

Joseph F. Hladky, Jr. was born August 25, 1910 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa to Joseph F. and Laura Hladky. His parents were grocers in Cedar Rapids and in this interview we learn something about the business and economy during this time as well as some of the day to day activities, amusements and lifestyle of the day. At present, Mr. Hladky is chairman of the Board of The Cedar Rapids Gazette Company and Cedar Rapids Television.

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
Joseph Hladky, Jr.

Conducted by Inez Lyon
June 11, 1985
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Transcribed by Sue Daugherty

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Oral History Project

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IL: This is an interview with Joseph F. Hladky, Jr., chairman of the board of the Cedar Rapids Gazette. I'm Inez Lyon. Mr. Hladky is chairman of the board of the Cedar Rapids Gazette Company and Hladky: Cedar Rapids Television.

IL: and Cedar Rapids Television.

Joe, you were born in Cedar Rapids? [August 25, 1910]

Hladky: Yes.

IL: And your parents were Joseph, Sr?

Hladky: Yes.

IL: And your mother?

Hladky: Was Laura.

IL: Laura. Hladky.

Hladky: They were both born in Cedar Rapids.

IL: They were.

Hladky: Their parents came over when they were eight or nine years old from the then province of Bohemia, which is now part of Czechoslovakia.

IL: And did you know your grandparents?

Hladky: One of them I have faint recollection of, they all died early, before my time, I guess.

IL: Then your parents were born here. Did your dad have the grocery store?

Hladky: Yes, he had the grocery store. I was born above the thing and I, needless to say, worked there for a long period of time and finally went to Coe and then I went to Iowa. Then I did some other types of work and tried to get into a manufacturing business with my brother and it was almost successful but not quite. Then I ended up at the Gazette after having married Jane Miller, whose father was president. Started up in the advertising department and worked at that for quite a period of time, both local and national advertising. Then I was here, of course, during the change of management and as a result I was called into play to some degree. When Mr. Miller died, Jim Falkes became president and general manager. Then when he died, I was named president and general manager and have been since . . . I guess he died in 1958 maybe. I'm not sure when.

IL: Did I understand that you were instrumental in the organization of the TV affiliates? For ABC?

Hladky: Yes. Along with a group of people, we met in Kansas City, an ABC meeting. We realized the affiliates had a very severe problem and as much as ABC as a network was a fledgling and didn't render a lot of service for the stations or the public. So at the next NAB meeting--National Association of Broadcasters--we got together and we needed an organization and I, of course, had been working on it. We'd had a preliminary meeting in Kansas City and then we went to Chicago and formed the board and I was on it and then I served on it about ten, eleven years, I guess as a full member. I was chairman, I think the third chairman of the thing. I have been very active with it since, inasmuch as

the structure is that the past chairmen attend the meetings on an ex officio basis. I have attended every one of them since and the organization has been in existence for about thirty years.

IL: Has it been that long? And it has become very important to the national ABC organization.

Hladky: Well, yes. But, of course, there is one unalterable fact that affiliates have to recognize that the network has a hold of the handle of the whip and so the affiliates, if it gets into a problem where it could affect their best interests, it takes a little bit of doing and persuasion and salesmanship to get them to alter their plans, which on occasion we have been able to do. Maybe not as much as we would like.

IL: The national organization's ear to the ground is the affiliate's organization, right?

Hladky: Yes.

IL: And now you are retired from that? Are you still a . . . ?

Hladky: No, I'm still involved with it. That is to the extent of being a past chairman and attending those meetings that I care to attend. And I sit in their formal meetings. But we past chairmen normally don't say anything unless we're asked. It depends on the makeup of the board whether they ask the "old goats", as they are referred to, any questions or whether they don't. This last two or three years they've been a little bit more demanding on our services. We're trying to get money for it but they won't pay us.

IL: Maybe ABC will pay the affiliates. (Laughter)

Hladky: The affiliate board.

IL: Now you are semi-retired from the business.

Hladky: No, I have no active function at the Gazette at this time.

IL: At this time. Shall we go back to your early childhood, some of the things you remember. I mentioned the other day Demoore's grocery store. So far, I'm the only one that remembers Demoore's grocery store. Do you remember Demoore's grocery store?

Hladky: They were in various locations, as I recall, I can't remember it exactly, but they had a very large business, a large volume. As did Armstrong and Mohl. Irving Emory had a store I believe and the Sid Liebsohn had the Fair grocery. Later on Doosters, I think, came into the picture, early out at the Fifth Avenue grocery and so forth. Then there were, of course, smaller stores but not the size of these stores.

IL: Those were in 1913, pre World War I, or during or following?

