six miles on the Rock Island Railroad. The towns were about that close together and they had a section in each town. So when The Depression hit, they had to cut out about every other section.

BM: Now, see, we're going to have to stop here for a minute because I don't understand what you mean when you use the word "section". You mean a section of the track that you took care of or a section was a group of people that. . .

CD: Well, they called it a section crew which was in this certain town and they went half way to the next town and half to the other town on the other side.

BM: And you maintained the track?

CD: Yes.

BM: I see. So you got bumped. What other jobs did you have on the railroad?

CD: On the railroad?

BM: Well, you used the word "gandydancer" and that's what I wanted to. . .

CD: Well, that's when I worked on the section. All the time that I was on the Rock Island, why, I worked as a section hand. And during the summer we would have to mow the weeds with a scythe on the right-of-way and we would change the rail sometimes if it broke. I recall one time we had a cracked rail and we had a main train coming through, a passenger train, at 9:00 and we was aware of the broken rail at about seven and so we sure had to hurry. We had to cut the rail to the proper length and drill it for the ties that we bolted them together and we got that rail in just about half an hour, I guess, before the train was to come through. And oh how we. . .

BM: They probably never even knew.

CD: No, they didn't know about it.

BM: When you used the word "gandydancer", what does that mean?

CD: Well, they called section men "gandydancers" and that's what I was.

BM: What was the most difficult problem of maintenance? What did you usually have to do, repair the most?

CD: The track bed. We would. . . if you'd get out. . . well, you've seen photographs on TV of certain tracks. They'll bow just like a snake, you might say. And, consequently, a passenger train is not going to run very smooth over a track like that. So we'd take the low part of the track and put ballasts under the ties to raise it up so that it was smooth riding.

BM: You told me that when you were in Dexter working for the Rock Island that you got involved with the union there.

CD: Yes, on the railroad.

BM: On the railroad.

CD: And our local didn't meet. They met only about once a month at that time, I think, and we met down in Des Moines.

BM: And what union was this?

CD: The Maintenance of Way Employees, the Brotherhood of Maintenance Way Employees. That was the name of it.

BM: And was this an independent union or was it an affiliated?

CD: No, that was an affiliated with the A.F.L./C.I.O., or the A.F. of L. at that time.

BM: Right, A.F. of L. What made you get involved with joining the union? What made you decide to join the union?

CD: Well, I think there was quite a little pressure to bear on the section crew. We might have been intimidated a little into joining. But after I joined, I could see the need for it because, especially on the railroad and especially on the section, safety is one of the high priority items. Most of the things we had, we preached safety all the time. And so I got interested more and more and more and so after I left the Rock Island, why, I was glad to help organize our shop out here.

BM: Let's talk about organizing the shop here. You came back to Cedar Rapids in 1933.

CD: Yes.

BM: And got your job back at. . .

CD: In June of 1933.

BM: In June of 1933. And at that time the shop was still not organized.

CD: Still wasn't organized, no.

BM: Was there talk about it when you came back?

CD: Yes, there was talk about it. I don't know how long the talks had been going on but we just felt as though we should organize. And so in November of 1933 we started organizing.

BM: Did you seek any outside. . . like, I don't know how you go about doing that. Do you seek outside help? Do you contact the A.F. of L., for instance?

CD: Yes, we had somebody. . . our international vice president lived in Milwaukee at that time, one of the vice presidents of the union. He lived in Milwaukee and we had him send out an organizer to help us because, like I say, this employer was very adamant in not in signing a contract with the union.

BM: Now that's a classic trouble situation, when you get somebody to come in from outside of town to organize a shop.

CD: Yes.

BM: Was there trouble? Was there bad feelings and a rift within the employees and things?

CD: Well, I don't think there was. . . there might have been on the part of management. They didn't like it very well but we called in this tough character. He was a tough character. He wore a gun and everything.

BM: (Laughter) No kidding! This was the organizer you're talking about?

CD: Yes. He helped us to get by the top hurdle in getting our shop organized.

BM: What was the first procedure into getting your shop organized? What is the first thing you have to do? When he came in, did he convince all the employees to be, you know, to go along with it or was everybody really ready to go by the time he came?

CD: We didn't have 100% join at first. In fact, I held back myself. They started in November of 1933 and it wasn't until March of 1934 that a great number of us, most of us I think, joined in 1934, March. Apparently, we saw the light ourselves and we felt that we was no longer wanted to be intimidated. I think maybe we was a little afraid, you know.

