



JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with: Ruth and Sam Perry  
Conducted by: Molly Eovino  
Date: May 15, 1985  
Place: Cedar Rapids, Iowa

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1,2 --When were you born? Where?  
2-3 --How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?  
--What are your parents' names?  
--Where did you go to school?  
2 --Are you married or single?  
3 --Did you raise a family? How big?  
3-11,12-13,16,17-18,19,23 --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)  
--Trolleys (the Interurban)  
31-32 --Horses and First Automobiles  
--Mud roads and the seedling mile  
--Hunter Airport and the first planes  
--Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- Newspapers  
--Radios  
--Advertising  
--Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

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

2. Famous Characters

- Cherry Sisters  
--Grant Wood  
--Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)  
--Marvin Cone  
2-8,12,13,15-16,26-27,28-29,32 --Weaver Witwer  
4,6,7,8,16,26-29,30,32 --Hedy Witwer

3. Lifestyle
  - Life before air conditioning
  - 31--Winter Activities
  - Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
  - 5,9 --Clothing
  - Toys
  - Saloons/Taverns
  - Farm Life
  - 26 --Backyard Pool
4. Family Life
  - 3-9,16-17 --Household Help
  - Women's Roles
  - 17-23--Childrens' Activities/Behavior
  - Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)
5. Ethnic/Minority Life
  - Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
  - Indians
  - 24-25--Segregation of Blacks
  - Jobs Available
  - 13 --On being Black
- C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community
  1. Education
    - Cedar Rapids Schools
    - Coe College
    - Mount Mercy College
    - Cornell College
  2. Government
    - City Services
    - Streets/Roads
    - Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)
  3. Medical
    - Hospitals
    - Patient-Doctor Relationship
    - Broken Bones
    - Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
    - House Calls
    - Home Delivery of Babies

4. Business and Economy

- Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
- Local Brewing Companies
- Retail Businesses /Department Stores
- Professions
- Banking and Finance
- 24 --Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
- 9-11,15 --Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
- Farmers Market
- Mills on Cedar River
- Buildings Erected
- Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
- 15-16 --Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

5. Attitudes/Values

- 22 --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)
- Public Library Murder(1921)

2. National Historic Events

- Womens' Suffrage
- World War I
- Roaring 20's
- Prohibition
- 2 --Great Depression



Sam and Ruth Perry came to Cedar Rapids during the latter years of the Depression, following up on a housekeeping job opportunity. They have remained in Cedar Rapids ever since. Their association with Weaver Witwer, his family, business, and household is discussed.

INTERVIEW WITH: Ruth and Sam Perry  
INTERVIEWER: Molly Eovino  
PLACE: Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
DATE: May 15, 1985  
TRANSCRIBER: Laura D. Coglean

ME: This is an interview with Ruth Perry. Sam Perry is also sitting here because he has as much to offer as Ruth does. We're going to have to get your picture taken, do you think you can stand it?

S. Perry: No.

ME: Okay. Ruth, could you tell me where you were born and how old you are?

R. Perry: I was born in Wamego, Kansas.

ME: Can you spell Wamego?

R. Perry: W-A-M-E-G-O

ME: Okay, what year?

R. Perry: August, the 19th, 1913.

ME: Okay, Sam, where were you born, and how old are you?

S. Perry: I was raised in Beeville. I was born in--I can't remember the town's name.

ME: Beeville, Texas?

S. Perry: Mmm-hm

ME: In what year?

S. Perry: I was born in 1906. May 2, 1906.

ME: 1906. Okay, where did you both meet?

R. Perry: In Colorado Springs.

ME: Next question--How did you get to Colorado Springs?

R. Perry: Well, I used to go there for the summer, and then we met through mutual friends.

S. Perry: Well, my mother was living there at the time, and I had never lived with her much that I can remember, and as to my grandparents' past, well then, I decided I'd go and live with my mother. She lived in Colorado Springs. I just made up my mind to go there.