Hladky: I think they went up pretty much through World War I. Then it started to . . . I can't remember when the A & P came into town. That was one of the first chains, so to speak, or larger stores. I presume that that was around the early twenties, I would guess.

IL: Now did your dad have the grocery store at that time? Was he on Sixteenth Street?

Hladky: Sixteenth Street and Fourth Avenue. They had the store since probably, they started it, I would imagine around 1902.

IL: Was your grandfather a grocer, too?

Hladky: No. Well, he was in a sense. One grandfather was a cabinetmaker primarily and then in later years he sort of gave that up and he had a small store next to his house up on Fourth Avenue and

Seventh Street but it didn't amount to much and he just had it as basically a plaything. He spent most of his time with music at that time. He was a fairly decent violinist.

IL: None of your family got that talent?

Hladky: Probably have it but then they never developed it.

IL: Jane likes the opera but I never heard of your boys or you interested in music.

Hladky: I like music very much but I don't particularly care for the screaming that too many operas have. I like good music.

IL: You do. What kind of music do you like?

Hladky: I like the symphony. I thoroughly enjoy a good organ concert. I like music generally. Except that I have some difficulty with opera.

IL: Do you remember horse-drawn vehicles around town at all?

Hladky: Oh, yes, there were some but not very much.

IL: The ice wagon.

Hladky: Yes, I suppose, I didn't think of those. But not for too awful long. The kids always used to follow them to get chips of ice as they were breaking the blocks to take into the houses and so forth to put into the ice box, which is what they were called. Many people still call them ice boxes, I guess, even though they're refrigerators.

IL: The streetcar went on Bever and the InterUrban on Fourth.

Hladky: Fifth.

IL: Fifth.

Hladky: The InterUrban on Fifth Avenue originally went on to Mt. Vernon and Tipton, I believe, or Lisbon, I mean. Then I think at one

time at . . . no, that line didn't go to Waterloo, that one there went by St. Luke's hospital. There was a local transit on Fifth Avenue, too, for a period. Electric cars. As well as the one on Bever Avenue.

IL: Yes, there was.

Hladky: I don't know how long that lasted. I can't remember exactly, hadn't thought of it till just now. They did have local service up to, I think about Forest Drive and probably 20th Street, 21st, someplace in there.

IL: The InterUrban to Iowa City, did you use that when you were going to school down there?

Hladky: No, I had a car. I used it on occasion. I spent a night in one of the cars. We had gone over to Illinois to interview a person for a job here and a tremendous blizzard came up and we started out from Iowa City and couldn't drive any further and left the car there and got on the InterUrban and we got out to just above Köningsmark and ran into an impenetrable snowdrift. It was just packed tremendously hard and the conductor wanted to get home apparently. He kept plowing into it and we were afraid that he was going to burn up something so we prevailed on him to quit trying to get out of there because he couldn't. So we sat in the car the rest of the night. The light company sent people out to retrieve us at about seven o'clock in the morning.

IL: Now when was that?

Hladky: That had to be 1945, I suppose, someplace in there.

IL: That's almost recent. (laughter)

Hladky: (Laughter) Almost recent. But it was quite an institution for

a long period of time. I guess the factors in its demise were tremendously high insurance rates and the union regulations that caused over staffing or over-manning of the cars.

IL: Do you remember the seedling mile?

Hladky: Yes. That was on Highway 30. It was. . . I can't remember . . . ten miles or something like that. Then, when that was open, everybody got into their automobiles and went out to drive the paving. I remember going out with my folks. We were driving a Chalmer's car at that time, I believe.

IL: A Sunday ride.

Hladky: Yes.

IL: Do you remember the Hunter airport?

Hladky: Oh, yes, indeed. That was started by Dan Hunter, he lived just a half a block from my dad's store. His father was a railroad man, I think a railroad conductor if I recall correctly. Dan was there and he went into World War I and came back as a flyer and interested in aviation and he wanted to pursue it. He met a very attractive woman by the name of Gwen, her first name was Gwen. She later said she fell in love with his damned old brass buttons. Anyway, they led a very happy life. She helped helped him get started with the passenger business in his early vintage airplanes. He had the thing and he was assisted quite a little bit in finances, I think, by Howard Hall. It went along very, very well. The airport became a part of the Chamber of Commerce development package. So that's where we got the Goss, Miehle--Goss Printing Press plant out there after Dan had closed up or he sold the airport to the city.

IL: He sold his airport to the city?

Hladky: He gave up his operation of it. It was owned by the city, as I recall. I can't remember the legal technicality of it.

IL: And Miehle Goss is on that spot?