BM: Well, it's a scary time because you have family responsibilities and those kinds of things at that point because you had a child by then, didn't you?

CD: Yes.

BM: How long did the organizer live here in Cedar Rapids? Did he stay here until. . .

CD: No, he was from out of town but he stayed at a hotel while he was here.

BM: How long was he here for? How long did it take to really get established?

CD: He stayed for about a month, I think, because he worked real hard and he got in quite a few of them. It might have been longer than that. I'm not quite sure about how long he stayed.

BM: You said earlier that the person that you negotiated with management said he'd never sign a union contract. Obviously, his mind was changed for him. What happened that changed his mind?

CD: Well, I think that maybe he got a little afraid of what a union could do and felt as though it might be better to cooperate than hold out. But

anyway, he finally yielded. I think perhaps that some of the two lesser vice presidents or something might have influenced him because he was the president of the organization.

BM: How much of a factor do you think it was that you men were skilled machinists? It wasn't as though they could just go out to the street and pull somebody off the corner to take. . .

CD: No, they couldn't.

BM: Do you think that that was a factor in their decision to. . .

CD: It may have been because I think at that time the machinists at that plant were very good machinists. They had to be in order to hold the precise measurements that they had to do in machining these parts. And so it may have been a factor in our company finally giving in because they realized that machinists at that time, especially in town here, there wasn't an over supply of them. In fact, I think that we were about the only. . . one plant, Universal, was organized about that time and maybe LaPlante Chote. I don't know but anyway we were one of the first ones in town to organize.

BM: Was there other union activity around town in some of the other industries? By that time were most other places unionized, like Quaker and Penick and places like that? Do you remember?

CD: Well, yes, I think especially during the 1930's there was quite an increase in union contracts and union organizing because of the, well, Roosevelt was friendly to unions.

BM: Do you think that President Roosevelt was a major factor or do you think that the economic times was the major factor?

CD: Oh, I think it was a major factor, yes.

BM: What were some of the things that they used to say about President Roosevelt?

CD: Well, they'd like to see him hung and a little bit of everything.

BM: Because he favored big government? Because he favored more government?

CD: Well, I think more or less because he was. . . well, that's probably right. But that he was over friendly with the unions kind of triggered some of the hatred for him.

BM: Well, you know, I have a hint or two of that because my husband collects political buttons and he has two buttons, one that says "The Dr. Jeckel of Hyde Park", which I kind of like, and another one that says "We don't like Eleanor either". And I didn't know how prevalent those kinds of feelings were. He changed a lot of things. One of the big changes that he instituted was the bank holiday. Do you remember the bank holiday? That would have been in 1933, right about the time you came back, wouldn't it?

CD: Well, I don't remember too much about it. I was kind of young and I didn't take much thought about those things.

BM: I suppose it depends on how much money you had in the bank too.

CD: That's right. I didn't have any money.

BM: Yeah, I understand. You were gone for some pretty important years in there and I'm sure there were a lot of changes. What changes did you notice at the plant between the time that you left in 1929 and the time that you came back in 1933?

CD: I think that the main change that I noticed was that all around town there was more talk between machinists, which I associated with more

than anybody else. There was more talk of organizing, the need for protection of some kind, against poor working conditions and naturally the wages always was a big issue.

BM: What was public opinion like toward the unions at this time? Were you aware of any public support or non-support?

CD: We weren't very popular, let's put it that way.

BM: How come?

CD: I don't know. I just feel as though it was the thinking of the times, the time of the union hadn't arrived yet because I know later the popularity of unions increased, I think, quite a lot. But at that time, why, I don't think that we were very popular.

BM: Were there any immediate changes that you noticed as soon as the union began. . . okay, let me back track a little bit. Can you give a specific date when the union was established, firmly established? Or was it too gradual to give a specific date?

CD: I would say that our shop was almost completely organized in March of 1934.

BM: Okay.

CD: But we didn't get a contract until much later.

BM: What was that interim period like? Was that continuous negotiation to get that contract?

CD: We were trying at that time, yes, to continue. . . that was the time where our stubborn employer was showing his muscles to show us who. . . (laughter) We didn't get a contract til 1937, three years later.

BM: My goodness. Was there ever any threat that everybody was going to lose their job?