ME: Okay. You met in Colorado Springs. Did you marry there?

S. Perry: Yes.

ME: In what year?

R. Perry: 1940. We met a few years before that.

ME: When did you come to Cedar Rapids, and why?

R. Perry: Well, we met during the Depression, and we were looking for work, and my brother lived in Omaha, and a friend of his said Weaver Witwer was looking for a housekeeper. Looking for a couple, and he said he thought he had that couple. And so, we were interviewed and brought to Cedar

Rapids where he interviewed us.

ME: Weaver interviewed you?

R. Perry: Yes, and we've been here ever since.

ME: Okay. Did you ever have any children?

R. Perry: No, we didn't.

ME: You had lots of adopted children. Namely, half the kids of the south-east side of Cedar Rapids.

S. Perry: That's right!

R. Perry: I used to stay all around--was it out in the Bowman Woods?

ME: There was no Bowman Woods back then.

S. Perry: Well, that was after she started taking care of--after she left Witwer's.

ME: Okay. Well, let's keep going then. You came to Hilltop to work for Weaver Witwer as a couple.

R. Perry: That's right.

ME: Where did you live, and what did you do?

R. Perry: We lived right on the place.

ME: In the house.

R. Perry: That's right. And Sam was taking care of the house. I did all the cooking. They entertained an awful lot there.

ME: I remember eating in the formal dining room. Whenever we ate, it was always in the formal dining room.

R. Perry: That's right.

ME: When there were family dinners or holidays out there. Was it always formal dining?

R. Perry: Most of the time it was, except when--sometimes on holidays, they had family and friends.

ME: And you'd what--eat out on the porch?

S. Perry: Well, in the summertime, they would eat out--they would eat breakfast, sometimes they would have dinner out on the porch.

R. Perry: Yes.

S. Perry: On the backporch, and, of course, they entertained. In the summertime, they entertained.

R. Perry: Then there was the music hall and the different halls, and the dining room, and the two porches. It was just all over the house.

ME: Could you describe the house back in 1941--what it was like and perhaps, if you can remember, some of the people who came that they entertained.

R. Perry: Well, they... let's say, like the Montgomery's...oh, my goodness...

S. Perry: Dows.

ME: Now, when you say the Dows, you're talking about...

R. Perry: The Sutherland Dows.

ME: Okay, seniors. Okay.

R. Perry: Oh my, I haven't had time to think about this.

S. Perry: The Howard Hall's occasionally.

R. Perry: No, there's a lot more.

S. Perry: I'd say that's as far as I can go.

R. Perry: Pickfords, oh, there was so many. I know we're leaving some of them out because there was so many.

ME: Sure.

S. Perry: Oh, what was the doctor's name?--Dennis?

R. Perry: And her doctor, too. There was so many that, I know, it wouldn't pay to start because we would leave so many people out.

ME: Okay, Weaver was always crazy about horses...

R. Perry: That's right.

ME: He always had horses around and I remember him--I never remember seeing him in a suit, I always saw him in brown--what would I call them--jodphurs or riding pants with the big belt buckle.

R. Perry: That's right.

ME: Was he always riding horses? Did he--Sam, do you know more about that?

R. Perry: He was either walking, riding... (directs Sam to photograph)

S. Perry: This would be one of the last ones we got of him, I guess.

ME: He was always riding his horses.

R. Perry: Oh, you'd see him with suits, too.

S. Perry: Oh yeah. He wore suits every day.

R. Perry: Yes, every day to work. He went out in a suit every day. He walked an awful lot.

ME: This would've been taken right over here in the driveway--it looks like.

S. Perry: I don't know...it probably is the driveway.

R. Perry: In the driveway it looks like going to the little barn.

ME: Over here?

R. Perry: Mm-hm.

ME: Okay, I've got to get back on the track here. Ruth, what would you cook? What were some of your specialties that Weaver and Hedy would ask for?  
(pause) Can you remember?