Hladky: Part of it, yes.

IL: Out where that road is now?

Hladky: Bowling Street.

IL: It is Bowling Street.

Hladky: Miehle - Goss had been looking for a place to build another plant because they needed one very badly. I knew the people very well and I tried to prevail on them to come to Cedar Rapids and they just said that they had a search firm conducting this thing. So, of course, there were always search firms coming in at that time, frequently coming into the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber said that there were some people coming in and they wanted to have some of the Industrial committee meet with these representatives of the firm at the Roosevelt Hotel for breakfast the next day. So Bill Crawford and I went. We were quite surprised--or I was very, very surprised-- because the two people that were there were Jim Coltrap, who was president of Miehle - Goss, Dexter, and Ed Morrison, who were both very close personal friends of mine. Of course, they had screened all the towns up to Cedar Rapids and two or three in Illinois. So needless to say, we tried to put on the best front we possibly could for them. Howard Hall was very interested in getting industry in here and he was prevailed upon to use his showplace for some subsequent meetings and have lunches out there. It just finally

grew and we were fortunate enough to get Miehle, Goss in here and at the peak were employing maybe six or seven hundred people as I recall. They're still operating out there but it's probably a little less than that now.

IL: When did they come to Cedar Rapids? Do you remember the date?

Hladky: No, I don't.

IL: Was it around 1960 maybe?

Hladky: Could be. I know I took quite a beating from other newspaper publishers after the plant was announced that it was going to be here in Cedar Rapids and after they actually came here. They used the argument that--one fellow said, "I don't know why they came to Cedar Rapids. You only have six of their units and I have twelve!"--and so forth. Of course, they wanted the labor market and the good location which we were able to give them here with that airport property.

IL: Back to the early days--the newspapers here in town, do you remember any of them?

Hladky: Well, I remember the Republican, yes. It was the morning paper and a very good one. But they had some trouble with circulation. Or the advertisers primarily, the circulation wasn't too bad as it turned out. The Gazette finally bought them. I know that the guys here were quite surprised that the circulation was as it was. So they merged the two papers together and for a short period of time, I guess, they maintained the two edition situation but not for too long. Other than the Labor paper and the Czech Language paper, I think that was about all of any significance that were here.

IL: Is the Czech Language newspaper still in existence here now?

Hladky: No, not here, I don't believe. There is one that comes in but I think it comes out of Chicago but I'm not sure on that.

IL: And did you say a Union paper?

Hladky: Yes.

IL: There is? Is there one here now?

Hladky: Not to my knowledge, no. It was located in about the center-- or a little below center--of the Armstrong store on Third Avenue. Where, I think it's owned by--I'm not sure whether it's--the Higleys or O'Donnells, Barnes property. It was the building between the Granby and the Armstrong building on Third Avenue. Of course, I think those people still own the real estate and it's a rental situation. Of course, it's been incorporated, it's hard to tell where it was, but Wolfe's clothing company was in there at the end and Schoen, Lee Schoen, the furrier was in that building for many, many years. He was a very good operator and was an extremely successful person. As I recall, they had two daughters. One of them, Elsie, she and I were in the same class at Johnson school. She was quite a smart gal, I don't know what happened to her. Then, she had another sister and I don't remember what her . . .

IL: Eugenie.

Hladky: Eugenie?

IL: I knew Eugenie someplace along the line.

Hladky: Well, one of them changed her named to Natalie, I guess Elsie did. Do you remember that?

IL: You mentioned Johnson school. We're kind of jumping around here.

Did you go all through Johnson school?

Hladky: Yes.

IL: Then to McKinley? Did you go to McKinley?

Hladky: I went to McKinley for one year and then Franklin was finished and they changed the school districts a bit and I was on one side of the street that went to Franklin.

IL: I went to McKinley at that time.

Hladky: You would. (Laughter)

IL: Great rivals. (Laughter)

Then, to old Washington. Joe, do you remember any of your teachers, as you were growing up, in school?

Hladky: Well, I can't think of some of the names. There was one second grade teacher the kids were scared to death of, but she was a heck of a good teacher.

IL: Was it Miss Kugler, by any chance?

Hladky: No, I don't recall that name, but she had courage enough to do what is illegal now. If you didn't tend to your P's and Q's, she would beat your bottom. Which was very good in my opinion. They were all good teachers there, I think, for the most part. Then I went from there to McKinley for a year then went to the other school.

IL: Fran Prescott was, of course, the principal at McKinley at that time.