CD: No, we didn't receive any threats but I think he was much more cautious of his treatment of us and so, like I say, we didn't get a contract until 1937. And from then on, even then we had to fight for everything we got.

BM: What were the main issues that that first contract settled for you?

CD: I think wages was the main issue because we still was perhaps ten cents below some of the other shops, other machine shops in Cedar Rapids. Yeah, I think wages was probably the main issue.

BM: What about things like retirement benefits, sick leave benefits and things like that? Did that come later or. . .

CD: Pensions came very much later. We approached them on that but they never. . . We were defeated by our own members more than by the company for this reason: when we would talk a pension and it would take so much in an overall picture package, why, they would much rather have that money spread out on an across-the-board increase than. . .

BM: Than 20 years down the line.

CD: . . . than so far in the future. So, consequently, we were still, I think, about ten years behind Universal, Iowa Manufacturing and some of those because our own employees helped defeat it.

BM: You know, earlier you were talking about safety and the problems with safety at the plant and I know that for an employer that's one of the most expensive things to change. In what ways did the union help increase the safety factor in the plant?

CD: I think it was more or less a gradual affair. I mean, I do not remember when we took down the old like shafts and we had individual motors on each machine. It wasn't too long after that, I don't think, and I think that was one of the reasons why because those belts, those open belts, uncovered gears and things like that were very dangerous.

BM: Was the difference that it just wasn't something that everybody thought about or was it that the technology wasn't there to make the machinery safe? Do you see what I'm saying?

CD: I think they had the technology to do what we wanted. So many of these machines that had open gears. . .

BM: It's frightening.

CD: It's very dangerous and we have so very much safer shops nowadays than we ever did and still we have bad places, I guess.

BM: I'm going to end this tape right now because we're running out of room on this side. I'm going to pick up with Tape 2.

END OF SIDE TWO -- TAPE ONE

BM: This is Tape Two, Side One of my interview with Clarence Dunn done on June 4, 1985, for the Junior League Oral History Project. My name is Barbara McCuskey.

Before we get back to talking about the shop and changes in the 1930's, I'd like to just sort of talk in general about life in Cedar Rapids in the 1930's. The Depression was on everybody pretty heavily in those first years. What do you think was the greatest hardship that you saw among your friends during that 1930's?

CD: Oh, that's a hard question.

BM: Or maybe I'm overstating it, you know. Maybe I just have my school book knowledge of it. Was it hard times?

CD: Quite, yes. I think that, well, wages were improving some somewhat. I think that our worst times were over. I think things started to pick up in about 1935 or something like that and from then on I wouldn't say we had many hardships.

BM: Did you know of anybody that was out of work for a long period of time? Did you know people that lost their homes, anything like that? When you were in Dexter, did you know people that lost their farms?

CD: Yes, a few. Not very many. I don't think there were very many. But now in jobs too, that's one nice thing about the company that I worked for. It was one of the most stable places of employment, I think, in town because very, very, very seldom did they ever lay off anybody.

BM: Why do you think that was? Why do you think that they were able to maintain at top, full speed?

CD: It was a family oriented concern. I think they. . . I give them an awful lot of credit there. They were. . . when they gave their word on something, they backed it up and they was very, very considerate, I think, of their employees--more so than they let on. They was quite gruff but they still was very. . . they thought quite a bit of their employees. Very seldom did we have a lay-off, so in our own plant very few people lost their jobs.

BM: But their business remained good too, you know it has to be more than just good intentions to keep a business open. I mean, their business was good, do you think?

CD: Oh, yes, very good. And it continued to rise and in fact there was. . . in 1938 there was a bad stretch. We had a little recession at that time and I think some of us were laid off for a while. I don't remember how long it was but I know three other men and I, we cut wood at that time. I don't think we was off more than six months or something like that.

BM: Now if that happened in 1938 you told me on the first tape that your contract didn't really come in until 1937. So was that little recession the first big test of the contract, do you think, or. . .

CD: No, I think that was kind of a general recession around town and elsewhere. I don't think it had anything to do with our contract.

BM: But because of the contract, were there any changes? What I'm saying is did the contract make a difference on how things were carried through that recession on people losing their jobs or retaining their jobs or anything like that? Was there any connection there?

CD: Well, perhaps it did. I never thought much about it.

BM: I was just wondering. Let's see, let's take an average day in like about 1935. I'd like to know what your work day was like. Like what time did you get up in the morning and how did you get to work and when did you have to report in and what your lunch hour was like and things like that.

