

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with
Charles Rorabaugh

Conducted by Anne Hampton-Larson
March 10, 1985
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Transcribed by Sue Daugherty

Charles Rorabaugh was born February 22, 1915, in Britt, Iowa and moved with his family to Cedar Rapids when he was 4½ years old. His parents were Walter Edward R. and Phronia Mary R.

Through this interview, we learn about daily activities that took place: the use of the InterUrban, movie theatres, newspaper, the location of many buildings and remembrances of school days and the Public Library murder!

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?
 - Where did you go to school?
 - Are you married or single?
 - Did you raise a family? How big?
 - What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

- 1. Transportation
 - Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
 - 4,11-18 --Trolleys (the Interurban)
 - 19-21 --Horses and First Automobiles
 - 19 --Mud roads and the seedling mile
 - Hunter Airport and the first planes
 - Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)
- 2. Communications
 - 5,27 --Newspapers
 - Radios
 - 5,11 --Advertising
 - Telephones

B. People in the Community

- 1. Amusements/Recreation
 - 6,7-11 --Motion Pictures and theatre locations
 - 2,3-5 --Cedar Rapids Parks
 - Dances
 - Carnival Week
 - Chautauqua
 - 6-7 --Community Theater -Paramount
 - Little Gallery
 - Symphony Orchestra
 - Circus
 - Greene's Opera House
 - Amusement Parks (Alamo)
 - Camps
 - Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)
- 2. Famous Characters
 - Cherry Sisters
 - Grant Wood
 - Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
 - Marvin Cone
 - 32 --Herbert Hoover
 - 32 --George Raft

3. Lifestyle

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

4. Family Life

- Household Help
- Women's Roles
- Childrens' Activities/Behavior
- 3,14--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

- 1-2,32-43 --Cedar Rapids Schools
- Coe College
- Mount Mercy College
- Cornell College

2. Government

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

3. Medical

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

- 4. Business and Economy
 - Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
 - Local Brewing Companies
 - 25,26,29-30--Retail Businesses /Department Stores
 - Professions
 - Banking and Finance
 - 27-28 --Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
 - 19,24,26 --Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
 - Farmers Market
 - Mills on Cedar River
 - 20--Buildings Erected
 - Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
 - Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)
- 5. Attitudes/Values
 - 27,34--Children/Discipline
 - Sex/Petting
 - Charity
 - Divorce
 - Work
 - Working women, Voting Rights for Women
 - Patriotism (World War I)
- D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community
 - 1. Catastrophic Events
 - Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
 - Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
 - Bank Closings (1933)
 - Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
 - 44-46--Public Library Murder(1921)
 - 2. National Historic Events
 - Womens' Suffrage
 - World War I
 - Roaring 20's
 - Prohibition
 - 12--Great Depression

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The following dialogue is as the interviewer has been able to recall it. The first part of the tape was lost.

[AHL: What year were you born?

Rorabaugh: February 22, 1915.

AHL: Where?

Rorabaugh: Britt, Iowa, near Clear Lake.

AHL: How old were you when you moved to Cedar Rapids?

Rorabaugh: Four and a half.

AHL: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Rorabaugh: One older sister, Ena Ford. She lives in Cedar Rapids.

AHL: What were your parents' names?

Rorabaugh: My father's name was Walter Edward. My mother's name was
Phronia Mary.

AHL: What was your father's occupation?

Rorabaugh: My father was a city school superintendent and he worked for
the Illinois Central Railroad.

AHL: What type of education did your parents have?

Rorabaugh: My mother was a fourth or fifth grade graduate and my father
graduated from Iowa State Teachers College, class of 1902.

AHL: And you, Charles?

Rorabaugh: I graduated from the old Washington High School in 1934.

AHL: Where did you attend elementary?

Rorabaugh: Polk Elementary, 15th Street and B Avenue NE, at the same site as the new Polk.

AHL: During your early years, how did you spend your leisure time?

Rorabaugh: We'd make little golf courses in our yard, play baseball and hard ball, bicycle riding.

AHL: Tell me about the parks in town.

Rorabaugh: I was more familiar with Daniels Park. They had a semi-pro Industrial league called M & J's, which stood for Manufacturers and Jobbers. Jobbers was a term for people who had wholesale houses who sold to other people.

AHL: How would you spend your holidays?

Rorabaugh: We'd just be glad to get off of school.
On Christmas we'd pretend to go to bed and we'd look for clues like looking through the keyhole to see when and who was giving presents.]

TAPE BEGINS

AHL: Can you remember some gifts that you would receive when you were younger?

Rorabaugh: Well, one time I remember--God bless my parents--I got 50¢ and an orange.

AHL: And how did you feel about that?

Rorabaugh: Well, I think I was pretty young. I think I was only about seven years old. Probably about six or seven, and I really didn't know the meaning of Christmas too much. I didn't know if you got a big gift or a little gift, so I was just as well pleased with the very gift that I received.

- AHL: Would people attend church services on Christmas Eve and Christmas day?
- Rorabaugh: Quite generally they would. Although this was more of the Catholic faith than the protestant. Some protestant churches-- I remember--I don't even remember them having any church services on Christmas.
- AHL: So was your neighborhood and area of town more Catholic dominated?
- Rorabaugh: No. More protestant.
- AHL: More protestant, but the church services that would be attainable during this time would be the Catholic services on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day rather than the protestant.
- Rorabaugh: Yes.
- AHL: Tell me about the names of the parks.
- Rorabaugh: The parks that I was familiar with were, of course, Bever Park, Ellis Park, the two big parks, and Daniels, then Shaver Park. These are the ones that I was most familiar with.
- AHL: You mentioned Frontier Park earlier.
- Rorabaugh: Frontier Park. That was the early name of what is now known as Hawkeye Downs. It started out as Frontier Park.
- AHL: And Hawkeye Downs used to be a park.
- Rorabaugh: No, it's the same place you might say, but just to give it this attractive name, they called it Frontier Park. It started out what is now Hawkeye Downs, with a cowboy rodeo. They promoted it by merchants and businessmen going around wearing ten gallon hats.
- AHL: How would people get to the new Frontier Park?

Rorabaugh: You would go out Sixth Street and also they had the Interurban, which departed from Fourth Avenue and Third Street, Fourth Avenue and Second Street East, and went across its own bridge onto the West side and then proceeded on out to Frontier Park.

AHL: Now tell me what would proceed out to Frontier Park. What type of transportation?

Rorabaugh: Interurban.

AHL: And what was that?

Rorabaugh: A great big steetcar. Electric driven vehicle.

AHL: Do you remember when Hawkeye Downs originated? The new Frontier Park. Can you remember what year?

Rorabaugh: 1925.

AHL: 1925. And did they have a big celebration?

Rorabaugh: Yes.

AHL: For the opening event? Can you tell me anything about that?

Rorabaugh: I was too young to really know much about it. I do remember it. Now I may be in error. It might be that Hawkeye Downs started in 1924. Now I'm trying to think . . . As far I know, I think it started in 1925.

AHL: And you said that they had the cowboys. And rodeos. Name some other activities that they had.

Rorabaugh: Auto racing was one of the main things that they soon got into. If they didn't have that at their very first events, why they soon had regularly scheduled auto races. It was one of the main things.

AHL: Would they charge admission?

Rorabaugh: Yes.

AHL: Can you remember how much they would charge?

Rorabaugh: I think it was a dollar for the covered section and 50 cents for the bleachers.

AHL: The dollar was quite a bit of money in 1925, wasn't it?