Hladky: Yes. Of course, I knew her and I really had known her early on because she was an Aunt of Bill Ellwood. Whereas he lived a long ways from where I lived, occasionally the gangs would get together and at that time I met his aunt and, of course, his

mother and father. She was a very, very outgoing and a very, very astute leader, I think.

IL: Miss Prescott, you mean.

Hladky: Yes.

IL: Yes. I agree. She also had everything under control over there at McKinley.

Hladky: Well, I think she did about as good as she could with the . . .

IL: . . . the mess. . .

Hladky: . . . the composite makeup of the . . .

IL: (Laughter) What a marvelous way to put it, Joe. And it was a composite.

Hladky: It was that. But she did a tremendous job and it worked very well, I think. I sort of hated to leave the school and go to Franklin because it was a lot further. But it was all right, I enjoyed Franklin.

IL: Who was the principal at Franklin? Do you remember?

Hladky: No, I do not. Holman was down at Washington High. Got in trouble with him. But I can't remember the one at Franklin. I was lucky enough, I didn't have too much contact with the disciplinary division of Franklin at that time. (Laughter) Which was unusual.

IL: (Laughter) And Donna Washington, Mr. Holman, and . . .

Hladky: . . . Abbie Abbott was, of course, there for a long, long period of time. She was the principal. She was of Indian heritage. I mean American Indian. I guess the other's Hindu. She was a very, very capable person--very strict but she had a very tough job because she had all of the east side and well,

actually a lot of the west side because Grant school was a vocational school primarily--which is now where the Board of Education is--and yet she did a wonderful job and everybody loved her. She was tougher than nails and she knew what she wanted to do and she did it, in spite of some of the pranks--and some very dangerous pranks--that were pulled while she was there. She controlled it very well.

IL: Did they have the assemblies for Washington over at the State Theatre when you were there or did they still have assemblies in the building or do you remember?

Hladky: I don't remember going over to the State Theatre.

IL: Apparently that was later, then.

Hladky: Of course, Washington didn't last a whole lot longer after. . .

IL: Well, my sister was in the last class and I think it was about 1935.

How did you get to Washington? Did you walk or ride the street-car?

Hladky: Walked for the most part. It wasn't very far.

IL: Do you remember the first radios?

Hladky: Yes.

IL: You were sort of in the neighborhood with Art Collins, too, in the circle.

Hladky: Yes. We used to play with him a little bit when we were real young.

IL: Do you remember any comments, when you got your first radio, about static at Arthur Collins'?

Hladky: No, I don't recall that.

IL: Do you remember any of the radio shows that you used to listen to?

Hladky: No, not really, I used to listen to a Pittsburgh station, I can't think of the . . .

IL: KDKA.

Hladky: KDKA. (Laughter) And some of WHO. Art Collins, he and Paul Engle became quite close friends. Paul worked in the drug store next to my dad's store and Art used to come down there on occasion. Once in a great while he'd bring his pony down. He'd let me ride it and so forth.

IL: Let me move into the entertainment area. Do you remember the early movies? Did you go to the early movies?

Hladky: Yes. Every chance I could get. The Strand. Of course, it was all silent movies at that time. The Strand on Third Avenue and the Isis on Second Avenue by where there's a beauty shop there now. Across was the Palace and then over on First Avenue was the Rialto, I believe. Then there was one down on the south end where the building that the community players had for a long period of time. Those are the basic ones that I can recall.

IL: Then do you remember when the Paramount and the Iowa were built . . . opened?

Hladky: Oh, sure. That was quite the thing. It was quite uptown for Cedar Rapids at the time. I later have heard them describe, particularly the Paramount, it was an element of Katz renaissance. (Laughter) The Iowa was a little more sedate.

IL: And now, of course, the Paramount's considered very elegant.

Hladky: That's Katz influence.

IL: Yes. (Laughter) And you know, when you go there, and the lights come up and you look around, it is quite pretty. It really is lovely.

Hladky: It's too bad it can't be duplicated anymore. It costs a little too much.

IL: Do you remember the Manhattan Dance Pavilion? Manhattan Park?

Hladky: Yes. Frank Bucheiser ran it when I was going out there. He was quite an operator, quite a good one, I guess. Then he had Dance-land on Third Street and A Avenue on the second floor.

IL: With the laundry under it.

Hladky: Yes. New Process. No, there was a garage directly underneath. Well, it was part of it, yes. But there was a garage under part of it.

IL: Do you remember Dreamland?

Hladky: Yes. That was Fourth Avenue and Second Street and there was a garage underneath that, too.

IL: Do you remember Chautauqua? Did you ever have anything to do with that?

Hladky: Well, I remember it because--let's see, what's their name now, they lived in Cedar Rapids, one of the former Chautauqua operator . . .