CD: Well, in 1935 I didn't have an automobile at that time so. . . I forget. Let's see, in 1935, I forget exactly where we lived at the time. But nevertheless it was quite a ways and I walked to work.

BM: Um-huh. So what time did you have to get up in the morning?

CD: Oh, I got up about 6:00, I guess, and eat a hurried breakfast and I had to be to work by 7:00. I probably got up at 5:30. But I know I always had to walk quite a ways.

BM: And you had to be to work at 7:00 and was there a clock that you punched or. . .

CD: Yes, yes, we punched the clock and in fact you didn't dare punch out til--you had to stay by your machine until quitting time. Some places, way they go out and wash up before quitting time but they didn't at our place. We had to be on the job.

BM: Every minute. Okay, now did you work straight from 7:00 in the morning until lunch time?

CD: Yes.

BM: There were no breaks?

CD: We didn't have any breaks at that time, no.

BM: What do you think about that in terms of the safety factor?

CD: Well, in general I think that a break is an awfully good thing for some of them. Of course, I'm old-fashioned and I just probably think the opposite. I'd just as soon work right on through but. . .

BM: I was just wondering if the fatigue factor, you know, if the accidents would go up the later in the morning as people got tired.

CD: Well, chances are that that has happened and probably a break is a good thing.

BM: So anyway, you would work until noon.

CD: Yes.

BM: And your lunch time?

CD: We had a half an hour lunch time period.

BM: Oh, my goodness. And what did you do on your lunch half-hour?

CD: Played poker.

BM: (Laughing) Did you ever win any money.

CD: No.

BM: You brought your lunch bucket?

CD: Yes.

BM: And did you eat outside or inside or did you have a special. . .

CD: Well, in the summertime we'd usually eat outside. In the wintertime, well, most of them congregated around my machine to play poker so when the poker game was going on, we just ate right there.

BM: Was it noisy, not at lunch time, I mean during the morning when the machines were going, was it noisy?

CD: Well, that's the difference between the line shaft and the individual motors on the machines. When the line shaft was there, oh, it was terribly noisy. But after they had individual motors on each machine, why, it wasn't so bad.

BM: So you had your half-hour for lunch and then you had to be back on the line at what? Back at your machine at like 12:30?

CD: Twelve-thirty, yeah.

BM: And then you would work until 5:00?

CD: Four-thirty.

BM: Four-thirty, okay. Very good. That's a long day.

CD: Yes. Well 12:30 to 4:30 is, let's see. We worked an eight hour day. I guess I got the times right.

BM: Okay. And then you'd walk back home.

CD: Yes.

BM: What did you used to do in the evening? Did you listen to the radio?

CD: Well, yes. At that time we had a radio. We didn't have T.V. naturally. But we had a radio and we'd listen to Fibber McGee and Molly and things like that. And Jack Benny.

BM: Well, as the 1930's sort of drew to a close you said that life was getting a little bit better and things but I know from hindsight that the war was brewing. Did you have any feeling for that in the late 1930's--1937, 1938? Did you have any awareness of the rearmament of Germany, for instance?

CD: I followed quite closely in the papers the rise of Hitler when in September of 1939 when he invaded Poland. And from then on I took quite an interest in the proceedings. And naturally at Pearl Harbor I was financial secretary of the union at the time and I had my books at home and I was working at my books at home when war was declared, when Pearl Harbor came.

BM: Sunday morning. This is going to sound like a dumb question but you have to remember this is from hindsight. Were you surprised?

CD: Well, yes, I was. Maybe I was naive or something but I was surprised that Japan would do something like that.

BM: And had you been thinking that there might have been an involvement with the war with us and with Germany?

CD: Well, yes, with Germany the way Hitler was running up and down Europe, why, he and Mussolini both, why, I could almost sense that the war was coming.

BM: You were of an age then that you. . . did you worry about getting drafted yourself?

CD: No, I didn't worry about it because I would have been willing to go. In fact, shortly after Pearl Harbor I went to the recruiting office and I was hoping that I could get a commission in the machinist trades or, you know, so that I could have a little more money than the individual sailor or something. But they told me that I would have to be skilled in boiler making and so many other things that I never had any experience about at all. So I knew I couldn't get a commission so I kind of dropped it. I was on the draft list. In fact, I think I was about ready to be called up when the war ended.