Rorabaugh: Yes, it was.

AHL: How long would these events go on? For instance, a rodeo. Would it be local people? Would they bring a rodeo in . . .

Rorabaugh: No. They'd bring in high quality entertainment from. . . I think Hawkeye Downs or Frontier Park was modeled after a grandstand in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Because, I saw one on some sports events one time. I was taken by the resemblance of the grandstand to the one out in Cheyenne. So I think they probably went out there and looked at that when they built Frontier Park.

AHL: Do you know what year they changed the name to Hawkeye Downs, or why they changed it to Hawkeye Downs?

Rorabaugh: I'm not sure what year it was when they changed it. I think it was they had a contest in the Gazette to come up with a new name. Just the idea of a name "Frontier Park" was getting kind of old hat, so they wanted to get something new. So they had this contest as I remember. But what year it was I'm trying to think now. . . I think it was around 1932 or '33, maybe.

AHL: How would people find out about the rodeo?

Rorabaugh: They advertised in the paper. Also, they'd have lots of bills posted on telephone poles and on grocery stores and everywhere you could find access for some literature. They'd always have them posted on prominent places you'd see in store windows downtown, besides in the paper.

AHL: How long would a rodeo be in town? Approximately. Or would it depend on the popularity?

Rorabaugh: Well, these were the forerunners of the Fair, I think they'd maybe stay about three days, three or four days. In the early days.

AHL: Tell me about motion pictures, Charles. You mentioned earlier in the previous interview that you really loved the motion pictures. How many theatres were there in Cedar Rapids? In the 1920's.

Rorabaugh: Well, quite a few. I'm trying to think of them all. There was about eight, I think.

AHL: Which are the ones that are still in existence?

Rorabaugh: The ones that really at that time existed, that are still in existence. . .talk about the twenties where the Paramount and the Iowa Theatre buildings weren't constructed until 1928. The only one that I can think of. . .that the building is still in existence, is the World Theatre. And the one down on Third Street and Twelfth Avenue, which was called the Olympic at one time, I think. And also, the Sun, changed its names a couple of times.

AHL: Do you remember the opening of the Paramount?

Rorabaugh: Yes.

AHL: Tell me about that.

Rorabaugh: This was a wonderful theatre, it was so beautiful. It had kind of an oriental motif. The carpets were so thick and rich, deep. It had a very impressive foyer and lobby in it, which was very spacious and you even took a right-angle turn before you got into the seating area proper. Everything was done on a very

grand scale. According to the way things were done back in them days, it was very lavish and probably one of the best theatres in the midwest at that time.

AHL: So would you say that the Paramount was the most popular theatre here in this time downtown? Where people would like to go to see?

Rorabaugh: Yes. It would probably be between the Iowa and the Paramount they both opened the same year. The Iowa opened in June. I think the Paramount opened in September.

AHL: In what year did you say?

Rorabaugh: 1928.

AHL: Did different types of people attend the Paramount? Or did just the upper class attend?

Rorabaugh: No. It was very democratic, because it didn't cost too much to go there in comparison to other theatres. There wasn't that wide a difference between the cost of admission, so practically every kind of people went to it.

AHL: Now, the opening day of the Paramount. . . Did they have a movie? Did they have activities? Can you remember?

Rorabaugh: I'm sure they did. I don't remember the opening picture, though. what it was.

AHL: Can you remember the first picture that you saw? Or the first picture that you remember seeing?

Rorabaugh: Well, one of the most memorable ones, probably one of the first ones that I ever saw there was called "Wings."

AHL: Can you remember who starred?

Rorabaugh: Mary Pickford and Buddy Rodgers.

AHL: Was it silent or a talking movie?

Rorabaugh: Partially talking. It had talking sequences in it.

AHL: Do you know how long it lasted? For instance, was it an hour and a half movie?

Rorabaugh: I think it probably lasted about an hour and a half. That is, the movie part. But at the same time they was having a movie, at that time, they had the vaudeville. So the whole bill lasted, I would say, three hours.

AHL: Tell me about it, as you would walk in, how much would you pay?

Rorabaugh: I know I only paid 10 cents.

AHL: Ten cents for the entire evening.

Rorabaugh: Let's see, 1928, I might have been snudging a little. I think the cut-off point was 12, anybody under 12 was 10 cents. Adults went in for 25 to 35.

AHL: What time would this start?

Rorabaugh: They had regular hours. I think it started at 1 o'clock. 1 PM and closed up at the last show, would probably run around 11 o'clock.

AHL: So they had many different shows during the day.

Rorabaugh: Continuous. The same thing, of course.

AHL: So when you'd go in, you'd pay your nickel and you'd sit down. What would appear first?

Rorabaugh: The thing that would appear first, most generally, was the newsreel.

AHL: How long would that last?

Rorabaugh: The newsreel would last about 15 minutes, I think.

AHL: Who put on the newsreel?

Rorabaugh: Well, it was put on by different companies. One of them was Fox Movietone News was one of them. These came in quite strongly with the advent of the talking pictures, which most theatres had talking pictures in 1928 it started.

AHL: How long would the newsreel last?

Rorabaugh: The newsreel would last about fifteen minutes, I think.

AHL: Would it include international news or mainly national news?

Rorabaugh: International and national and a little bit of sports and a little bit of novelty or comedy, very slight. Maybe a whole show like bathing beauties and beauty contests, swimming contests, that kind of thing. (Laughter)

AHL: After the movie reel . . . what would happen?

Rorabaugh: Then, they sometimes would have what a lot of people called a one-reeler. They used to call them a funny reel. A term they used back in the twenties that you don't hear now. That would be a comedy. That would be somebody like Charlie Chase or maybe Wheeler and Woolsey, somebody like that. That was one reel, that probably lasted maybe 20 to 25 minutes, maybe. Maybe not that long. About 20 minutes, I suppose.

AHL: And then would they show the movie?

Rorabaugh: And then, there'd be lots of previews of the coming attractions.

AHL: How long would that last?

Rorabaugh: That would last, oh, maybe, seven to eight minutes. Then would come the main attraction. Of course, in the early days, they didn't have too many double bills, in the early days. They was making lots of movies in Hollywood. They was trying for good quality and especially in the movies that came to the

Paramount and Iowa theatres, there was generally just one show.

AHL: Would they sell food?

Rorabaugh: In the lobby. Popcorn and candy. Some pop.

AHL: Could you eat the food while you were watching the movie?

Rorabaugh: You could take it in.

AHL: Can you remember how much popcorn was?

Rorabaugh: 10 cents, I think.

AHL: Was it a big bag? Was it in a sack?

Rorabaugh: In them days, it was in a paper sack, it was just kind of like a white sack.

AHL: Can you remember your favorite kind of candy bar?

Rorabaugh: Milky Way.

AHL: Milky Way. And what kind of pop was available then?

Rorabaugh: Coca Cola. I don't know if they poured it into a cup or if they gave you the bottles. I don't remember, because I never did drink it much in the shows. But I know they had some sort of drinks. Plus they had root beer, probably.

AHL: Were there ever any musicians in the theatres?

Rorabaugh: Oh, yes. They had the whole orchestra. Basically, in the days before 1928, when the talking pictures came.

AHL: How long would they play?

Rorabaugh: They would play a prelude, probably before they showed the movietone news or newsreel. They would play some popular overture, like William Tell or Poet and Peasant, something like that. Then they would retire after the news and all and then the funny reel, they'd have a pianist, which would sometimes kind of keep in key with what was happening, you know.

