

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ELSIE S. WILLIAMSON

CONDUCTED BY INEZ LYON

2701 - 21st Street, S.W.

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

10-07

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

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

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

1. Transportation

- Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
- 9 --Trolleys (the Interurban)
- 9,29 --Horses and First Automobiles
- Mud roads and the seedling mile
- Hunter Airport and the first planes
- Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- Newspapers
- 11 --Radios
- Advertising
- Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

- Motion Pictures
- Cedar Rapids Parks
- 15,16 --Dances
- Carnival Week
- Chautauqua
- Community Theater
- Little Gallery
- Symphony Orchestra
- Circus
- Greene's Opera House
- Amusement Parks (Alamo)
- Camps
- Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)

18-19 --Majestic/Vaudeville

2. Famous Characters

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

- 3. Lifestyle
 - Life before air conditioning
 - 22 --Winter Activities
 - Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
 - 24 --Clothing
 - Toys
 - Saloons/Taverns
 - 6-8,10,20 --Farm Life
 - 28 --Rag Picker
- 4. Family Life
 - Household Help
 - Women's Roles
 - 14 --Childrens' Activities/Behavior
 - 26 --Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)
- 5. Ethnic/Minority Life
 - 25 --Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
 - Indians
 - 27 --Segregation of Blacks
 - Jobs Available
 - 28 --Gypsies
- C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community
 - 1. Education
 - 3 --Cedar Rapids Schools
 - Coe College
 - Mount Mercy College
 - Cornell College
 - 2,5,6 --One room rural school -Rose Hill
 - 2. Government
 - City Services
 - Streets/Roads
 - Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)
 - 3. Medical
 - 32 --Hospitals
 - Patient-Doctor Relationship
 - Broken Bones
 - Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
 - 31 --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
 - 34,35 --Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
 - 33,36 --Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
 - 6-8,37,45 --Farmers Market
 - Mills on Cedar River
 - Buildings Erected
 - Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
 - Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)
5. Attitudes/Values
 - Children/Discipline
 - Sex/Petting
 - Charity
 - Divorce
 - Work
 - Working women, Voting Rights for Women
 - Patriotism (World War I)
- D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community
 1. Catastrophic Events
 - Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
 - 42-43 --Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
 - Bank Closings (1933)
 - Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
 - Public Library Murder(1921)
 2. National Historic Events
 - Womens' Suffrage
 - World War I
 - Roaring 20's
 - Prohibition
 - 23,24 --Great Depression

Elsie Scorpil Williamson was born in Solon, Iowa, in 1903, the daughter of Katie Heiber Scorpil (a German) and John Scorpil. Her father, an immigrant from Czechoslovakia, moved her family to a farm on the edge of Cedar Rapids in 1906. Mrs. Williamson attended Rose Hill Elementary School before graduating from old Washington High School. At age 21 she married "Bob" Clyde James Williamson and had three children, Rita, Robert, and Clair. Known as the "Jelly Lady" at the City Market for 30 years (1945-75), Mrs. Williamson openly shares her childhood memories of Prairie Creek and reveals some of the prevailing attitudes and values of the times.

Interview with Elsie Scorpil Williamson

Interviewer: Inez Lyon

Transcriber: Carol Schwes

IL: You were born in Solon, you said, and you came to Cedar Rapids in 19--when?

Williamson: Gee, I was, does the tape. . .

IL: Yes, it's taping now. About 1906, did you come to Cedar Rapids?

Williamson: Well, probably it was about 1906.

IL: And you were, what, about three years old at that time?

Williamson: Three years old, yes.

IL: And your parents. . .

Williamson: They came from, well, when they were young, my father came from Czechoslovakia and my mother, several years later, came over from Wittenburge, Germany.

IL: And their names were Scorpil.

Williamson: Yes, John Scorpil was my father's name and Katie Heiber was my mother's name.

IL: And as you grew up you went to school?

Williamson: Yes.

IL: Tell me about the school.

Williamson: Well, in 1906 my father bought a farm out on the edge of Cedar Rapids and when I was nine years old, we moved out on the farm. I attended Rose Hill School, that was a country school. There were nine students.

IL: And it was a one-room school?

Williamson: Yes, it was a one-room school. The teacher would come out on the Iowa City interurban and get off at a station on the cut-off, walk two miles on the railroad tracks, and then open school and build a fire. We just started a new week going to school.

IL: And was that outside plumbing?

Williamson: Yes, it had outside plumbing. We also had to go to the neighbors to get water--drinking water. We had to carry it.

IL: To the school?

Williamson: To the school.

IL: Can you imagine the children doing that nowadays?

Williamson: Oh, no.

IL: And then you went on through the Cedar Rapids schools after Rose Hill?

Williamson: Well, yes. I graduated from Rose Hill when I was twelve and then later on, why, I decided to go to high school. My mother rented the place and worked uptown at Brem's Bakery. I started to Washington High School and I was seventeen years old, graduated when I was twenty-one.

IL: And old Washington High School. My, a lot of us that went there.

Williamson: Yes.

IL: Do you remember the stairs in Washington? They were just like this--they have been used so many years.

Williamson: I thought that was interesting.

IL: It was a shame, but my goodness, it would have been a terrific chore to rehabilitate it. After school were you married right away, or did you work?