IL: Keith Vawter?

Hladky: Keith Vawter, yes. They lived there and I think they traded at my dad's store to some extent. But they were, as you know, their influence was much beyond Cedar Rapids. As to actually attending their sessions or functions or entertainment, whatever it might be, I did not.

IL: Do you remember the Little Gallery? The art gallery over next to the Sadie Apartments?

Hladky: I just have a faint recollection of it.

IL: Remember circuses?

Hladky: Yes indeed. Real early on they were out in Mount Farm. Then they went where Link Belt Speeder is on Sixth Street SW. That was the circus grounds. My uncle used to take me when I was a kid when they were unloading it about four o'clock in the morning.

IL: And you were there and saw them unloading?

Hladky: That was a big treat and then we went to the show in the afternoon.

IL: And the parades. Do you remember the parades?

Hladky: Yes. The elephants and the lions and the pretty girls and everything riding bareback on the horses and so forth.

IL: An those elegant carriages. Elegant. , ,

Hladky: Animal cages?

IL: Animal cages. (Laughter)

Hladky: Yes, they're quite something.

IL: Do you remember the Cherry sisters? Did you ever see them?

Hladky: Once or twice. Of course, they were in the big time, so to speak, such a part of the big time. But they, seemingly, had a place in the entertainment world. They were ridiculed and so forth, but people still went to see them and hear them.

IL: Never could figure that out except they said that in New York they were so fad. That's why people went and they had to put a screen up to catch all the tomatoes and stuff.

Hladky: Yes. I guess that's right.

IL: Can you imagine that?

Did you ever know Grant Wood?

Hladky: Yes. I went to an art class with him at McKinley. He was very interesting, he was very outspoken and he said what he thought, which sometimes shocked the students, particularly the conservative young ladies in the class. It was never too bad.

IL: Was there quite a group there or was it a small class?

Hladky: It wasn't too large a class as I recall. It was very interesting, he seemed to get through to students--what art is and so forth.

IL: So you really learned from him. He was a good teacher.

Hladky: Well, I didn't know anything before, so if I knew what a picture was why of course, I learned something. (Laughter) Yes, I felt that I got something out of it, I really did.

IL: Did Carl VanVechten ever cross your path?

Hladky: No. I did not know anything about him except by hearing my folks mention him.

IL: Marvin Cone?

Hladky: Oh, yes. I had a French class with him at Coe. Not doing a whole lot of painting at that . . . oh, yes, he was, too. He was doing a fair amount of painting. They lived not too far from my dad's store, they traded there to a great degree. He was, of course, quite a close friend of Grant Wood's. But I never was involved in . . . close to that relationship.

IL: Do you remember holidays? What holidays were like growing up? For instance, the Fourth of July.

Hladky: I didn't have to work.

IL: (Laughter) The store was closed.

Hladky: The Fourth of July, of course, with the fireworks and so forth. The kids in the neighborhood always, the idea was to be the first one up in the morning to shoot off the first firecracker, then we were all out of them by by seven o'clock or so in the morning and then stood around and wondered what happened with all our fireworks that we'd spent our money that we'd saved. But they were dangerous, of course. But they used to have ball-games and lots of entertainments. My parents, my mother particularly, had an awful lot of relatives on farms around town, or around south of town. We used to go out there on picnics a lot.

IL: Any night fireworks? Do you remember any of those?

Hladky: Yes. They had them. I can't remember exactly where they were. I don't remember when the country club started having fireworks. But when they did, why of course, everybody went out and got as close as they could on the streets around Cedar Rapids Country Club to watch them. Then they gave them up, you know, several years ago. Then it went out to Hawkeye Downs and so forth. Night fireworks were very picturesque and so forth.

IL: Lots of fun--but dangerous.

Hladky: Quite dangerous.

IL: Of course, how we all lived through them.

Do you remember any celebration of Memorial Day?

Hladky: Well, it was another good day not to work. We used to do quite a bit of stuff and we'd go to the races and so forth. Swimming,

IL: Where were the races? Out at Hawkeye Downs? No, there wasn't any Hawkeye Downs.

Hladky: There wasn't any Hawkeye Downs until they had the rodeo out there.

Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself there. Early, very early, I guess I didn't go to races.

IL: Did Thanksgiving and Christmas mean a lot in your family? When you were growing up were those big days?

Hladky: Yes, of course. Thanksgiving: too much eating. Christmastime: too much eating and the presents were always very adequate and so forth. They were days to look forward to and wonder what Santy Claus was going to bring and afterwards you didn't want to realize that Santa Claus didn't exist really. Kids weren't quite as sophisticated then as they are now.