BM: That's a scary time. That's an understatement. What changes did you see at the shop because of the war? You must have lost a lot of guys.

CD: Well, the biggest change I saw was the advent of women workers.

BM: I would love to talk about that because with everybody keeping in mind that the times were different and it was a new thing, what was your opinion about that?

CD: Well, I just quite wasn't ready for a change--girls working in a machine shop. I always thought that was a man's work. (Laughter)

BM: No, I think that's neat that you'd say it because those times were different and. . .

CD: Because it's dirty work and everything like that, I figured, well, I just can't see a girl doing that.

BM: Well, now what was happening was that you would have skilled men being called up and leaving and you'd be getting unskilled women to come in and take their places.

CD: Yeah.

BM: What kinds of training did they have for them and how did that affect. . .

CD: Well, that's one nice thing about our place over there. The machines were fairly close together and anybody that was new, well, they were very good at helping other people out and teaching them the ropes. And I think that's what happened over there. I think the girls were quite well trained by the people next to them.

BM: And yet, as you say, you know I'm sure there were a lot of men that were there thinking, well, we don't want them here. This isn't right if we have women around. What kinds of problems came on because of it. Were there any that you can remember?

CD: Well, the problems of seniority. Some of the men felt as though. . . it so happened that if anybody came in after the girls, which wasn't very often, why they might have been a little reluctant to accept the fact that the girls had more seniority and they would be laid off first. But there wasn't much of a problem, I don't think.

BM: Did the women join the union?

CD: Yes. In fact, before that time. . . I don't know when we first became 100% but I think we became 100% about before the war. And about 1939 or 1940 and we became 100% union then and we stayed that way.

BM: Did the women have status as temporary workers? Everybody knew it was going to be a temporary situation. It never occurred to anybody, did it, that the women would keep working?

CD: Yes, that's right.

BM: Okay. Did they have any kind of temporary status or was there any other difference in the way that they were paid or you talked about seniority?

CD: No, they was hired just. . . it was always felt that when the emergency was over, why, they would be laid off.

BM: And is that what happened then?

CD: Mostly, yes. Although three of them stayed. They stayed on regular and they had the seniority they could do it too.

BM: Was that a smooth transition or was it kind of a. . .

CD: Yes, it was fairly smooth, I would think. There wasn't much hard feelings of any kind any where.

BM: That was a big change on the home front anyway. What about. . . how did it affect things socially around the shop? What happened to your poker game?

CD: Well, I guess the poker game broke up. (Laughter) Although, no, not so much though because most of the poker participants were older people

like me. But, oh, there was a few younger men around there that would run around with the girls, which the gossip had it, you know. The next morning, why, the gossip people had a hay day.

BM: Just like offices always are. Were there any other consideration changes? Were there ladies restrooms, new changes like that, separate area for the women to change clothes, anything like that?

CD: Well, yes. They had to make changes to provide separate restrooms so that made quite a bit of change in the company. I don't think the company gripped about it too much. I don't recall any. . .

BM: Well, it's kind of obvious it would have to happen.

CD: Yes, it would have to, yes.

BM: Did the company have any defense contracts? Do you remember?

CD: Yes, we had. . . at that time FMC was based, I think, in Los Angeles. I think it's the same FMC. Yeah, Food Machinery Company. And we had a little valve about so big and it had very high tolerance, I mean, low tolerance you might say. It just had to be right on the money and it was standard equipment on all bombers. And I think it had something to do with the triggering of the bombs or something. But anyway that's one contract we had. And we had one or two others of our valve grinders or something like that that the government bought quite a few of them.

BM: Because of having a defense contract did you ever remember any federal types being around with a lot of talk about secrecy or anything like that?

CD: Oh, yes, to a certain extent--always be careful and don't shoot off your mouth or something like that.

BM: Did you feel that that was necessary or just kind of silly?

CD: I think it was kind of silly. No, we didn't have an awful lot of it but I suppose there was a certain concern on the part of the government, I could see that. But that was necessary on all defense contracts anyway. So we, yeah, we had a few there and everything went just fine.

BM: Do you remember anything about rationing?

CD: Oh, yes. I was on the rationing board.

BM: Oh, I didn't know that.

CD: Yeah, I. . .

BM: How did that happen? How did that come about?

CD: Well, I don't recall when they implemented that but when. . .