Williamson: I was married when I was twenty-one.

IL: Right out of school.

Williamson: Well, just about out of school.

IL: And then did you raise a family?

Williamson: Oh, yes. Is that running now?

IL: Yes.

Williamson: Well, later on I'll show you the pictures. I have three children. There was Rita, Rita Charmaine. She was born in 1930 and then a few years later Robert Garner, a boy, and he was born in 1934. Then there was Clair Williamson. He was born on January 19, 1935. Those were the three children and they attended Rose Hill School.

IL: And they did. So you were still living out on the edge of town?

Williamson: Yes, over here on this place.

IL: On a farm?

Williamson: The farmhouse right over here.

IL: Oh, yes.

Williamson: And that's the school right across the road; it's condemned. I don't know how long it will be there.

IL: Is that the little, old building--across the street here?

Williamson: Well, that's the Rose Hill School. Then when it was--I don't know if you want to hear all of this. . .

IL: Go ahead.

Williamson: When the schoolhouse was condemned, why, the College Community started to the south and it's a great big school, a lot of teachers, and a lot of things that they never had at the old Rose Hill School.

IL: But the Rose Hill preceded the. . .

Williamson: Oh, yes, Miss Margaret Sullivan taught for years and years and years.

IL: At Prairie--College Community?

Williamson: She taught in College Community, but she also had the Rose Hill School here. All my children went to her, but when she taught, there was 32 children. The old Rose Hill where I went, there was only 9.

IL: The newer Rose Hill, was that a bigger school? It wasn't a one-room with 35 students?

Williamson: It was 32 students with Miss Margaret Sullivan as the teacher.

IL: And where was that school?

Williamson: It was right across the road. It's still standing.

IL: Oh, I thought that you meant the one your children went to.

Williamson: Well, they went to that, too.

IL: Oh, they did.

Williamson: But it went for sixteen years and then it closed. Then the College Community started, but they were already graduated from the grade school.

IL: I see. And then after your family was grown?

Williamson: Yes. I went to the City Market.

IL: Oh, yes, and you became the Jelly Lady.

Williamson: That's right.

IL: And all those years were you the Jelly Lady, did you have other things?

Williamson: Oh, yes. I had berries and I had vegetables, when I had them or when I could raise them. I went in for raspberries, strawberries,

currants, gooseberries, and things like that. Well, when I started in on the jelly for the first three years, I used only wild berries. I could pick a big bucket of blackberries or black raspberries in a short time, but I'd have to walk three miles to get them. I had wild gooseberries and wild crabapples and, oh, there was hickory nuts and walnuts and. . .

IL: Those were all wild. Where did you find them? In this area?

Williamson: Yes, right here, close by, in the pasture and the woods.

IL: Oh, so all the wild things. . .

Williamson: That's right. If there was a little stream, there'd be raspberries growing there and runners they'd keep long.

IL: Wonderful berries. And you turned them all into jellies.

Williamson: Jellies and jam.

IL: And jam. You didn't sell them by the pint or the box?

Williamson: Not the wild.

IL: Not the wild.

Williamson: But my own--then it came to me, why walk miles when I could have the farm and the land right there, so I planted my own. I

had big strawberry patches. I had three of them going at one time, one planted, one picking, and one would be plowed up. So then I had to do the same with the raspberries and currants, all the things. Besides that I had ground cherries and, oh let's see, oh, apricot and peach, those I'd have to buy--the apricot and peach, but the ground cherries I raised.

IL: Well, that's certainly not something that everybody raises. I never heard of anybody raising ground cherries.

Williamson: They had a lot of vegetables and things on the market, but nobody--they just couldn't seem--to get started on making jelly. But it was very easy for me and I did it for about thirty years.

IL: Now where was your husband all the time, running the farm?

Williamson: Well, my husband wasn't what I thought he was going to be. We lived together about four years and then I divorced him, the first time. When we were married the second time, I had my children. The first time, why we didn't have any children.

IL: How long have you been retired from the jelly market?

Williamson: Oh, I'd say since '75. In 1975 I think I drove the car in the last time, and I said, "Take it." It was a 1955 Chevy. I used that for 11 years, never having any trouble with it.

- IL: You mentioned a while ago, your teacher, in the school, coming by the interurban out to this area. How did you folks manage with your transportation out here?
- Williamson: Well, in the winterime we had bobsleds and horses. In the summertime we had a horse and buggy--rubber tires on the buggy and buggy horse, not one of those cobs.
- IL: Did you use the interurban?
- Williamson: Yes, but we had to walk quite a ways--what they called McKinley Crossing and over in there--we'd have to walk it--at least a half a mile, or maybe a mile, from the interurban. But it was better than walking all the way--three miles. It's about three miles from town out here.
- IL: And did you ride horses, too?
- Williamson: Yes, horseback, no saddle though, just bareback.
- IL: And, of course, there wasn't any paving.
- Williamson: No, there wasn't any paving. Well, I used to ride the horse when my father cultivated. It was hard for him to guide the horse and cultivate too, so I would manage and guide the horse, sitting on his back. My father would cultivate then--corn and different things, we had patches of things that we raised.

IL: And did you use all that you raised, use it all for yourself, or did you--there wasn't any City Market at that time, was there?