IL: Was there a special food--I know you and Jane have goose on Thanksgiving or Christmas. Did your family have any special. .

Hladky: No, they didn't do that particularly. Oh, they'd have goose, mother would roast a goose once in awhile but not very often. My dad didn't particularly care for poultry so it would usually be either pork or beef or chicken. And he didn't care for chicken either particularly, but he would eat it. But the goose thing, I just sort of like it myself and I used to like to monkey with it and we had a spit in front of the fireplace at home. I could get four geese on the darn thing.

IL: Do you remember anything about saloons or taverns?

Hladky: Sure, once in a while I'd have to go down and get a bucket of beer--it cost ten cents, I think--and carry it home on my bicycle for my dad to drink.

IL: Now, where did you get it?

Hladky: The saloon where Freddy Wells' building is now on Third Avenue by the railroad tracks. There was a big saloon in there, I

don't remember whose it was.

IL: And you would go down there on your bicycle and . . .

Hladky: Yes. Kids at that time could go down there. I had a big tin bucket and I think it was a dime to fill it up and then I'd get on my bicycle and take it back for my father to drink.

IL: Do you remember what the saloon was like?

Hladky: Yes. Very faintly because kids could only get. . . I think they made us stay outside, if I recall correctly. We, of course, would sneak a look once in a while. And they had a lot of food on one end of the bar and a lot of men standing up there and there were some tables. I don't recall seeing many women in them at that time. Of course, I was there just in the daytime, I didn't go down there at night.

IL: When you were growing up, was your mother at home all the time or did she . . .?

Hladky: No, she was in the store. She worked in there all the time. So she worked too hard, of course, and she finally, in later years couldn't give it up.

IL: I know she loved it.

Hladky: That was her only life. And after my dad got a stroke then Don ran the thing. He took it the same way. He just got too firmly entrenched in it and he just didn't get out and do things that he should have done.

IL: Were your parents strict with you? Do you remember growing up at that time? Were parents stricter then or did you have quite a bit of leeway and free time?

Hladky: No, I didn't. I didn't have much free time, cause I was always

working. I, of course, had some. I didn't have a chain around my ankles but yes, I suppose they could have been a little stricter. If I misbehaved, my dad just slapped me across the face and he did a pretty good job of that. But it didn't cure me, I got into enough trouble without . . .

IL: (Laughter) Were there lots of jobs? Of course, you don't know, because you were always working in the store, weren't you? I was going to ask if there were jobs available.

Hladky: After high school, I guess, the next few years, friends had an awful time. They just wandered aimlessly around the neighborhood because they didn't have anything to do and couldn't get jobs.

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IL: What kind of jobs were they, were they yard jobs or delivery jobs?

Hladky: Well, actually, during the early Depression, there just didn't seem to be any jobs. I don't recall that they talked much about yard jobs or that type of thing. They just plain didn't have anything to do. And later on, of course, some of them worked in gas stations and so forth.

IL: Do you remember ever being in the hospital? Anything about the hospital?

Hladky: Well, I had an emergency appendix operation when I was, I guess, maybe sixteen or so years old. I was taken to the hospital in an ambulance and so forth, with the siren blowing and sounding and so forth. I had to lay there ten days, as I recall.

IL: Were you at Mercy or St. Luke's?

Hladky: Mercy. Didn't like it particularly, but that's where I was.

IL: Do you remember anything about it except just being there?

Hladky: No. I think at the time, for a day or two or three, you had a private nurse and that sort of thing, which of course is a little different than this day and age. (Laughter)

IL: Do you remember lots of the local businesses? Do you remember retail stores downtown? Do you remember factories?

Hladky: Well, yes I do. Factories, of course, Quaker Oats which is of course tremendously important and dominant institution here. Then there was Penick and Ford and Douglas Starch Works. There was the packing house, T. M. Sinclair packing plant and of course, they had some manufacturing businesses here, Lattner, P. M. Lattner and some other machine shops, I can't think of the name of them. Of course, the Iowa Manufacturing, that didn't really become dominant until a little later, but then it grew very fast, rapidly, as you know.

IL: Do you remember the Starch Works explosion?

Hladky: Yes. I was a kid. Nobody knew exactly what it was. We were outside playing and heard this and finally my dad got us in the car and we went as close as we could and walked a ways because they kept people a long way away from it. It was a very chaotic thing, of course.

IL: And you were out playing, you say at the time.

Hladky: As I recall, it was early evening.

IL: The department stores, do you remember?