BM: I mean how did it come about that you were on the rationing board?

CD: Well, I don't know whether the mayor or somebody got a hold of me, I guess. Any way, I served on the rationing board for two or three years. In fact, I got an autographed citation from President Truman for it.

BM: What were your duties on the rationing board? What did you do?

CD: Well, there were always being some cases where some women, maybe her husband was in the war, and she was being overcharged for some commodities or something. We would take up matters like that and, let's see, maybe I'm talking out of turn here. Was it the rationing board that. . . we sat in on all cases of discrimination against, well, against most anybody that. . . my memory has started to fail there.

BM: You mean people that weren't getting the appropriate amount of ration cards or were not being treated. . .

CD: Well, yes, we had, oh, so much gasoline to each person. And some people had two cars or something and that posed a problem when they were the same person, under the same registration as one person. They had to prove that they needed the extra ration.

BM: And what was. . . gas was rationed, sugar, what else?

CD: Sugar and, oh, boy.

BM: Meat, eggs, anything like that?

CD: No, I don't think so. No, my memory's a blank on all that was rationed there but I know we was. . . what I remember the most was the automobiles because that affected me on my driving.

BM: I think that's what probably everybody remembers the most and was happiest to see go was the gas rationing. There were different cards, weren't there? There were like "A" cards and "C" cards and things like that?

CD: Yes.

BM: What did you have to do to. . . was it the "A" card that got you the most gas?

CD: I think it was. I think I had an "A" card.

BM: And what did a person have to prove in order to get any. . .

CD: He had to be able to prove that he, in the miles that he drove, that they were essential to the war effort or something, or rather reverse that, why, that he couldn't have it if it was just for joy riding.

BM: Right. So in other words, somebody that had to drive to their job and the job was a defense related job and they would. . .

CD: Yes.

BM: I see. Was there any black marketeering? Do you remember? Did people used to get gas under the table? Sugar?

CD: Well, yes, we run across a few of those cases. I don't recall what we ruled on, our ration board ruled on. But there was a few cases like that.

BM: We're coming to the end here of the time period that we're talking about but I'd just sort of like to go back and, oh, ask you a few sort of random questions that might sort of seem off the wall. One thing is, were you aware of President Roosevelt's handicap? That he was in a wheelchair?

CD: Yes.

BM: Were you?

CD: Yes.

BM: Did anybody ever talk about that? Did anybody ever discuss that? Because that's. . .

CD: No, they didn't seem to think it was a handicap to the way he was performing his job. They felt that he was doing good.

BM: Well, absolutely. But you know in all the history books that I had when I was a child in the 1950's it was mentioned and he was never shown with crutches or in a wheelchair or anything. And I just wondered if at the time how much people were aware of it.

CD: Yes, I think most of us knew about it.

BM: What about during the presidential campaigns? Do you remember anything about those when he ran against like Dewey for instance? Was there a lot of. . . how was the town? Was the town divided? Could you talk at all about that? Was there any division about who was Republican and who was Democrat?

CD: Oh, definitely in our shop, well, it was always the same. There were always two sides taken. I know these two friends of mine were just so bitter against Roosevelt and Harry Truman both as far as that goes. I remember when Harry Truman came through on the railroad and he campaigned on the back of a railroad car. Why, they let us out if we wanted to go down to see him. Why, they didn't pay us for it but they let us go if we wanted to. And I know I went down there and so did some of the others. But some wouldn't go down there. Talk about obscenities, why, they were great at that on both Roosevelt and Truman. But I always thought Truman was just one of the most honest presidents we ever had.

BM: Well, you know people talk these days about how there's no real choices between presidential candidates. Everybody's so watered down so that they can get elected. Did you feel in those days it was the same or was there a greater choice between candidates?

CD: I don't quite understand what your. . .

BM: I'm not sure I do either. Let me start over again. Do you think there was a real choice, a difference in philosophy between say President Roosevelt and Thomas Dewey or President Roosevelt and anybody else that he happened to run against?

CD: Oh, yes, I think very definitely because of his philosophies and the programs he tried to institute and the programs that he failed in. And I think very definitely there was a choice. A clear cut choice, I think. Espe-

cially with Roosevelt because I think that most of his opponents were very definitely just about the opposite. So I think there was a clear cut choice.