AHL: Do you remember the Wurlitzer organ coming to Cedar Rapids?

Rorabaugh: Yes, that was quite a feature. Especially in the Paramount. The Iowa had one, too. The Paramount was a better one, was bigger, had more pipes to it.

AHL: Would they play that before a film, or would they have recitals?

Rorabaugh: They would play that before the film, and there'd be little intermissions between the feature. . . between the coming attractions and the feature. Also, they would probably have a prelude as you'd enter the theatre before any films at all were shown.

AHL: Was it a local person playing the organ?

Rorabaugh: Yes.

AHL: What types of promotion would be given for a particular movie?

Rorabaugh: You mean advertising?

AHL: Yes.

Rorabaugh: Well, "The Greatest Picture Ever Shown" would come out on bills. They'd take all signboards to show the coming attractions of a film, like Joan Crawford in "The Bride Wore Red" or something like that. That's a little later.

AHL: Where would the signs be shown?

Rorabaugh: Regular billboards like you see, you used to see a lot more of them, they'd be on top of buildings, on sides of buildings. In fact, even just billboards sitting on kind of platforms in vacant lots. Used to be one down on 16th Street and First Avenue, had nothing but billboards down there.

AHL: Can you remember the most popular movie in Cedar Rapids when you were growing up?

Rorabaugh: Most popular movie house?

AHL: Most popular movie.

Rorabaugh: Most popular movie. Probably Rudolph Valentino in "Blood in the Sand" was about the most popular.

AHL: How would people get money to go to the movies, especially during the 30's when people were so poor.

Rorabaugh: It was comparatively inexpensive. They had these matinees, and the prices were quite reduced if you went at one o'clock. It wasn't so hard. People could spare this small amount from their meagre wages. It cost about 25 cents. Then if you didn't want to go to the Paramount or the Iowa theatre, you could go to a cheaper theatre, like the Rialto.

AHL: Where was that located?

Rorabaugh: The Rialto was over on First Avenue between Fourth and Third Streets.

AHL: What is standing there now?

Rorabaugh: It's right in the place of the Five Seasons. The entrance of the Five Seasons sets right about where the Rialto was.

AHL: And that was kind of a discount movie theatre.

Rorabaugh: Well, they had a lot of things there. Things that were quite popular back in that time was the serial movie, where they'd show a certain amount of it and then they'd have it the next time. Some of them would run about 12 different episodes. There was chases and hair-raising episodes where they was hanging over Niagara Falls, or something.

AHL: What is your favorite movie that you've ever seen?

Rorabaugh: It's hard to say. "Beau Geste" was a classic, was pretty good,

about the French Foreign Legion.

AHL: How about actors or actresses that come to your mind that you admire.

Rorabaugh: Well, when I was a boy, Tom Mix was the best, was my favorite. Then Harry Carry was awful good. Then Douglas Fairbanks, Milton Seales, Rudolph Valentino, although most men didn't admire him so much, but he was pretty good. John Barrymore was quite popular at that time.

AHL: Were there any women actresses who you admired.

Rorabaugh: Oh, quite a few. Delores Costello and Liatris Joy and Anna Q. Nelson, and Agnes Ayres. Loretta Young was one of the ones that you might have heard of. She's an old time actress. Another one that you might have seen or know about is Myrna Loy. . .

AHL: How often would you attend a movie theatre?

Rorabaugh: I would go about every week.

AHL: Any particular day?

Rorabaugh: Generally on Sunday.

AHL: How many adults would be in the theatre?

Rorabaugh: I would say, if a Sunday afternoon was pretty well crowded, I would say it could be 150.

AHL: So it was a family event.

Rorabaugh: Yes, it was kind of a family event.

AHL: Where families would take their children, rather than children just going.

Rorabaugh: Well, let me think about that a little bit. Come to think about it, I think there was about two-thirds kids and one-third

adults, probably.

AHL: Charles, tell me why would you choose Sunday to go to the movies?

Rorabaugh: Well, going to school five days a week, then Saturday, that was for violin practicing or football, mostly football. Maybe going to the store. Sometimes we'd go on Saturday. Most generally, it was on Sunday.

AHL: How would you get to the movie theatre?

Rorabaugh: Go on the streetcar.

AHL: Where would you pick it up from your home?

Rorabaugh: I'd pick mine up at the corner of 16th Street and First Avenue NE.

AHL: What is there now?

Rorabaugh: A HyVee store.

AHL: And tell me where it would drop you off.

Rorabaugh: I'd generally get off down at First Avenue and Third.

AHL: How much would it cost, one way?

Rorabaugh: Five cents.

AHL: Would you get a deal if you took a round trip?

Rorabaugh: I think you could get six tokens for a quarter. A token being something you could use only on the streetcar. A little coin, self-minted coin, made in Cedar Rapids. Printed on there, it says "Cedar Rapids Railway lines" or something. . .

AHL: So could you take six trips with the token?

Rorabaugh: Six for a quarter.

AHL: Then they would give you six individual tokens for 25 cents.

Rorabaugh: Yes.

AHL: Did you enjoy riding the streetcar?

Rorabaugh: Oh, I liked it, yes. It was pretty good. It was direct and you knew where you were going, and it seemed safe and everything.

AHL: How would you indicate that you wanted to be let off at a corner?

Rorabaugh: Well, they had little buttons by each seat, it was a little press button. And when you wanted to get off, you were supposed to ring, after you passed that one street before where you wanted to debark, you would press the button.

AHL: What color was the button?

Rorabaugh: I believe it was a kind of a cream color. Or black. I think of it as being kind of an ivory color.

AHL: Tell me, how long were the trolley cars? Two car lengths? Three car lengths?

Rorabaugh: A car's 18 foot long.

AHL: Or just like a freight car?

Rorabaugh: I'd say they were 40 foot long maybe.

AHL: How many people do you think it would hold?

Rorabaugh: I think they would hold 40, at least.

AHL: Did people need to sit down or could they stand and hang on to something?

Rorabaugh: Well, they could, they had straps, but that's when it got to overflow. Got a crowded morning or something going on and they'd get a big overflow crowd. The straps were like a subway type, because they lurched a lot, because when they braked why it wasn't all that smooth sometimes so it was well to be holding on to that strap. Then the seats, as I remember, were made out of a kind of wicker weave. There was a kind of a straw

weave like on the seats. The seats were made so you could push them one way or the other according to which way the streetcar was rolling. See, that's the way they changed at the end of the line. When they reached the end of the line, when the back of the streetcar became the front.

AHL: What color was the outside of the streetcar?

Rorabaugh: I think it was yellow.

AHL: And who owned the streetcars?

Rorabaugh: It was the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City Railway Company, I think.

AHL: And they had engineers.

Rorabaugh: They had conductors.

AHL: Conductors.

Rorabaugh: One time, in older days, in the teens, 1916 and that, they used to have conductors. I mean, they used to have a motorman driving them. The motorman was the driver and the conductor is the one that collected the fare. After a while they concluded that they didn't need the conductor so they dispensed with the conductor in about 1917, something like that.

AHL: So the trolley was on just railroad tracks, is that right?

Rorabaugh: Regular. . . pretty much the same gauge as a railroad track, it might have been a little bit narrower and lighter rails. But essentially the same as a railroad track. Street railway.

AHL: Then who would direct the trolley?

Rorabaugh: The motorman.

AHL: The motorman. And tell me how he would do that?