Williamson: No.

IL: Did you go into town with a truck or anything?

Williamson: No. We just raised for our ownselves. Then some of the time they'd raise cow beets and they'd cut the beets up, put them in the bucket and the cow would eat them. We had about five cows at that time and we raised some chickens and some hogs and just enough for our ownselves.

IL: Just for your ownselves. Of course, there wasn't paving.

Williamson: No, just mud. The roads were very bad.

IL: This time of year they would be.

Williamson: Yes, in March they were very bad.

IL: Do you remember Hunter Airport and the first airplane?

Williamson: Well, we weren't too interested in the airplane because we were either too old or too young.

But there was what they call Hawkeye Downs and the carnivals and fairs would come there. I remember one time my father and I

went over there and they had a little, small house. They were advertising televisions and that was about, oh, I must have been about twelve years old at that time, so that would have been 1915 I guess, along in there. Some people just shrugged their shoulders and said, "Oh--they didn't think it was going to amount to very much."

IL: Imagine, I didn't realize they even knew the word.

Williamson: And we also had radios, but everybody had to wear a headphone because they couldn't hear the radio. Then when it got so we could hear the radios, we thought it was the most wonderful thing that ever happened.

IL: Do you remember any traffic on the river? There weren't any boats other than pleasure boats? Do you remember anything other than that?

Williamson: Like on the Cedar River?

IL: Yes.

Williamson: Well, we had very little transportation to get places, and we didn't get over to the Cedar River. We had Prairie Creek, our own place down in the woods, and people would have boats on that sometimes.

IL: Oh, they did! Prairie Creek was big enough for a boat?

Williamson: Canoes.

IL: I didn't realize that.

Williamson: Well, I remember when I was little, about four years old, we lived near Fairfax and the Prairie Creek went through the land that we had there. My older sister would take me--we'd go and get the cows--and then she'd take the rowboat and go part way on the creek. It was quite a thing.

IL: And then this creek, right down here, that is Prairie Creek?

Williamson: Prairie Creek. No, not this, that's just a ditch that goes into Prairie.

IL: Down here or across the tracks?

Williamson: Yes. This place when they built it--it was landscaped--used to be all grown up in bushes and trees. Where there's little waters, going right out here, which you went over on the road, that is just a ditch that leads into Prairie Creek. It goes down here to the railroad and through a tunnel.

IL: I didn't go through a tunnel.

Williamson: Well, no, but this water goes over here to those--there's three railroad tracks going through the place.

IL: Yes.

Williamson: And the tunnel is underneath. The water goes underneath and then it goes into Prairie Creek.

IL: Oh, I thought that was Prairie Creek.

Williamson: No, that's just a ditch. It has no name. But when the place was landscaped, they kind of took all the trees and everything out, just had it a bare ditch. They could put big, round. . .

IL: Drainage things.

Williamson: Drainage things in there if they wanted to.

IL: There seems to be something going on down there.

Williamson: Well, this ditch, the water in it, comes from the whole neighborhood, many places.

IL: Do you remember newspapers? Did you get the newspaper out here?

Williamson: Well, not like they did in town. I don't think they had any carriers. You (would) occasionally buy a paper uptown, bring it home--relish it, all the things that were in the paper. But as far as that, I mean carriers like do now, they didn't have (them).

IL: Did you have a telephone?

Williamson: No, we had no phone. Kerosene lamps, that was my job--to wash the chimneys and fill the lamps.

IL: Oh, wasn't that a job?

Williamson: Kerosene was 10 cents a gallon.

IL: Just imagine.

Williamson: And we had the gypsies come out on the road and there'd be hobos on the other side, coming in from the railroad tracks. So we had quite a life.

IL: Heating, of course, was the stove.

Williamson: Oh, yes, we had three wood-burning stoves. Sometimes, when they put new ties on the railroad tracks, we'd get the old ties and burn those up in the wood stove. And let's see. . .

IL: What did you do for recreation when you were a child growing up? What kind of fun did you have?

Williamson: Well, we played with dolls and, well, I was a great hand to sew. I remember when I was growing up, why, my mother would always have to blow out the kerosene lamp so I'd go to bed. I'd want to

stay up all night and sew doll clothes. So I liked to sew. I was making my own clothes from the time I was about twelve years old and I sewed my own things.

IL: Were there square dances or barn dances or anything like that?

Williamson: Oh, yes. The barn has burned down, but there was a large barn over here on this place. This is a part up here where we are now. My husband and my sister's husband would put in an oak floor and paper ceiling, kind of, with garlands of crepe paper and benches all around the place. They'd have barn dances there every Saturday night.

IL: Oh and that was right in the neighborhood so. . .

Williamson: Yes. My husband would, after the musicians left, why he'd get out the mouth harp and played on that for about three hours. Then the ones that were left would go uptown. If there were any taverns open, they'd stop there.

IL: You said the musicians--were they the neighborhood musicians or were they a band from this part?

Williamson: Well, some came from Fairfax, and some came from Cedar Rapids. They'd have different ones and some were popular, and some weren't so popular. We'd clap, and they'd keep a playing all the time. About midnight or one o'clock they'd go home and then anybody wanted to play the mouth harp would play it and then

still dance. My brother-in-law ran the snack bar or what do you call it?