BM: You talked about President Truman coming through town on the back of a railroad car. Do you remember anybody else ever campaigning around in Iowa? I know that Roosevelt was too busy to do much stumping but in the early years do you ever remember any of the candidates or presidential candidates like. . . okay, how about when President Hoover was running for office? He was an Iowan. Was he ever here?

CD: He went through. I don't recall whether he campaigned like Truman did on the back of a railroad car or not. But, yes, he was in the state quite often I believe. But as far as I was concerned, Hoover was the first president I ever voted for. The first election I ever voted. But I changed my tune.

BM: Let's talk about, oh, some specific Cedar Rapids things. There's some famous people from around town. Did you ever have any connection with the Cherry Sisters or Grant Wood or anyone like that?

CD: I heard an awful lot about the Cherry Sisters but I never met them.

BM: Were they as awful as everybody said. I mean, did people really throw things?

CD: I believe they were. (Laughter) But Grant Wood, I recall him very well because my brother and his wife, she was a. . . they both attended the Brooklyn Art Institute in Brooklyn, New York. And she was quite an artist in her own right, or I think she was, and so naturally she got acquainted with Grant Wood. And I recall one time of having tea at his studio, which was a barn back of Turner's Mortuary. And then I well remember the home of Howard Hall, Brucemore. And it was through my sister-in-law that I went with her one time to a flower show out at Brucemore. I can't

say I enjoyed it too well. I went along because she wanted me to go along. But it was beautiful. No doubt about it. And so was the home and everything. I didn't mean to imply that. . .

BM: I know. Either you like flower shows or you don't. I mean, there's no faking. Did you see the lions? Were the lions there at Brucemore then?

CD: Did I what?

BM: Were the lions there at Brucemore when you were?

CD: Yes, that was one of Howard Hall's prides. In fact, I remember when the lions were shipped to him from Africa, I guess, and they were shipped in big crates you know. And one of the employees who worked right next to me, he got so obnoxious about a nail. He got a nail, I don't know how he got it, but this nail came from one of the crates that shipped Howard Hall's lions in.

BM: This was his claim to fame, right.

CD: He was showing that off and he got so obnoxious about it, we thought. We got tired of hearing about it.

BM: What were your impressions of Grant Wood? What do you remember about him?

CD: Oh, I thought he was just wonderful. At the time I don't recall whether I thought too much about his most famous painting but anyway, as a man I enjoyed him very much. I thought he was very nice.

BM: Was he personable, easy to talk to?

CD: Yes, he was.

BM: Just last week one of his paintings sold for three and a half million dollars. I just read that in the paper. That is really local boy making good.

CD: It sure is.

BM: Did you have any feeling for the importance of his work? Did you see any of his work around or did everybody just sort of like it cause it was local? See what I'm saying? What I mean, he's so famous now and his work commands such a high price. Do you have any feeling for how popular his work was?

CD: Well, I'm kind of proud that he's a home town boy and all that but that's about all I've ever thought about it.

BM: Of course, if we could all look into the future we'd all be millionaires, right?

CD: That's right.

BM: Do you have any memories of Greene's Opera House?

CD: I thought that was a wonderful place. I was kind of awed at it sometimes but the most I remember about the opera house was when it was converted into a skating rink, of all things.

BM: Roller skating?

CD: Pardon.

BM: Roller skating rink?

CD: Roller skating. And we, my buddies and I, we went down there so very often. We had a lot of fun down there at Greene's Opera House.

BM: Was there music to skate to?

CD: Yes.

BM: Was it an organ or an orchestra or a guy on a piano or what?

CD: I think it was kind of an organ, I believe. It was a kind of a carousel affect, the music you know.

BM: I never knew that that had been a skating rink. What about the other movie theaters in town? You said you weren't a real movie fan too much but did you ever go to any of the other movie theaters?

CD: Yes, I used to go to the Iowa quite a bit. Of course, that's not there any more. And the World used to have a different name. I think that was the Paramount, I believe. No, no, the Paramount was down. . .

BM: No, I think it was the Orpheum. Orpheum? Is that right?

CD: No, that don't sound right.

BM: I don't know. The only reason I know is cause it's still way up at the top. There's something carved up at the corner or something. Did you ever, when you were younger, did you ever go to any of the. . . did you have any connection with the Y.M.C.A. for instance or any other fraternal organizations?

CD: Yes, I was in the Moose for quite a while. I was Governor of the Moose in 1950. But I had more enjoyment, complete enjoyment, out of the early part about the start of the World War II. I sang in what they called. . . it was named Sanger Bund. S-A-N-G-E-R-B-U-N-D. Sanger Bund.