Rorabaugh: It was essentially, he had a great big rheostat.

AHL: What's a rheostat?

Rorabaugh: It's kind of an electric throttle, really. Electric throttle. As he would advance the throttle, he would be feeding more electricity into the motors that drove the wheels. They'd get them wide open a lot of times, but then they drew them back. It was kind of like a great big crank, the throttle was. And the throttle was detachable, it fit on a spline like and that was part of the motorman's equipment to his throttle handle.

AHL: Tell me what a spline is.

Rorabaugh: It's a kind of a square boss, like. Visualize a great big square nut standing up and then visualize a cut-out part of the crank-like device fitting over the square to make a lever out of it.

AHL: If he wanted to stop, what would he do?

Rorabaugh: He'd advance the throttle, and then if he wanted to stop, he'd bring the throttle back again, then he had a lever, just a handle, kind of and it seemed to me that that handle was mounted on a vertical bar that was close hand to the motorman and as he wanted to stop, this was air actuated and he would feed the air to the brakes to stop.

AHL: So he wouldn't be cutting off electricity.

Rorabaugh: He had to cut the electricity because they'd be opposing each other. If he decreased his throttle, he brought that back to zero, and then he had to stop, and he had to do this about every block. Then as he started out again, he'd open up the throttle and then take it from there. You'd get another ring, you'd have to stop at the next street.

AHL: Tell me, did people sit individually? Were there two seats

next to one another?

Rorabaugh: The seats would be quite a bit like you would see on a trans-continental bus except they didn't have any division between them. It was just a rather stark sort of a seat that was flat and wasn't the most comfortable seat in the world. It was kind of a non-absorbant seat, in other words it was hard, pretty hard. These seats could be reversed from one side to the other by just pulling the rests. The back rest could move from one side of the seat to the other depending on which way the car would be going.

AHL: So correct me if I'm wrong, there would be several seats just right next to each other right across. No aisle, is that correct?

Rorabaugh: No. The aisle was as you imagine it, right down the middle.

AHL: Right down the middle. And how many seats would they have on one side?

Rorabaugh: Probably about six or seven in a row on each side. At the back was longer seats for guys that maybe wanted to sneak a smoke or didn't like to sit in the regular seats, guys or gals.

AHL: So if you wanted to smoke, you needed to go to the back, is that correct?

Rorabaugh: Well, I don't really remember the smoking too much but I believe they did smoke there.

AHL: Did all types of people ride the trolley? Rich and poor, men, women and children?

Rorabaugh: Yes. Sometimes you'd see some quite prominent looking people riding them.

AHL: Were the streets during this time paved? Were they dirt?

Describe the streets.

Rorabaugh: Paved. They were paved.

AHL: They were paved with. . . cement.

Rorabaugh: Brick a lot. Lots of brick.

AHL: Brick.

Rorabaugh: First Avenue, as long as I've ever been in Cedar Rapids, First Avenue was asphalt. But there was a lot of other streets, now, like 16th Street NE was brick. Old fashioned brick, and A Avenue was brick and quite a few other streets. I remember Grande Avenue being brick. Great, big wide street, probably the widest street on the East side.

AHL: Charles, tell me how long it would take you to get from your home to the Paramount, by trolley.

Rorabaugh: Oh, I think about 10 or 15 minutes at the most.

AHL: How fast do you think it went?

Rorabaugh: I think they went 25 miles an hour.

AHL: Charles, do you have any memories of horses in Cedar Rapids?

Rorabaugh: I refer that to my sister more. Cause she talks about it quite a lot and she rode around with my grandfather and he was a drayman and she said that he went down in the vicinity of the old Killian's building and back in about 1918. He drove right down there from over in a location over around 12th Avenue and 10th Street SE.

AHL: So you don't remember anybody in your neighborhood owning a horse and riding a horse to work.

Rorabaugh: No.

AHL: Or seeing them on the street.

Rorabaugh: You saw them on the street. Peddlers would have them quite a bit. And I think milkmen had them, you could hear them clopping along. Yes.

AHL: Could the people who had horses, could they ride anywhere?

Rorabaugh: Yes. They was permitted the rules of the road. They was permitted to go anywhere they wanted to.

AHL: They could stay in town, the horses?

Rorabaugh: Yes. As I understand it, they had a big horse watering trough down in front of the old auditorium that was down on First Street and A Avenue NE.

AHL: Can you remember what is there now?

Rorabaugh: That's Cedar River Towers mostly. Pretty close to there.

AHL: Can you remember the first automobile your parents bought?

Rorabaugh: Yes.

AHL: What year?

Rorabaugh: 1919. 1920, I think.

AHL: What kind was it?

Rorabaugh: A _____

AHL: And what color was it?

Rorabaugh: Green.

AHL: Can you remember how much it cost?

Rorabaugh: Five hundred dollars, I think.

AHL: And where did they buy it?

Rorabaugh: He bought it in Cedar Rapids, I think.

AHL: Were there quite a few dealers then?

Rorabaugh: This was second hand.

AHL: A used car.

Rorabaugh: Second hand.

AHL: Charles, tell me about some of the cars in the 1920's.

Rorabaugh: Well, they were pretty slow, for one thing. One of the most popular was the Model T. I must have seen a thousand of them. I was telling my sister about the Model T. The main thing about them was that they seemed to be quite noisy. And of course, the Model T could never make a really good take-off. In other words, they were not what they call a gear shift car. They had the three pedals. They had one pedal on your left, that was your clutch, they had a pedal in the middle, and that was reverse. That would make you go backwards. Then they had another pedal on your right, by you, that was your brake. And the throttle was a hand-throttle. Practically anybody could drive them. But they wasn't very smooth. They was one of the most popular makes because they was the most inexpensive.

AHL: How many people could it seat?

Rorabaugh: In a Model T you could get four in there.

AHL: Comfortably.

Rorabaugh: That is, it was a two-seated. In the coupe you could get three. In the two-seated, or touring car, they had sedans, too. You could get, at the most, six. But that would be really crowding them. Then the two-seated.

AHL: Did the people sit behind the car, in the trunk, as you see in some places, with the Model T? Can you remember?

Rorabaugh: Oh, I know what you mean, the rumble seat?

AHL: Yes.

Rorabaugh: Well, just in certain models. The Model T never had the rumble seat configuration.

AHL: Can you remember the names of the cars that were in Cedar Rapids during that time? Can you remember, for instance, Chevrolet?

Rorabaugh: Yes, Chevrolet was a fairly well-known make. There was the Rio, the Graham Page, the Stutz, the Moon. . .

AHL: Did you say the "Moon"?

Rorabaugh: The Moon, yes, Locomobile, Veley. A machine which was quite popular, you would see quite a few of them. They were made in Moline, called a Veley.

AHL: What car was the type of car that everybody wished they could own? And afford?

Rorabaugh: I think a Stutz. A lot of people talked about them a lot.

AHL: And how were they different?

Rorabaugh: They had a great big straight eight engine, which was the latest things in them days. Big and powerful and they was known to be fast and powerful. Bootleggers used them.

AHL: Did they look more attractive?

Rorabaugh: Yes.

AHL: Do you think they'd be compared with a certain brand now?

Rorabaugh: If you had to compare them, you'd have to compare them with a Lincoln or a Cadillac.

AHL: Would they be convertibles?

Rorabaugh: Yes. You've heard of the old Stutz Bearcat, and that was a little before my time. Then they come out with a pretty sharp looking touring car and even a sedan. A Cord was another kind

that was quite well desired. It was the first front wheel drive car. It was the first practical front wheel drive.