Hladky: There was Denecke's, which was later bought out by Newman

Newberger and Carl Ettinger family, I think they were from Springfield, Missouri, someplace in Missouri. And they operated it for a long period of time, as you know. They got out of the business and Nick Craemer, Craemer's had a very good store, very good reputation. It was a little narrower line of merchandise, it was more or less notions and yardgoods and household goods, as I recall it, in the earlier days. Until they built the new building and they got further into ready-to-wear and that sort of thing. And then of course Armstrong's was primarily all men. It was, of course, a much smaller operation at that time, early on. Killian's were growing and went very, very fast. A.L. Killian was a tremendous merchandiser and had a great dedication to the store and merchandising and good service and quality merchandise. Of course, he was dominant without a question in this community as far as retailing was concerned. Then there was, of course, the O'Meara Clothing company was a very dominant men's furnishings and clothing. There was a smaller store, the Severa Clothing company, down on Twelfth Avenue and Third Street. They had Hart, Shaftner, Marx mens' clothing and they had work clothes, of course, being in that location. I always got a kick out of it, he had Hartshafner and Marks, as did Armstrong's. That always sort of irritated Robert. He didn't think they should have anything down there. Of course, business in that area was dying out, so they sort of died on the vine. A . L. Killian used to have his nine-day nine cent sale which was a tremendous event for this area. It was in August, I think. He would just literally load the town

people could hardly walk on the streets of Cedar Rapids. It's hard to envision at this time but much like Fifth Avenue in New York, in the middle forties, fifties--streets I mean, of New York--Saks and all those stores. . . hardly walk there and that's the way Cedar Rapids was when A.L. Killian had his nine-day, nine cents sale. Of course, all of the merchants in town benefited by it because he brought in . . .

IL: . . . and there were lots of merchants down there, too.

Hladky: Yes, there were. There were many, many stores. There was a beautiful retail set-up, and then, of course, things were changing. The chain stores were coming in and caused a problem for some of them and the weaker ones would fall off and then, of course, the malls started. That caused some trouble. I like to chide Robert Armstrong now about--in fact, I told him a little while back, I'll mention it again--I said, "You know, Robert, it's just really too bad that there was an age differential between you and A.L. Killian because it would have been really a tremendous thing for Cedar Rapids and it would have been a lot of fun for you two guys to be toe and toe in competition. Because, I said, that would really be something." Because they were two of the--A.L., in his time, without a question was, I think, the top merchandiser in this area and Robert, of course, was just learning at that time. Now, of course, Robert has proven himself to be the same caliber.

IL: Joe, what's ahead for downtown Cedar Rapids?

Hladky: Well, it's going to be a difficult thing to get it fully brought back to . . . Robert Armstrong, he acknowledges that one store

cannot carry downtown, they need more than one and he, as the record shows, has worked actively to try to get another big store down there. He was very, very disappointed when the Killian company fell by the wayside because just one store won't do it. But in the interim, and I've said this when I used to attend the Greater Downtown meetings when that organization was first started they were trying to get things into Cedar Rapids and of course Killian's was still going very strongly at that time, but there would be stores vacated and closed up and space available. So they got panicky and they tried to get anything from soup to nuts into the place and thinking of making progress. Well, sure the owner of the building got his rent out of it, but it wasn't anything. . . too much of it wasn't good for the development of retail business. Of course, there's a thing, and my friends in the banks, in the different banks probably don't like to hear me say this, but nevertheless it's true and they recognize it deep down, is that too many banks in the downtown area--in a confined downtown area, which this is by virtue of the physical plants of Quaker and the river and the railroad tracks that sort of cut things off, of course that can be changing now, and the industrial to the south--a downtown this size needed a bank and of course there were two established banks in the downtown with the People's Bank across the river which is a little bit outside of the downtown area, needless to say. The banks are not traffic generators and Brenton's built this bank, and they're very fine people and they run a very fine operation, it's a very solid good bank

but it's not a traffic builder. It does not bring people down to go into the stores. Then, of course, we have all of the building and loans and so forth that are not traffic builders. They have people in them but they're not traffic builders. So it's going to be a sort of a tough situation. The only place that's left is Third Avenue, the south side of Third Avenue, the old Montrose hotel building and the [interruption] But it's just a case where there just isn't too much room for retailer to come in and as a result it's going to be very difficult to get the downtown rejuvenated. It can be done, I'm sure, there still is enough space and if they get it started, getting more retail down there, I'm sure that some of these non-traffic type operations will move to places that will probably more advantageous to them than where they are.

IL: Do you think this mall plan will be developed there in the Montrose?