BM: Two words, one word?

CD: I think it's two words.

BM: Okay.

CD: And it was German residents. We sang in the German language. Which was so much enjoyable to me. My brother-in-law was a German and he and all ran around together all the time so we got to sing in this Sanger Bund. They changed the name of it. They took away the Bund, I think, because of the Hitler affect. So they changed the name of it. But we had so much fun there that, in fact, we went down to Moline and we had groups of these singers from all over the Midwest and we sang down there in acapella, you know.

BM: Did you sing for an audience or did you sing for yourselves?

CD: We sang at different audiences but we sang mostly for ourselves. We sang, all of these were in German, and I got so that I could sing German. I couldn't speak it very well but. . .

BM: Was there a strong German-American community here in Cedar Rapids?

CD: Yes, quite a bit. And we would meet and practice every Monday night and we'd always have a keg of beer.

BM: That goes hand in hand. That's great.

CD: But there was so much enjoyment in that.

BM: Well, you know you had said earlier that you used to sing with a quartet. Did those two things sort of just flow together or did. . .

CD: Yes, I think they did. I sang in a double mixed quartet at the church that I went to, the Calvary Baptist Church. And for two years, I think at the

least, we sang on WMT every morning, or every Sunday morning rather. Then we would sing at different churches all out in northeastern Iowa. We went just all over. We had a double mixed quartet and we had such good times that they'd invite us in for the evening and we'd have a big meal and we'd sing. Oh, we had a wonderful time.

BM: That's great. When you sang at WMT, did you sing live or was it recorded? Did you sing live over the microphone, just out over the air?

CD: Yeah.

BM: Okay. What do you remember about early radio? You said earlier that you listened to Fibber McGee and Molly and some of those. Those were network shows. What do you remember about local radio? Anything in particular? Were there any local shows that you listened to?

CD: Well, not so much, no. But what I do remember. . . speaking of when I told you about my brother-in-law and I, we did a lot of singing around and we sang. . . I had a date with Maxine Par. Mr. Par owned this radio station and we was. . . it's kind of phasy, my memory's kind of phasy on it, but we got our quartet down there for an audition one time. And he was going to hire us, I think that's correct, but there was another quartet about the same and they eventually muscled in on us and we lost out. But we was going to sing there too but. . .

BM: That's great. Do you remember anything about a. . . this is just fishing in the dark here. . . do you remember anything about any tent shows or Bible shows or traveling evangelists or anything that came through?

CD: No, I don't.

BM: Okay, just checking. How about the heat. Everybody always likes to talk about life before air conditioning. How did you deal with the heat. Now it must have been hot in the shop.

CD: Oh, boy! It was terrible but we didn't even have fans or anything and I guess today, why, some people bring their own individual fans but I haven't been in the shop lately so I don't know how the conditions are. But I presume they're so much better than they ever were but. . .

BM: How did you deal with the heat when you were a young man and working there?

CD: Oh, it was just so terribly hot that we just had to put up with it. In a machine shop especially, you get so dirty and you get so filthy and you just want to jump in a lake when you get out of there.

BM: I'm sure. How did you stay cool at home?

CD: We just didn't. It was just the same thing. We would have a fan at home but even then, why, it was far from an air conditioner.

BM: My dad was at Coe during the 1930's and he said they used to go down and sleep in Green Square. Did you know anybody who used to go to the parks and sleep out when it was real hot?

CD: No, I didn't.

BM: Well, you were a responsible man at that point. He was just a college kid. (Laughter) Let's see, how many children did you and your wife have?

CD: Four.

BM: Four kids. How did you used to spend your Sundays usually?

CD: Well, for a long time we attended Calvary Baptist Church. That's when I was singing in the double mixed quartet. And I don't know, we kind of got away from going to church maybe a couple years later. And for quite a

while I'd just stay home and watch the television after television coming in or listen to the radio before that.

BM: Did you have a garden?

CD: Oh, yes, I always had a garden. And for the last seven years I've had a garden out at Squaw Creek City Gardens.

BM: Oh, wonderful!

CD: But this year I had this cataract operation and the doctor wouldn't let me do my work.

BM: Did you keep a garden, I'm talking about a truck garden, produce, you know. Did you keep a garden because it was a better way

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