AHL: And what year was that?

Rorabaugh: 1930.

AHL: And it was an Accord? A-C-C-O-R-D?

Rorabaugh: No. Just C-O-R-D.

AHL: A Cord.

Rorabaugh: Cord. They had companion cars and the companion car of the Cord was the Auburn and the Dusenbergs.

AHL: During this time, did they have heaters in the car?

Rorabaugh: Yes. You could get heaters. Another thing that they had that was quite popular was what they'd call a "cut-out." What a "cut-out" was was a little door or a little opening carved in the side of your exhaust pipe. When you'd get out on the open road, you'd pull a little lever and it'd open up this little flue, you might say, and the noise would just reverberate off of the floorboards of the car. It bypassed the mufflers and theoretically, you could go faster.

AHL: Tell me about the tires of the car.

Rorabaugh: The tires were rather narrow, compared to modern tires, rather small in a cross section. It was called Cord tires. They didn't talk much about rayon or anything about what kind of Cords they used. A lot of them was made out of pure rubber, which I don't think too many are nowadays, if any.

AHL: Would everybody who owned a car keep a spare tire in the back?

Rorabaugh: You had to have a spare tire. It was quite important because you had quite a few flats. Tires wasn't near as reliable in

them days.

AHL: Can you remember how much one tire would cost?

Rorabaugh: It wasn't very much. I think a tire could cost you nine dollars.

AHL: Tell me about where you would obtain gas for the car.

Rorabaugh: Lots of filling stations. Service stations they called them. One of the most popular brands sold around Cedar Rapids was the Standard. Standard of Indiana service stations. They had them on First Avenue and that was one of the earlier. Another popular kind back in them days was Skelly. One called Skelly.

AHL: Can you remember how much gas was? In the 1920's or '30's?

Rorabaugh: I think in the 1920's, it was costing 16 cents a gallon. Sixteen or seventeen cents a gallon.

AHL: How many gallons did the car hold?

Rorabaugh: The car would hold about 12 gallons, I think.

AHL: Were they pretty fuel efficient?

Rorabaugh: Surprisingly enough, more than you would think. According to them early times, they would get, I've heard of people talk about getting 15, 20 miles to the gallon sometimes. That's about what you hear now and some of them don't even get that much.

AHL: Let's shift to downtown. Where did downtown start and end?

Rorabaugh: One of the big things about downtown was Kresge corner, you might say that was the middle of downtown. Kresge corner was the corner of Third Street and First Avenue East. That was really the middle of town. Where town started, it mostly started on First Avenue at the tracks, and then went down to

First Street, across First Street to about Third Avenue, up Third again to the tracks, and maybe in the case of Third Avenue it went up farther because the Library was up there. That would just about encompass the whole town. If you got off anywhere on Fourth Avenue, that wasn't really part of downtown. It wasn't the Loop. You might say the Loop of downtown was around from the tracks, down to First Street. . .

AHL: Now when you refer to the tracks. . .

Rorabaugh: Fourth Street. Fourth Street tracks.

AHL: Fourth Street tracks. And. . . go on. . .

Rorabaugh: And then you'd go down to First Street, across to Third, and up to about Fifth again. That'd encompass everything that was important.

AHL: So, was St. Luke's Hospital and Mercy Hospital, were they considered out in the country?

Rorabaugh: Well, not exactly, they were in good residential districts. They were comparatively farther out than they would be nowadays.

AHL: List some of the businesses that are still in operation that you remember.

Rorabaugh: The Merchants National Bank was built when I was about twelve years old. That's one. Armstrong's Clothing, Armstrong's. Of course it was called different then. It was exclusively for men and boys. At one time, Armstrong's just sold men's and boys' clothes.

AHL: What was it called then?

Rorabaugh: Armstong McLanihan, it was called. Then another one that just recently went out of business was Killian's.

AHL: Any jewelers?

Rorabaugh: Yes. That was Siebke and Taylor, called Siebke and Hoyt now.
Then there was Boyson's, they was there.

AHL: What was **the** place downtown?

Rorabaugh: For young people gathering?

AHL: Yes.

Rorabaugh: Wixstead's Drugstore, I think, down right where Armstrong's is
now.

AHL: What was the name of it?

Rorabaugh: Wixstead's.

AHL: Wixstead's. How do you spell that?

Rorabaugh: That's W-I-X-S-T-E-A-D-S. Wixstead's.

AHL: Where was it located?

Rorabaugh: Right at the corner where Armstrong's. . . Armstrong's corner.

AHL: Where was Armstrong's located?

Rorabaugh: Armstrong's, in them days, was located at the corner of Second
Street and Second Avenue. Right where the Ginsberg Jewelry . . .

AHL: . . . used to be.

Rorabaugh: Used to be. He moved across the street.

AHL: Where Securities Corporation of Iowa is now.

Rorabaugh: Is that what it is now?

AHL: Why was this place so important to children?

Rorabaugh: Wixstead's? It was a great big drugstore where you could go
in and have a coke or a malt or something, buy something. It
was big and spacious and I think it was connected with the
Walgreen chain, I'm not sure. But it had everything you needed.
If you wanted to get something that was the place to go.

AHL: So children felt very comfortable there.

Rorabaugh: Yes. There was quite a few young people that worked there to help themselves through school. It was even necessary in them days for kids, believe it or not, to help themselves through grade school. Now you'd hardly even think of such a thing, but there was some people who wasn't very well off and some of the kids felt that they had to get themselves a job and help the family a little bit.

AHL: Charles, what would the youngest age child that would be working?

Rorabaugh: I believe the children would start working when they were 12.

END OF SIDE ONE

This part of the tape is missing part of the interview. Transcriptionist begins where tape begins.

Rorabaugh: . . .papers.

AHL: And how much would you earn?

Rorabaugh: When I started, five dollars a week. As I got more customers, I got up to six, I think.

AHL: Would you pick the papers up early in the morning?

Rorabaugh: Well, no, at that time, you see, you'd pick them up on Sundays only. It was an evening paper. The Gazette was an evening paper.

AHL: And how often would you have to deliver the papers?

Rorabaugh: Seven days a week. Six days in the evening and once on Sunday morning.

AHL: Getting back to the downtown. Can you name some restaurants?

Rorabaugh: Well, there was the Butterfly. Still there. It was under that

same name, Butterfly Cafe. There was the First and Second Avenue Virginia, it was like cafeteria. That was Second and Third Avenue, excuse me. The Third Avenue Virginia was the one that Broeksmitt, the man that committed murder, that shot the policeman---he ran through the Third Avenue Virginia. Talking about other cafes, in later years, there was the Harmony Cafe which was down right about where Merchants National Bank, the east section of it. Of course, they always had Woolworth's and Kresge's lunchrooms. But that wasn't exactly restaurants.

AHL: What was the name of your favorite restaurant downtown when you were growing up?

Rorabaugh: There was one called the Sameway Cafe. It was over on Third Street . . .it was on Second Street behind the Paramount Theatre.

AHL: And that was your favorite place to eat?

Rorabaugh: It was like hot dogs, you know.

AHL: You liked the hot dogs. (Laughter)

Rorabaugh: It was cheap, too. (Laughter)

AHL: Tell me about the ethnic foods. Were there any Greek restaurants downtown, or the Chinese or Czech?