S. Perry: One that I can remember that he loved so well--he used to raise his own capons. And he'd get capons and Ruth used to cut 'em up and have chicken and biscuits. He just loved those.

R. Perry: Yes, and their steaks--their broiled steaks--roasts--it was a variety. You never knew.

ME: Okay. What was your schedule like during the day? When would you come down to the kitchen and carry on?

R. Perry: Sometimes, we didn't get out of there. (laughter) It was just one following the other. Sometimes it might be--she might have a brunch,

sometimes it might be a luncheon, and sometimes, it was a dinner party.

They entertained an awful lot.

ME: Okay, how about on a normal day?

R. Perry: Well, just a normal day...

S. Perry: ...fix their breakfast.

R. Perry: She always had breakfast in bed.

ME: Hedy. Now, by "she" we're talking about...

R. Perry: Mrs. Witwer.

ME: Mrs. Witwer, who went by the name of Hedy--that's right? H-E-D-Y?

( R. Perry: Hedybell.

ME: Hedybell. That was her real name.

R. Perry: That was her real name.

ME: She was a very petite woman, was she not?

R. Perry: I don't know...she was...

ME: Of course, I was only six.

R. Perry: She was around about 5'5" or 5'6".

ME: No, she wasn't. No.

( R. Perry: No, she was average height.

ME: And she always had breakfast in bed.



R. Perry: Yes, she had her breakfast in bed. She was a very busy woman. She was not the kind that wanted somebody just waiting on her all the time. She was very busy. She was private, but loved to do for others. They were both that way.

ME: Weaver did seem to take care of a lot of people. ( chiming clock)

R. Perry: Well, now, I don't know too much about his private life. I know he... well, you heard that he helped a lot of people. But his private life was just private. You know what I mean?

S. Perry: He didn't like the publicity of what he did.

ME: Right.

S. Perry: I remember we had took a big meal--well, one time we had a big meal down at Ioway Foods--we had a dinner for all the help down there. And one turkey that we didn't touch, and he told me to take it--that's when they had this children's home--Do you remember that? He told me to take it over there.

ME: To the children's home.

R. Perry: We had more than one that day.

S. Perry: Oh yeah. That one that we didn't touch, we took it over there. I don't know what we did with the others that was touched. We just took it for...

R. Perry: Nothing was ever wasted.

ME: It always went somewhere. Did you have any other duties at the house besides cooking?

R. Perry: Oh, I did the ironing. Well, I didn't--at first, I did, and then it got

heavy, and then, someone else did the washing and ironing. But he liked his shirts done a certain way, so we used to do his shirts.

ME: Sam, you took care of the house or the grounds or...

S. Perry: Just the house, I had nothing to do outside.

ME: In what manner of speaking?

S. Perry: Well, running the vacuum, and the serving...

R. Perry: Just the cleaning.

S. Perry: ..and the cleaning in the house.

ME: And you served the meals?

S. Perry: Mmm-hm

ME: He didn't have you in any special outfit or anything, did he?

S. Perry: No.

ME: You know, like a butler with the white gloves...

S. Perry: Well, I wore white suits at dinner time and during the parties but other than that, I didn't have no special...

ME: Okay. What year did you go to work for Ioway Foods?

S. Perry: In forty-four. I think it was forty-four--forty-three or forty-four.

ME: And what did you do there?

S. Perry: I worked in a food processing plant--process... make peanut butter...

ME: Could you describe what Ioway Foods was since it's now not a business.

S. Perry: What it was...

ME: Yeah, did Ioway Foods have different products or...

S. Perry: Oh yes. They had...I couldn't name them all-- peanut butter, and roasted coffee, made mustard and salad dress...

R. Perry: Wait a minute.

S. Perry: And the Grill Mix pancakes was packaged. We mixed that right up there and packaged it and shipped it out. Hmm, gosh, bottled vinegar, ammonia, barreled vinegar, hmmm.