Hladky: Well, I don't know. They've tried everything in the book. The economic situation right now is sort of difficult. Iowa's getting a very great amount of adverse publicity of this farm situation. It, of course, is very, very severe, but by the same token it isn't as chaotic as is being portrayed. Generally speaking, they had an over-value on the farm land and borrowed too much against it so that has to shake out and the conservative operators are still very healthy farm operators. Of course, some of those have gone down maybe but not very many.

IL: Joe, do you have any funny incidents to tell about your dad's store?

Hladky: Well, I wasn't there, but Van Schaefer had a farm out at--my dad told me about it--someplace east of town above Marion someplace. He had some cattle out there, raised quite a few cattle. He used to trade at my dad's store and he said he was going to have one of his steers butchered and wanted to know if my dad would hang it in his refrigerator and process it as they wanted it, so to speak. So, the first thing my dad asked was how big and he said around fifteen hundred pounds, which is quite a large steer. And my dad said, "You're crazy," which is the way he would talk to him and Van, of course, was just as bull-headed and stubborn and outspoken as my dad was, he said, "Do you want to do it or don't you? Cause I want you to do that". So the old man said, "Okay, I'll do it." But he said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. At that weight, there's going to be an awful lot of fat on it and I know what your wife wants in the way of meat and it has to be cut off. There will be a lot of waste to it. I will send you the package of meat that you ask for and I will send the trimmings along with it". A short period of time passed by and it wasn't long before the package of trimmings was larger than the package of meat. And Van, in his inimitable way, according to my dad, said, "Bub, goddammit I guess you were right." (Laughter) It was not a very profitable venture for him and he didn't have anything frozen.

IL: (Laughter) Are there any other stories?

Hladky: Well, there was one lady, wife of one of the leading industries here. Husband had her on an allowance, not a very generous one, but she was generous with her spending and she had to pay all

her household bills and stuff. She was always running out of money and her husband, once in a while she would prevail on him one way or another to get a little extra money. I don't know how she did it but she got to the point where she was very far behind. People all over town were hesitant at raising very much ruckus about it, that is business people, because of her husband's position and just couldn't figures this all out. My brother had a truck driver that kind of got the secret of the thing. This lady would get her statements from all of her creditors each month and she would put them on top of the pile and then when she got her allowance, she would take the envelope on the bottom and pull it out and pay it and she'd pay it as long as she had money--paying the bills on up the line. So, knowing this fact, the maid there would like to drink, so every once in a while, she would get a bottle of bourbon and then she would move my brother's statements down to the bottom. (Laughter) So he'd get his money a little ahead of the others.

IL: Are there any others?

Hladky: Those are sort of typical. Screwy things.

IL: Those are all the questions I have to ask you, Joe. Do you have anything you'd like to say before we turn off the tape?

Hladky: Well, I think that I haven't given anything of any import here, and so forth. I was reluctant to enter into this, as you know, Inie. But I didn't try to write down any, make any notes or try to rack my brain. I just thought I'd sit here and take what comes.

IL: Well, Joe, you're real nice to let me come and I do thank you

and you have given us a lot on the tape. It may not seem like much but put it all together and the history of the city. You're history, you're a prominent member of the community and we do thank you.

Hladky: Well, thank you very much, Inie.

END OF TAPE

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1,2--When were you born? Where?
- 1--How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
- 1--What are your parents' names?
- Where did you go to school?
- 2--Are you married or single?
- Did you raise a family? How big?
- 1,2--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)
- 5-7--Trolleys (the Interurban)
- 5--Horses and First Automobiles
- 7--Mud roads and the seedling mile
- 7-8--Hunter Airport and the first planes
- Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- 8-10--Newspapers
- 13-14--Radios
- 2--Advertising
- Telephones
- 2-4--Television

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

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

2. Famous Characters

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

3. Lifestyle

- Life before air conditioning
- Winter Activities
- 17-19--Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
- Clothing
- Toys
- 19-20--Saloons/Taverns
- Farm Life

4. Family Life

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

5. Ethnic/Minority Life

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

C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community

1. Education

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

2. Government

- City Services
- Streets/Roads
- Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)

3. Medical

- 21-22--Hospitals
- Patient-Doctor Relationship
- Broken Bones
- Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
- House Calls
- Home Delivery of Babies

- 4. Business and Economy
 - 8,22--Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
 - Local Brewing Companies
 - 24-25--Retail Businesses /Department Stores
 - Professions
 - 25-26--Banking and Finance
 - Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
 - 4-5,22-24,25--Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
 - Farmers Market
 - Mills on Cedar River
 - 10--Buildings Erected
 - Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
 - Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)
- 5. Attitudes/Values --20
 - 11,21 --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)
 - 22--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
 - 21--Great Depression