Rorabaugh: I remember Trombitto's Roman Inn was over on Fourth Avenue at about . . .between Fifth and Sixth Street on Fourth Avenue. Over by the YWCA. Italian. They had a lot of these, what they'd call hot dog joints.

AHL: You liked those.

Rorabaugh: They was quite popular because you could get a hot dog for six cents at one time. Bishop's. Bishop's was one of the

main ones. It was there on First Avenue, and was there for years.

AHL: The same place?

Rorabaugh: Until it finally went out a few years ago. It was right next to the old Allison Hotel.

AHL: Was it there originally? Where was Bishop's originally?

Rorabaugh: That was its original location, I think.

AHL: And then they built the Allison next to that?

Rorabaugh: No. The Allison was a lot older. They moved in there next to the Allison, I'd say, about 1923, I'm guessing. Somewhere about there.

AHL: Describe the atmosphere of the downtown. What made it so attractive?

Rorabaugh: It seemed like it was quite easy to get from one place to another. They had a number of good stores. Killian's was, for years, a good store. You could go in there and get about anything you could want. Just ride up one elevator. Then Armstrong's was real good for men's clothing, back in them days. Armstrong's was kind of the standard for men's and boys' clothing, back in the twenties. There was another one called the Syndicate that a close runner of Armstrong's. They was on First Avenue right about where that Mexican food place on First Avenue, that's about where the Syndicate was. Then there was another clothing company, called O'Meara Clothing. They was on Second Avenue and Third Street.

AHL: Where did the rich people in town shop?

Rorabaugh: I think a lot of them traded at Killian's. Because Killian's

was a kind of a--as we used to call it, being very common people--kind of snooty-like. We thought it was.

AHL: Where did your mother like to shop for her clothes?

Rorabaugh: I think that she bought a lot at Martin's, for one thing.

AHL: That was a woman's apparel shop?

Rorabaugh: They had a lot of things there. They wasn't really much on advertising. But you could find things there that you couldn't really find other places. Was quite a good place. There was another store that burned down in 1930, called Denecke's. That was superseded by another store called Newman's. They came in here from Joplin, Missouri.

AHL: Where was that located?

Rorabaugh: That was the same old location as Denecke's, right on Second Avenue and Second Street, right where the Woolworth's is now.

AHL: Where was Woolworth's?

Rorabaugh: Woolworth's in them days, was on Second Avenue where the Osco Drug is now. With an entrance on Second Avenue and Second Street, both. You could enter from either place. They had an entrance, if you can visualize, on Second Street, you could go in right where one of them shoe stores and that is. In fact, in more recent years, been a shoe store. You could go right into Woolworth's there and it had a kind of an angle in it. Built in an L-shape.

AHL: Did a lot of people meet downtown? Did they loiter and visit?

Rorabaugh: Oh, they did . . .

AHL: More than they do now?

Rorabaugh: Yes. Quite a bit more. One of the main gathering places,

incidentally, was the ten cents stores. There was quite a few people that would kind of just loiter around there.

AHL: Did they serve food in there?

Rorabaugh: Yes, they did.

AHL: Drinks and things so people could sit down?

Rorabaugh: It was short-orders.

AHL: Where did the adults go to feel comfortable?

Rorabaugh: To eat? Or a gathering place?

AHL: A gathering place.

Rorabaugh: A gathering place.

AHL: Or even a restaurant.

Rorabaugh: Well. . .I suppose the Roosevelt Hotel was probably one of the main places. That was built in 1927. They always had pretty high-quality eating places in there, under different names over the years.

AHL: When you were growing up, if someone would have offered you a free meal anywhere, where would you have gone? What would you have chosen?

Rorabaugh: What would I have chosen to eat?

AHL: The restaurant. The name of the restaurant.

Rorabaugh: What restaurant would I have chosen.

AHL: Which you would have really liked to afford to go to.

Rorabaugh: I still think like the Roosevelt. One of the restaurants in there. Which I don't recall because they changed the names of them quite a bit. It was still the same operation, but they changed the names.

AHL: Can you remember any famous people who came to Cedar Rapids?

Rorabaugh: Herbert Hoover.

AHL: And how did he come?

Rorabaugh: It was during his campaign of 1928 that he visited the Douglas estate. He visited with the Douglasses. I saw him riding out First Avenue and he had a tall, silk hat on that Presidents used to effect. If you remember John Kennedy when he was inaugurated, he did wear a tall, silk hat. I don't know if you remember seeing it, that was before your time, maybe.

AHL: Anybody else that you recall. . .any famous people who came to Cedar Rapids?

Rorabaugh: There were quite a few, like movie stars and things like that, like famous people.

AHL: Movie stars.

Rorabaugh: George Raft was here. Veronica Lake.

AHL: And where would they stay?

Rorabaugh: They'd stay at the Roosevelt. That was the best hotel then. I remember when I was going to high school, that one of the girl reporters from the Washington high school paper went over to interview George Raft.

AHL: Can you remember the name of the girl?

Rorabaugh: Her name was Luburger. I forget her first name now. It's in my yearbook.

AHL: Charles, what was the name of your elementary school?

Rorabaugh: Polk.

AHL: And where was it located?

Rorabaugh: Fifteenth Street and B Avenue NE.

AHL: Is it located where Polk school is now?

Rorabaugh: Same location.

AHL: Same school?

Rorabaugh: Same essential location, but the school's been demolished and rebuilt.

AHL: Why was it demolished?

Rorabaugh: Too old. Falling apart. I think it dated from 1887.

AHL: Did they have indoor plumbing in the twenties.

Rorabaugh: Yes.

AHL: How long was your school day?

Rorabaugh: I think we went to school at 8 o'clock and we got out at 12, and then I think we went from 1--we had a one hour lunch--and got off at 3:30, I think, if I remember. It might have been 4, though.

AHL: Did you start in August and you ended your school year in June?

Rorabaugh: I started in January, in my case.

AHL: You started in January.

Rorabaugh: In the kindergarten. But of course, Polk school had a kindergarten where they had rented a church basement, which was controlled by Polk presumably, Central Park Church, which was just one block east of Polk.

AHL: So did kindergarteners only go for half a year?

Rorabaugh: Yes, in them days, I think it was.

AHL: And tell me about the school children. Did they attend Polk, grades one through six?

Rorabaugh: Yes. That was one through six. That was the set up there.

AHL: And when did they start the school year? What month?

Rorabaugh: They would start in September.

AHL: And they would end . . .?

Rorabaugh: In June.

AHL: In June.

Rorabaugh: Always in June. In contrast to some rural schools, I can't ever remember us getting out in May. Also, I can't remember starting earlier than the . . .the day after Labor Day was the traditional day for starting. The Tuesday after Labor Day. Also, I think one year they started on August 31 and that was the earliest they'd started for many years. I think that was the year 1925.

AHL: Do you remember it being terribly hot in August when you went to school?

Rorabaugh: Well, yes, it was and also, in September it was hot in some years. The year 1927 was an awful hot year.

AHL: Do you remember children misbehaving in school?

Rorabaugh: Yes. I'm talking about myself. (Laughter)

AHL: (Laughter) And if so, what type of punishment would they receive?

Rorabaugh: I think I'm an authority on that. (Laughter) Probably as well grounded in this as anybody. One of the punishments, they would make you stand outside in the hallway. Another punishment, in extreme cases, they would put sticking plaster over your mouth sometimes.

AHL: They would.

Rorabaugh: This was in very extreme cases.

AHL: Over the lips.