ME: Kind of like the idea of Hy-Vee food brand now with all the different variety of products.

S. Perry: Mmm-hm.

ME: Except it was Ioway.

S. Perry: Mmm-hm

ME: Because did--well, when they actually--did Ioway actually close their doors or were they bought out by Hy-Vee?

S. Perry: Ioway Foods was closed. They closed. Witwer Grocery was taking it over eventually, and then, eventually, they had a bakery and we furnished-- it was for Witwer's Farm Market, at that time--We furnished them bread, and he had eggs. We candled eggs there at Ioway Foods, and then he had a milk processing plant built in and he delivered milk to the farms stores. Of course, when Hy-Vee took over, we still delivered milk to to the Hy-Vee stores until it went out of business..

ME: Until Witwer Foods went out of business?

S. Perry: Mmm-hmm, Witwer Grocery.

ME: Yeah. Ruth, we discussed this before. You were the Grill Mix Lady?

R. Perry: That's right.

ME: How did you represent Grill Mix?

R. Perry: By just being myself.

ME: Okay, was your picture on the package?

R. Perry: Oh no.

ME: Did you--would you--what would you do if you promoted the product? Would you go somewhere and what would you do?

R. Perry: They would just have--say like you work with the scouts, the churches, and different organizations, and they wanted to have pancake suppers and things like that. So, I would just go and supervise.

ME: Okay. Did you have a special chef's hat or anything like that?

R. Perry: No. I would organize it after I got there, and then have so many people helping me. And sometimes, I had--well...these new culinary cooks were really something. (laughter) Had 'em coming out of all sides.

ME: Do you still do a lot of cooking?

R. Perry: Well, not unless I have to. (laughter)

ME: Do you do all the cooking now?

S. Perry: Oh no, no, no.

R. Perry: No, I cook if I have to, but I don't cook anything like I used to.

ME: Have you ever thought about sitting down and starting to write down your recipes or sharing them?

R. Perry: Well, they're mostly--they're all in my head.

ME: You shouldn't let them stay in your head.

R. Perry: Why?

ME: Well, because, you should share them--with people like me who's an awful cook.

R. Perry: Well, the thing that I do, Molly, that's--if it doesn't look right, and it doesn't taste right, then I add until I get the consistency that I want.

ME: Who taught you how to cook?

R. Perry: Watching my mother. It was so effortless for her.

ME: I watched my mother and the only thing I got was kicked out of the kitchen. You had said, Ruth, that Weaver did not like the idea of Aunt Jemima. Could you tell me why?

R. Perry: Well, Quaker Oats had their Aunt Jemima, but he just had--I was their representative and that was it. He wanted somebody that could do the job, and felt that I could do it.

S. Perry: Aunt Jemima was Quaker Oats brand. They had their package on their pancake...Aunt Jemima.

R. Perry: So I just went as Ioway's representative and to help get things organized. And he felt that I could organize it.

ME: Okay, so, but when he did--when you say that he didn't like the Aunt Jemima idea--is it because it was Quaker Oats or was it because of the connotation of the Black with the--of the Black woman with the turban on her head?

R. Perry: Well, I was never confronted with that at all. I was just plain Ruth.

ME: You've always been just Ruth.

R. Perry: That's right. They have all known me as just Ruth. Uh, let's see if I can find that...if it's in here...they used to send them to me from all over..when they were in the paper. This is a picture with Hubert Humphrey.

ME: So, you met some world-famous personalities? As just plain Ruth?

R. Perry: Yes.

ME: Do you remember who? Can you remember some of them?

R. Perry: Well, some of our...oh, I ought to let you see this...

S. Perry: There was Humphrey, you know, he...they had...

ME: (looking at letter ) Oh no.