IL: A sort of a concession--the food concession--you didn't call it that then.

Williamson: Well, refreshments, I guess, but they didn't sell beer or anything like that.

IL: What would they sell?

Williamson: Oh, candy and I suppose drinks.

IL: Cider?

Williamson: Probably. I don't know, maybe it was soda pop, I'm not sure what he did sell. I was expecting my second child and so I wasn't out there very much at the barn dance, but they had a big time and many people enjoyed it. There were several boys, all young men, that were always clapping and excited over the dance.

IL: You said that you were married then. If you weren't married, would you have dates, or would you just all gather there?

Williamson: Oh, things were very quite for young people out here. They had to go uptown or places like that there. The houses are few and far between and they didn't have too much going on, except when

they had something over at Hawkeye Downs or carnivals or something would come to town--a circus.

IL: Did you go to the Cedar Rapids parks? Did you ever go there for picnics or anything?

Williamson: Not too much.

IL: But you would go to. . .

Williamson: Ellis Park. When I was going to high school, my sister lived near Ellis Park. I think I stayed with them a while and walked to Washington High from Ellis Park.

IL: That was quite a hike.

Williamson: Yes, it was.

IL: (Of) course we used to walk.

Williamson: Oh, yes--didn't think too much of it.

IL: Two miles each way for us and we didn't think anything about it.

Williamson: Did you live at Edgewood?

IL: No, I lived out in Vernon Heights.

Williamson: Oh, Vernon Heights.

IL: But that was two miles.

Williamson: You were born in Cedar Rapids; your hometown?

IL: Yes. Did you ever go to Chautauqua? Do you remember Chautauqua?

Williamson: No, I was never to Chautauqua--those were in Chicago?

IL: Well, they were kind of a tent show; speakers, entertainers who went around the country. Sort of vaudeville.

Williamson: Yes, well, I used to go to the Majestic--I had a friend that used to take me to the Majestic and we had big time. They had vaudeville and big times. I went for about a year, I guess that's all, with shows every week.

IL: That was fun. There was a company, here in Cedar Rapids, did a different show every week. I remember those. Do you remember Greene's Opera House?

Williamson: Well, I heard it mentioned, but we didn't patronize it very much, weren't able to.

IL: Did you to to the YM or the YW or anything like that?

Williamson: No, not here in Cedar Rapids.

IL: By any chance did you ever see the Cherry sisters? Do you remember what they. . .

Williamson: Well, I heard a lot about them--I don't believe I saw them. I guess they used to come to the Majestic theater, didn't they?

IL: They came there for, sort of, what do I want to say, a comeback in about 1932 or something like that.

Williamson: No. I might have seen them, I don't know.

IL: They were awful, just terrible.

Williamson: They used to throw things at them. Did you see them?

IL: When they came back for the comeback thing--oh, they were just terrible! You can understand why people threw things at them. Before we had air conditioning, do you wonder how we managed?

Williamson: Well.

IL: Of course out here in the country I suppose it wasn't quite as hot.

Williamson: It wasn't too hot and if you didn't know anything about air conditioning, why you didn't miss it.

IL: When it was hot, did you swim in Prairie Creek?

Williamson: Oh, yes. It wasn't polluted like it is now and we had many, many good times. There was all kinds of pretty rocks in the bottom, and we--is that going?

IL: Yes. It's going.

Williamson: I got some pictures I was going to show you about the creek, but I can show them to you later on. We have a big rock over by the driveway that was brought up from this creek. A man brought it up on his tractor. We have several pictures that were taken of the rock while it was still in the creek.

IL: Did you have picnics?

Williamson: Oh, yes. We had lots of picnics and we had things that farm people enjoyed.

IL: Like what?

Williamson: Get togethers.

IL: Barn raisings?

Williamson: Yes, and like you say square dances and things like that--we'd have many at Christmas time or New Year's and we'd have

meetings and sometimes they'd have a wedding dance. They'd get married on Valentines Day and have a wedding dance. So there were a lot of things going on.

IL: Did you kind of plan wedding dates according to the season?

Williamson: Sometimes. My sister and her husband were married the first of March, that was just Friday. They were wedded 69 years.

IL: Oh, really.

Williamson: Ed and Carrie Sheer, 69 years.

IL: Not very many like that.

Williamson: No, there aren't. They were married before the season--before they got summer work started. They were married the first of March and then the summer season work came, why then, no more weddings.

IL: They just kind of planned it that way.

Williamson: Yes. Plan when you're not too busy.

IL: What did you do in the winter?

Williamson: Oh, crack nuts and read, and we had victrolas. The television and the radio wasn't going when I was real young, it came later on. But we had the victrola, and we had music and. . .

IL: And what about outdoors?

Williamson: And. . .

IL: Sleigh rides and bobsleds.

Williamson: Oh, yes, there was always skating and sliding down hills. We had sleds, wild wintertimes.

IL: Where did you skate? On the creek?