Rorabaugh: It wasn't dangerous in any way.

AHL: Did you have that happen to you?

Rorabaugh: I think I did one time. Got to talking too much. (Laughter)
It was just like kind of a paper tape, something like scotch tape, but they didn't really have scotch tape back in them days. I think that they had to moisten it, they moistened it with tap water or something, you know.

AHL: Did the teachers schedule conferences for your parents to come and talk about you?

Rorabaugh: Well, it seems in them days that they was just getting under way with comprehensive Parent-Teacher associations where the teachers and the pupils, teachers and parents of the pupils would have good liaison with each other. They was getting quite popular. In fact, before, say about 1922, '23, it seemed like the only contact, regular contact that the teachers and parents would have would just be casual. A parent would come over to see how their child was doing on rare occasions. But a lot of them, they just knew they was going to school and the teachers was teaching them and that was that. I must say, too, that the teachers done an excellent job back in them days.

AHL: Name some of your favorite teachers in the 1920's or 1930's.

Rorabaugh: There was Miss Tapper, she was the principal at Polk. There was Miss Byers, she was the principal at Polk. She went to Franklin Junior High School. There was Miss Preston, second grade teacher. Miss Downs, she was primarily an English teacher, I think.

AHL: Were there any male teachers at Polk?

Rorabaugh: I can't remember any male teachers at all back in those days.

AHL: The principals, were they married?

Rorabaugh: Mostly not.

AHL: So most of the women who had careers in the 1920's and 1930's, that you knew, were not married, is that correct?

Rorabaugh: The two that I did know, really, had contact with, was Miss Tapper and Miss Byers, and they were both unmarried.

AHL: Where did you attend junior high?

Rorabaugh: I went to Franklin Junior High school.

AHL: And where did you go to high school?

Rorabaugh: I went to Washington High School, **old** Washington High School.

AHL: Let's talk about Franklin. What grades went to Franklin?

Rorabaugh: That was seventh through ninth.

AHL: Seventh through ninth. What hour did you start your day at Franklin?

Rorabaugh: I think that the times there was very similar to what they was in the grade schools. It seems to me like they started at 8 and got off at a quarter til 12, then went back at 1 o'clock until 4, I think it was.

AHL: So would you walk home for lunch?

Rorabaugh: Yes. Almost invariably, or ride my bicycle.

AHL: And what happened if it would be very cold?

Rorabaugh: Still do it.

AHL: You still went, no matter what.

Rorabaugh: They had a cafeteria there.

AHL: So did you have the option of eating there?

Rorabaugh: If you had the money. (Laughter)

AHL: That was the problem.

Rorabaugh: Well, to tell you the truth . . . I'll tell you the whole secret of the whole thing. I was kind of bashful. (Laughter)

AHL: You were.

Rorabaugh: I didn't like to eat in the cafeteria. (Laughter)

AHL: You wanted to be home.

Rorabaugh: I thought somebody would guy me. (Laughter) You know what I mean?

AHL: Someone would what?

Rorabaugh: Guy you. A word that they used to mean harrassing them.

AHL: Oh, I see.

Rorabaugh: You know. In other words, you might spill a bottle of milk or something.

AHL: Now would your sister walk home with you?

Rorabaugh: No. My sister was eight years older than me, so she was out of phase with me in school.

AHL: Now with school at Franklin, how many different teachers would you have in one day?

Rorabaugh: I'm not sure you had your home room, yes, I'm pretty sure you had your home room. About six, at least. Including gym. I forget, if physical ed was every day or was three times a week, I kind of forget that. Seemed to me though, would it logically be every day, do you think?

AHL: I'm not sure.

Rorabaugh: It seems to be it wasn't every day, it was about three days a week.

AHL: Now they have PE every other day along with Health. So Monday, Wednesday, Friday, they'll have Health, Tuesday, Thursday

they'll have PE, then they'll alternate it. Did you have Health?

Rorabaugh: Well, they actually didn't call it Health till we got into Washington. I didn't even know what Health was. I said, "What is this Health business?" (Laughter)

AHL: What subjects would you learn at Franklin?

Rorabaugh: English, algebra, history, manual training.

AHL: What was manual training?

Rorabaugh: Learning how to work with wood, primarily. How to be kind of a carpenter.

AHL: We call that Industrial Arts now.

Rorabaugh: They called it manual training.

AHL: How about sciences?

Rorabaugh: And then science, yes, we had science. We didn't have biology in junior high.

AHL: What was your favorite subject?

Rorabaugh: I think English, no history was my favorite subject.

AHL: Did they teach Latin?

Rorabaugh: Yes, there was Latin.

AHL: At Franklin.

Rorabaugh: In the ninth grade.

AHL: Were you required to take it?

Rorabaugh: As I remember you weren't. You weren't required to take it. I should have taken it. Because I think a person should know Latin. But I wasn't very good at languages, so I elected not to take Latin.

AHL: Did they have teams at Franklin?

Rorabaugh: Debating teams?

AHL: Yes.

Rorabaugh: Yes, I think they did.

AHL: And how about sports?

Rorabaugh: Not so much.

AHL: Teams. Sports teams.

Rorabaugh: In them days, they didn't have organized teams too much.

AHL: How about Washington High School?

Rorabaugh: Washington did, yes. But from the seventh to the ninth grade, I don't remember any really organized teams. Well, they would have the eighth grade team playing the ninth grade or something, but not teams that went out representing the school.

AHL: Name some of your favorite teachers at Franklin.

Rorabaugh: Miss Byers, she was there for quite a long time. There was Miss Woodson, she was a geography teacher. Oh that's another subject I forgot, geography. Miss St. John, she was a rather elderly teacher at that time, even. I think my sister said she had her. There was Rowena Wilson, she was a history teacher, she had been there a long time. She was a real good teacher.

AHL: Charles, in our schools today, we have Associate Principals in the junior high and senior highs and they mainly deal with discipline problems. Can you remember any Associate Principal?

Rorabaugh: I can't remember during that era.

AHL: So they had a Principal? Did they have an attendance secretary that you remember?

Rorabaugh: Yes. Attendance, I think that a teacher doubled in

to be a secretary, a part-time teacher.

AHL: Were you required to go to school everyday?

Rorabaugh: Yes.

AHL: And what would happen if you didn't go? If you played hookey?

Rorabaugh: If you didn't show up that day, the next day you had to bring a written excuse signed by your parents.

AHL: Did you ever play hookey?

Rorabaugh: No. I think one time I hurt myself when I was sliding with a sled and I decided I wanted to stay out or something and it wasn't all that official. I can't say that I ever did play hookey, though.

AHL: So did your mother write you the note?

Rorabaugh: It was a proper note. I guess what I did the forgery was on the report card.

AHL: You forged a report card!

Rorabaugh: I duplicated my father's signature. (Laughter)

AHL: So your father never saw that report card?

Rorabaugh: Yes, he saw it, he knew he didn't sign it but he didn't make a big issue out of it. I learned to duplicate his signature pretty good.

AHL: Tell me about Washington High School. Where was it located?

Rorabaugh: Washington High School was located right where the Legion Bowling Lanes are now. That's at Fifth Street and Fourth Avenue.

AHL: What were your hours of school for the day?

Rorabaugh: Seems to me that it was just about the same as they was in the junior high schools. Seems to me, that we got out about 4:00.

Eight to twelve and one to four.

AHL: And how would you get home for lunch?

Rorabaugh: I'd go home on my bicycle. In fact, we done it all the time I went to Washington High School.