Williamson: Yes, Prairie Creek. When the water froze, why, we'd have skates, and we'd go skating. It was sort of tame amusement, not like they have now. I remember my father would play the mouth harp a lot. He'd play "Golden Slippers" and, oh, I can't remember all of them that he would play--but they went in for music. My sister can play the piano by ear, and her son can play by ear. I can only sew, use the sewing machine. I can't play any music, but I like the sewing machine.

IL: But Prairie Creek played a great part in your life.

Williamson: Oh, yes.

IL: From the time you were little.

Williamson: Yes, and there used to be a bum's camp at Beverly and they used Prairie Creek. Many times the hobos would come with a can and they'd want potatoes and vegetables. They'd take it down to Beverly. It was the coaling station or filling station for the steamliners. They had Pullman trains that ran by steam. They had firemen, engineers, and conductors, and porters, and they had sleepers and diners, and coaches.

IL: They wouldn't change at Beverly, would they?

Williamson: No, it was a filling station, coal. They loaded coal and water. It came from the cutoff. The Northwestern had two tracks going-- that's where the Pullmans were, on the Northwestern, not the cutoff. The cutoff was all freight trains, long freight trains.

IL: How did you celebrate holidays when you were growing up?

Williamson: Well, mostly by having a big dinner and relatives came and probably some small presents, not too big of ones, and did I mention the Great Depression?

IL: No, go ahead.

Williamson: Well, during the Great Depression--why it lasted, well, seemingly it lasted four years, but sometimes it seems like it lasted much longer than that. We had a very hard time during the depression.

We didn't have many celebrations at that time and everything was tied up pretty tight.

IL: But you were lucky living on the farm, you had enough to eat.

Williamson: Oh, yes. We had our own milk and our own hogs and our own chickens, but the work was very scarce, and the men folks didn't have anything to do. It was a hard life.

IL: Was there a particular kind of clothing that you wore when you were growing up? Were you part of the bloomer. . .

Williamson: Well, yes. We didn't know anything about slacks and overalls and so we wore bloomers. We took gym class in school. We had bloomers there and middy blouses.

IL: Do you remember long underwear or long stockings?

Williamson: Yes, in fact, my mother was German and they didn't think much of the short dresses and the curly locks and the things that American children had, so my hair was combed straight back and then put in one braid down the back. I had to wear long dresses. No short dresses for Elsie. So one time my mother was making me a dress, and I thought "What an idea!" I was about, oh, about eight or nine years old, I think, at that time. I took the scissor and cut about 4 inches off from the dress. That was one that wasn't long.

IL: And what happened to you when you did that?

Williamson: Oh, I don't know; I suppose I got a scolding in German. My mother couldn't speak English; she was a German. She was raised German and could read and write in German, but she couldn't speak the American language. She spoke broken English.

IL: Do you speak any German? Did you learn any German?

Williamson: Oh, yes, I can "sprechen deutsch".

IL: And do you know Czech too?

Williamson: No, my sister can; she's six years older than I am. She absorbed-- when my father had neighbors and company, why, they'd talk in Czech--and she absorbed it. She can speak it, but I can't. I was quite a bit younger than she was and I never did learn it. It's an interesting language though.

IL: I think it must be. Some place along the line, when I was growing up, we learned a Czech song.

Williamson: Oh, you did.

IL: And nobody would ever translate it for us so we never knew what it. . .

Williamson: Can you remember any of the words?

(Tape stopped and restarted)

IL: What did you do on Sunday when you were growing up?

Williamson: Well, most of us slept a little bit longer than usual and when we lived at Solon, why, my mother insisted that we go to a Lutheran Church and that we were baptized at the Lutheran Church. We spent quite a bit of time there. My father was raised Catholic and he couldn't seem to settle, as he grew older and had a family. He didn't take up the habit and go to the Catholic Church. But his mother, my grandmother, she was Catholic all of her life, and she was buried in--when she passed away, why, she was buried by a Catholic priest. But my mother was Lutheran and she insisted that we go to the Lutheran Church. Then later on we kind of got away from it. We didn't have much transportation; we were out on the farm why, we kind of quit going to the church. My sister and I attended the Kenwood Park Church. Kenwood Park was a suburb of Cedar Rapids. We attended that for about three or four years.

IL: Well, now that's a long way from here. How did you get to Kenwood?

Williamson: Well, we had a piece of property that was on 30th Street. It was a residence. Kenwood was a suburb and there was a place where we got our groceries, about a half a block of stores there. They had--I remember well, the candy counter. They had penny choco-

late mice and little nigger babies. I couldn't--maybe you don't want me to say any of it.

IL: That's what we called them when we were growing up.

Williamson: And there'd be three or four for a penny. The pennies were scarce so we didn't get to buy very many. I remember we could get--they had barrels of apples--we could get an apple for a penny. We'd stop there and sometimes we'd just get groceries. They didn't have supermarkets like they do now. They were all old grocery stores with shelves of food, tin cans.

IL: The streetcar used to go through Kenwood?

Williamson: Oh, yes.

IL: Did you use that?

Williamson: Yes, once in a while we'd get to--I think the children were all free, but all older people had to pay. It wasn't very much though.

IL: Do you remember any Indians?

Williamson: Well, Grandma McKinnon lived about--up around the high road here. They bought their land for \$1.25 an acre from the government. The Indian women would camp down by Prairie Creek and they would come up to her place. She had a daughter that did the work there and cooking. This daughter would cook a dozen eggs

for these women and each Indian would eat a dozen eggs for breakfast. I don't think they paid for it. I don't know whether they gave them something, or if they just begged it off of them or how it was. But Grandma McKinnon told me that these Indian women would have Jessie--(that was the girl that did the work)--fix a dozen eggs for them. Then there was also, oh, what do they call them?

IL: Do you remember gypsies?

Williamson: Yes, gypsies, and they would have a fish hook on a string, that they would--someone would sit in the back of the wagon or on the car they were driving through and if there was a chicken around, why they'd see that the chicken saw the kernel of corn on the fish hook, and they would catch a chicken and that was the end of the chicken. Then we also had what they call the "rag picker".

IL: What was that?

Williamson: Well, we'd have a gunny sack and afterward when our clothes were so worn that you couldn't patch it or do anything more about it--absolutely not--why it would go in the rag sack and then about every three months the rag picker would come through. He'd raid the sack and give you maybe--usually less than a dollar for a big sack, gunny sack, full of rags.

IL: Oh, for heavens. I've never heard of him. Now did he come in a cart, or was he on foot or. . .

Williamson: Well, he had, I think, a one-horse wagon, kind of a summer--what they called a spring wagon--spring--kind of a lightweight wagon, not a heavy, farm wagon, but a lightweight wagon. One horse could pull it.

IL: Now did he come from Cedar Rapids, or did he just go right through Cedar Rapids?

Williamson: Cedar Rapids was his base, but he'd go all through the neighborhood, all through the farm country. People would save from one time to the next.

IL: I've never heard about him.

Williamson: Yes. I was less a--around twelve years old when he left this place. Of course it disappeared. As progress came along, why, all these things disappeared.

Talking about early cars, my brother-in-law had a little truck that he got a great deal of use out of. It was a two-cylinder Cadillac and it had a place to haul milk and little, hard, rubber, tires. They used it a great deal on the farm because it was much easier to drive the car than it was to hitch up horses. Then my brother, my half brother, had an Overland car. He would gather the children up and take them out to the park on Sundays. You'd

have a watermelon in the car and we'd have lunch out there.

We'd have a good time riding around. There weren't many cars at that time. Then my brother-in-law had a Maxwell car that he got a lot of good use out of.

IL: That's what Jack Benny had--a Maxwell, remember?

Williamson: Maxwell, yes.

IL: Those old cars really are fun to think about, aren't they?

Williamson: Oh, yes, they are. You could buy Fords for \$640 and it had side curtains on. If weather got stormy, why, you had to put on the side curtains. It had a running board and the whole works. They crank, before they had the dashboards so that it could be automatic, but I remember when they used to crank the cars.

IL: When it came to shoveling the snow, plowing the roads, did the farmers have to do it themselves or was there a city service that. . .

Williamson: Well, they stayed home most of the time.

IL: They just stayed home and never did. But I remember city service. . .

Williamson: I remember when the snow was so deep that they cut across this field and said, "Go on around the road and then cut across the

field,"--it was right over the top of the fence--not paying attention to the fence. Everything was snowed in and sometimes it would be cold for three weeks. It'd be -25^o and times were hard. They stayed home most of the time. They didn't do much gadding around.

IL: You didn't have any city services out here did you?

Williamson: No. Absolutely none, no transportation of any kind.

IL: Let's talk about health. What did you do when someone got sick? Did you go to the hospital? Did a doctor come to the house?

Williamson: Well, the doctors all--we had many, my father wasn't well in his later years, and we had a doctor that came out to see him, came to the house. Very few people went to see the doctor. The doctor always came to see them.

IL: Would he come in a horse drawn carriage?

Williamson: Well, I can't remember. I just didn't pay too much attention, I mean that wasn't important to me. It was the fact that he was coming to see my father, help my father.

IL: Now where did he come from? Did he come from Cedar Rapids or was he in. . .

Williamson: He came from Cedar Rapids. Hersch, he was Dr. Hersch. Later on, when I was on the market, he used to come and buy things from me.

IL: And so anytime there was a broken bone or anything, the doctor came to the house?

Williamson: Yes, the doctor came to the house, and the hospitals, well, they had them, but few people could afford to go or had the time. It wasn't like it is now.

IL: And what about when the babies were delivered, were they delivered at home?

Williamson: Oh, I can tell you some things about when my children were born. I had Dr. Brown, he was a very good obstetrician and he only charged \$50 to deliver a baby and the hospitals were very reasonable. They would keep you in bed for two weeks and wait on you hand, foot, and finger and charged you \$65 for the two weeks. It sounds like a fairy tale. The times have certainly changed.

IL: Haven't they though? I liked it when you got to go to the hospital 40 years ago because you got to be Madam Queen for two weeks.

Williamson: I know it.

IL: Waiting on you hand and foot--that was fun.

Williamson: Yes and the nurses would make over your babies. They'd haul them through the aisle on a big bed or a big mattress and deliver the baby to you in the room. So it was a wonderful thing.

END OF SIDE 1 BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

Williamson: From the time was twelve I sewed my own--made my own clothes.

IL: So you really didn't go to town to shop or anything like that?