AHL: How did you dress for school?

Rorabaugh: The main thing in them days, you'd have a white shirt, and a blue serge suit, that's the way I'd dress. And sweaters, a lot of sweaters.

AHL: Sports jacket? And matching pants?

Rorabaugh: No. This was like a regular suit.

AHL: A suit.

Rorabaugh: Three-piece suit.

AHL: A three-piece suit. Did you need to wear a tie?

Rorabaugh: No, I don't believe it was required to wear a tie. However, more of them did wear them than would nowadays.

AHL: How about your shoes?

Rorabaugh: One thing about it, the shoes was altogether different than they are now. If you'd come to school in what they call jogging or athletic shoes, they kind of frowned on it. Now, as I observe, just about 95 percent of the kids wear these jogging type shoes, including everybody to about 20 years old.

AHL: Charles, tell me about the athletic teams at Washington High School.

Rorabaugh: Of course, mostly there was about four sports that was quite strong. The football and basketball. They didn't play much softball or baseball. This was just on an intramural basis to play around school, but just for exercise and gym classes or

health classes. Then the varsity basketball, then they had the running team, the track events: running, jumping, pole vault.

AHL: How many high schools were in town during this time?

Rorabaugh: Well, at the time that I went to Washington, there was only two senior high schools at that time.

AHL: Washington and . . .

Rorabaugh: Grant.

AHL: And where was Grant located?

Rorabaugh: Grant High school was over on Second Avenue and Fifth Street West, right where the Board of Education is. Do you know where the Board of Education is? That's it.

AHL: You mentioned Harrison when we first talked. Tell me about Harrison. Elementary school.

Rorabaugh: Well, they had this old Harrison school. It was over on about Seventh Street and L Avenue West. One time, about in the year 1931, 1932, the thing burned down, burned to the ground. Caught fire mysteriously. Burned bad.

AHL: Was anybody hurt?

Rorabaugh: No, I believe it occurred during the time that the children and custodians weren't there, maybe in the early hours of the morning.

AHL: You don't have any idea who did it?

Rorabaugh: I've heard, but I wouldn't like to put it on tape. They say that it wasn't all accidental.

The Washington High school building, in the first place, was such an example of old-time architecture. It had these

battlements--kind of a half-round turrets--several places on it. It was made out of gray stone. I don't know if that was that Stone City stone, something like the kind of stone that they used on the Anamosa Reformatory. This is probably a different kind because that's more yellowish there. The Washington High School, the kind of stone that it was made out of just kind of a dull gray-like. But it was a very impressive place, really.

AHL: How many floors? Name some of your classmates.

Rorabaugh: Sam Johnson, connected with Allan Motors.

AHL: Any of the Douglas, the Sinclairs. . .

Rorabaugh: They was really before my time. I went to Franklin, there was a Huckins girls that went there. That was the big deal where they had an interest scandal, where they had a man was taking in a lot of money and offering 52 percent interest. It was quite a promotion scheme. That erupted in the 1920's.

AHL: Tell me a more about that.

Rorabaugh: It come to light about 1929, I think it was, that there was a kind of a scheme going on in Cedar Rapids where some people would take in some money and offer big interest. These people ran a cigar store and they said that through making big buys, through international markets and that, they was able to make huge sums of money. But they needed some money to perpetuate this and keep their operation going. So they would accept money from people and they would promise 26 and 52 percent interest. An finally, just like any scheme of that kind, you know it will all come to an end. It lasted a couple years, I guess, and there was a lot of scandal about it in Cedar Rapids.

AHL: Can you name any Cedar Rapids tragedies that you can remember?

Rorabaugh: The most famous is the Broksmith case.

AHL: Tell me about that.

Rorabaugh: I call it the Broeks~~smith~~ case. I know it very thoroughly because my sister and me have talked about it so many times. It had to do with a man who was between 35 and 40 years old. He lived out on Sixth Street and 12th Avenue SE, roughly speaking. He was said to be very eccentric, but very talented. He was skilled at electricity, which was a fairly new science in those days, back in 1921. So he was going from his house one day and he encountered a group of boys, they threw a ball and they knocked his hat off. He became enraged and cursed and remonstrated with them. At the time that he did that, it was noticed that he had a pistol in his waistband of his trousers. So after arguing with these boys awhile and cussing at them and blaspheming them why he got on board a streetcar down in the vicinity of Sixth Street and Twelfth Avenue and the boys knew he was funny acting, and they'd known him before, I guess they'd observed him, so they went and they called the police that he had a gun. As he got onto the streetcar, why more or less commandeered the streetcar soon after he got onto it. So it was well that the boys called. The call was duly received and so the police proceeded down to the corner that I mentioned before, Wixstead's corner, it was right across from the Guaranty Bank, on Third Avenue, Armstrong's corner now. As the streetcar came into view, they apparently had a plan where they was going to apprehend this dangerous man. It

failed some way. He was able to get off of the streetcar. I don't know exactly how he did it without them apprehending him. So they had to pursue him, the police, I think there was three of them. They pursued him up the alley, between Second and Third Avenues between Third and Fourth Streets. He ran up the alley, Broeksmitt. He ran into the back of the Third Avenue Virginia, the kitchen part and ran right through the patrons, the serving part, out the front door. Then got back onto Third Avenue again, ran across the tracks, ran up Third Avenue, then he ran up the front steps of the Library, he ran through the Library, then he went through a door which was kind of towards the north part of the Library, towards the alley, and ran upstairs. Apparently as he ran up the stairs, he more or less trapped himself, he couldn't seem to get anywhere from there because the police was in hot pursuit of him. So he fired at the police and--incidentally, he exchanged shots as he was going up the alley and hit one policeman--as he got up to the top and seemingly got trapped up in the top of the stairs, a policeman proceeded up to try to grapple with him and he fired and fatally wounded the policeman. The policeman's name was Frances Wilson, who was a hero of the police force. Even to this day, he was a hero for being so brave as to go after a man who was armed like that. Two or three policemen finally overpowered Broeksmitt and he was sentenced to a long term. It told in the paper when he expired, he finally died in Fort Madison in the 1940's sometime, maybe in the early forties.

AHL: How do you spell his name?

Rorabaugh: That's B-R-O-E-K-S-M-I-T-T. Broeksmitt.

AHL: That is interesting. Can you think of any other stories? Any other tragedies? Fires? How about the Public Library murder, you mentioned that.

Rorabaugh: That's the one I'm talking about.

AHL: That's the same person?

Rorabaugh: Actually, it wasn't a murder in the truest sense of a murder. A murder is kind of misleading because you think of one citizen murdering another or something of that nature. Or maybe a little bit of stealth to it or something. Whereas this was a policeman pursuing a desperado.

AHL: And this was Mr. Smitt.

Rorabaugh: Mr. Broeksmitt.

AHL: Mr. Broeksmitt.

During your childhood, early years--twenties and thirties--who were the leaders of Cedar Rapids?

Rorabaugh: Well, I think definitely that, socially speaking, the Douglasses was the leaders. Because you heard about them. They had the biggest estate, most impressive estate in Cedar Rapids and you heard about them quite a bit. They were well connected politically. They had quite a tradition behind them and everything. There was other families. There was the Averills, for instance, was quite well-known around Cedar Rapids. It occurs to me. I wasn't in the social swim too much, really.

AHL: The leaders who did a lot for the community.

Rorabaugh: I think that Armstrongs has certainly contributed a lot. ***END***