Williamson: Very little. We had Craemer's and Reys and a few other places and I remember they had thread, binding, scissors, and yard goods. They didn't have many stores with ready-made clothing, not when I was growing up, but as the time went on, they came more and more popular all the time.

IL: What about medicines, pharmacies, or did the doctor bring them?

Williamson: Well, they had medicine shows or. ..

IL: Now where did you buy them?

Williamson: Well, we didn't buy too much, but I remember my father liked to have a bottle of liniment and he'd take some kind of pills, I don't remember what they were for. We had kind of what they called a medicine chest and there would be a few bottles in there.

IL: But you don't know where they came from?

Williamson: My mother would have absolutely nothing to do with anything in a bottle or a can or an ointment or anything. She was never sick a day in her life and she didn't think anybody else would be sick either. She had no time for any medicine.

IL: Isn't that interesting?

Williamson: Well, she was never sick and she lived--at the time when she passed away, why, we had a little talk. She talked to me and told me that she wasn't going to make it or didn't expect to make it. That night we took her to the hospital and the next day at two o'clock she was gone.

IL: The only time she was sick.

Williamson: The only time she was ever in the hospital, too, and we were born without--I think that she had either a midwife or a doctor--but at the house, not at the hospital.

IL: Do you remember any restaurants in the city of Cedar Rapids?

Williamson: Oh, yes. There was a Stark's Hotel. It was a big place near the river. When they had food left over, they always took it over to the jail--any food that was left over from the day's cooking.

IL: And you went there, there was a restaurant. . .

Williamson: Well, when they came in from Solon, why, they always put the horses in the livery barn and they planned to stay all day. But they had dinner and supper usually at Stark's Hotel, they knew people there and they had a good time. They served all the food in bowls. They served pie and wouldn't think of letting you go without a piece of pie when they had dinner or supper. And bowls of soup, they had that. My older sister, half sisters, worked there and I think my mother, before she was married, worked there for a while. Stark's Hotel, they could talk German, Bohemia, and all the languages. They had a lot of college students that worked there, too, for their room and board--just for their board not the room--or Stark's Hotel, I guess maybe they did have rooms there--but they had college students that worked there too. They were always a lot of fun. The girls always had a big time with the boys, throwing water at each other and I don't know what all.

IL: And that was down on the river?

Williamson: Yes. Part of it faced the street and part of it faced the river. It was on the east side, east side of the river. The west side never amounted to very much; it was always the east side. It was a big. . .

IL: I'm trying to place the Stark's Hotel. What would be near it?

Williamson: Well, I think now it would be like Third Avenue or Second Avenue. I don't think it was on First Avenue. I think it was either Second or Third Avenue right across the river on the east side.

IL: Sort of where that parking ramp is now?

Williamson: Yes, parking ramp.

IL: Do you remember an icehouse? What did you do for ice when you were on the farm? Cut up from the creek or. . .

Williamson: Well, they didn't have any.

IL: You didn't have ice?

Williamson: We didn't have ice. But I remember we lived at Ellis Park and they cut ice in the winterime. They had Hubbard Ice Company, I don't know if there was more than Hubbard or not, but I remember as a child, the ice wagon would go through the neighborhood and a group of children would always be following the ice wagon. They'd chip off a little bit here and there and let the kids have it.

IL: And if you were lucky, the driver let you get into the icemaker, too.

Williamson: Yes.

IL: We used to do that. You mentioned a while ago the Farmers' Market, that was on First Street on the riverbank.

Williamson: Yes, F Avenue.

IL: And did you have your jellies there, too?

Williamson: Well, I had a real nice neighbor that lived close by, she was quite heavy set, and she always liked to have a little help from the other neighbors, that could do it. So she'd ask me quite often to help her. She'd have a bake sale. She had a stall at the market, that was the very first that I knew anything about the City Market. I was quite shy and I thought twice before I went with her, but I thought, "Well, if she needs help, I'll go with her". I was very shy the first and second time that we went. She had a nice, big bake sale, made quite a little money on it. She'd have cake, pie, and different things. That was for one year or two years I did that and then it came to me, "Well, why don't I rent one of these stalls and bring my own things to the market?" So that came to me and the following year I did. I started out with, my mother was a great gardener, she had a lot of nice vegetables, and I'd load up what I thought I could sell and then take a little of my own things. I'd make bread and buttered pickles, sold them for 25 cents a pint. Then I had maybe four kinds of jelly or preserves and I had no labels. I'd have them in rows and then if a customer would come, I'd say, now, this is currant and this is plum, and this is peach, and this is apricot or whatever it was, or

strawberry, or black raspberry, red raspberry, whatever kind it was, but I'd usually have about four kinds and maybe 10 or 12 jars of each one. I remember one time a lady bought a dozen jars and I never, hardly, got over it because to make a sale like that was outstanding. That was the first year and then the second year I got labels and kept adding to it. Most of it was wild stuff. Some of it was raised and some was wild, raspberries and blackberries and gooseberries. We could get good pans of wild things to use in making the jelly and the jams. So then little by little it grew until in the end, I was taking about 30 dozen a week.

IL: Just imagine it, 30 dozen. You must have spent all week making jelly.

Williamson: Well, it was quite a chore, especially when I raised it. But it was nice to have your own things because I couldn't have hardly afforded to buy it, even currants were around 35 and 40 cents a quart at that time.

IL: But you went out and picked all the wild things and the. . .

Williamson: Some I raised and some I picked wild. That was the way it went.

IL: Do you remember any mills on the river, like the packing house?

Williamson: Oh, those places were old.

IL: We were talking about the mills on the river.

Williamson: Well, let's see, mills--would that be saw mills?

IL: Well, any kind, just any that you remember.

Williamson: Oh, like the ground flour. Now my nephew and his wife--their mother ground pure wheat, nothing taken away from it. But they lived at, I don't know if it was DeWitt, or. . . They were Quakers and she had her own mill. They ground the flour, sold it by the pound.

IL: Here on the Cedar River in Cedar Rapids?

Williamson: Well, I don't know if the mill was on the Cedar River or where it was. But they were very--and to this day, they won't hardly use anything that's polluted or mixed up or, what do they call it?

IL: Polluted.

Williamson: Oh, I can't think of it.

IL: Spoiled?

Williamson: Well, it's preserved.

IL: Let's go on to something else.

Williamson: Yes, all right.

IL: Have you noticed the difference in the values and the discipline of children growing up?

Williamson: Oh, yes.

IL: Then and now.

Williamson: Yes, very much so. The times have changed and they've got altogether different ideas. They don't seem to have the same ideas that the farm children had. The city children are so much different.

IL: Even today, I think.

Williamson: Oh, yes.

IL: Even though the farm children had their cars and could go to town?

Williamson: Yes.

IL: There's still a different set of values.

Williamson: There's still different groups of children. But I feel sorry for the city children, especially the Negroes, they have a hard time. If they don't have their own money, why then, they see that they get whatever they want anyway. It's sort of a hard life.

IL: When you were growing up, charity, where did charity enter your life? Was it just to your neighbors, to your own families? Was that mostly where your charity was directed?

Williamson: Well, I don't think that. Now every time you turn around, somebody is asking you to give a donation. There was a time when they didn't do that.

IL: Do you remember when women got the right to vote?

Williamson: Well, quite a bit, but it didn't make any difference in our family because we had German and Bohemian ideas. It didn't take in the . . .

IL: Tell me something, with the German and the Czech members of your family, was there any feeling during World War I? Do you remember?

Williamson: Oh, yes. My mother had relatives, in fact, she stayed with them when she came to this country, when she first came over to this country. I remember there was a piece in the Gazette. The headline was, "Old Bill's Dad, he was hanging on the wall". That was this place, where she stayed. She stayed at his home and he had a picture of Old Bill's Daddy. That would have been, who had that been? That was Hitler, that was. . .

IL: The Kaiser?

Williamson: The Kaiser. Old Bill's Dad, he was hanging on the wall, that was the headline. Then it went on to say that these people lived in Kenwood Park. They had a lovely home there, nice, big, two-story home and that's where the picture was of the Kaiser. So I guess they had to get rid of that.

IL: But there wasn't any feeling, within your family?

Williamson: Of a . . .

IL: The fact that there was a German and Czech?

Williamson: No, oh no.

IL: In World War I.

Williamson: No, see we lived over there, then. Pullman trains went through and soldier boys were hanging out of the windows and. . .

IL: Do you remember some of the historic events? I doubt it if you do, like Starch Works? Do you remember that?

Williamson: Yes. I was about, oh, eleven, ten years old I think. We came home from town and that big explosion happened.

IL: After you got home and did your. . .

IL: Do you remember the bank closings in 1933? Did that. . .

Williamson: That as from the Depression, yes. I remember that day. You couldn't--if you had money in the bank, it was just too bad, you couldn't draw it out. They wouldn't let you have your money. But when Roosevelt got in, why, it all changed. He changed things around. The wages doubled and everything was altogether different.

IL: And do you remember Prohibition? Did that affect you?

Williamson: Oh, yes. I remember Prohibition. It didn't affect me any, but I remember lots of talk about it and I think a few people did get caught doing something they shouldn't be doing.

IL: But it really didn't affect you around here?

Williamson: No.

IL: And the roaring '20's. Do you remember the roaring '20's?

Williamson: Oh, yes, the roaring '20's. They had bobby socks and--what kind of little shoes did they have? It was altogether different than what. . .--and they had a lot of beads and all wore hats and fancy dresses. They had shows and a lot going on.

you'd have a hard time because you'd be talking to about five people at one time and they'd be wanting all kinds of things. You'd have a very hard time getting your counter set up. So it was always a good idea to get there early.

IL: Nowadays I go on Tuesday afternoon or Saturday morning.

Williamson: Oh, yes, that's Tuesday, but they didn't have Tuesdays.

IL: They didn't have afternoon?

Williamson: No, they didn't have Tuesday, but I had so much to do, I didn't go during the week. Saturday was the main day that I sold my produce. People already knew that I wouldn't be there during the week, so they didn't come to buy my things at that time, but the vegetables were always good.

IL: 1975 was your last year there?

Williamson: Yes, it was the last time. I enjoyed every bit of it for the 30 years that I worked on the market.

END OF SIDE TWO -- END OF INTERVIEW