S. Perry: She had a demonstration--where was that at?

R. Perry: Uh...Coos Corner, Lost Nation.

S. Perry: Lost Nation, I guess.

R. Perry: Did you read that?

ME: Yeah. Do you want me to read this out loud?

R. Perry: Yes.

ME: So we can get it on tape? You know this, right? This--it's a letter written in, probably, what--third-grade hand writing, it looks like. It says "Jamie to Ruth" and it's from Jamie Halpin. "Ruth, please come home, we're getting lonely. Sam wants you to come home, too. I want some of that good..." I don't know what this is... B-R-E-O-L, breol.

R. Perry: Wait a minute...

S. Perry: It's probably home-made bread.

ME: Bread! Okay. It's just his writing! It's still bad..."I want some of that good bread and rolls so please come home. God bless you. Yours truly, Jamie Halpin. "I love you Ruth Pary," and Perry is spelled P-A-R-Y. (laughter) And it's also signed Jamie Halpin and all the Halpins.

R. Perry: Oh, I keep all of those things.

ME: That's kind of indicative of how the children who are now all in their thirties and forties felt about you back in the Fifties.

R. Perry: Yes, but, then, I ran into--the later years--Oh, is that tape on?

ME: Yeah (laughter) be careful! Well, wait a minute. I've got to try to keep it on course. We'll talk...we'll get to...I want to talk about... let me finish one section at a time.

R. Perry: All right.

ME: Then we can leave that behind. Let's finish with Ioway Foods. Is there

anything else to discuss about this? Was Weaver a fair employer? Sam?

S. Perry: Yeah. In a way. I don't know how to explain it.

ME: Was he strict?

S. Perry: Yes...he didn't pay regular union scale. He was under that.

ME: He did not ever have a union. Is that correct?

S. Perry: Well, yes. In a way. When I started, they...I was automatically in the union, but he did all the negotiating. The workers couldn't negotiate. The reason why he did that is because so many places his truckers went that was unionized that wouldn't cooperate with the drivers. So, then he put his drivers and all his help in the union and paid all the dues. But we didn't have no say. That was the only union. And then later on, just before he went out of business, that's probably one cause that caused him to go out of business because he didn't want to pay union labor. They went on strike and...

ME: His workers went on strike?

S. Perry: Mmm-hm. And, I don't know how long they was out, but when they settled, he'd taken back less than half of the workers. Then he come up to union pay scale not long after that. That's when he closed.

ME: He closed his doors. Did he close his doors because he couldn't afford it any more or simply because he was older and losing interest or what do you think the reasoning was?

S. Perry: Well...



ME: Or do you want to say?

R. Perry: You wouldn't be able to--I don't think a person would be able to tell because he probably wouldn't discuss it, you know.

S. Perry: Well, he was a man that didn't want nobody else to tell him what to do with his own business. He was going to run it the way he wanted to. And he wasn't going to let the union tell him what he had to do and couldn't do. That's one thing. More than that, I don't know.

ME: Okay. Through these years, Ruth...Okay, you lived in the house when you first moved to Cedar Rapids. When did you move out of the house?

R. Perry: Well...

S. Perry: Three years later.

R. Perry: Well, it was going on four years. And then we moved down the road--about a mile down the road. In fact, Mrs. Witwer used to walk down there in the evening. And she'd take her walk and walk down there and then we'd walk back up with her. Well, after so long a time and the way they used to entertain you can take just so much of that, you know. And then you've got to get away from it. When you're just on your feet all the time, and when you're serving coursed meals like we served all the time. You've just got to get away from it.

ME: But did you not work up there anymore or did you continue...

R. Perry: Oh no. I went up on holidays. There was meals that he didn't want anybody else to cook.

ME: So you did not cook every meal then. You just cooked the special meals.

R. Perry: Just special meals if I wasn't busy. It was just special meals that I cooked for them. And then I baked for them a lot.

ME: Well, you're famous, as Jamie said, for your bread and rolls. I told you before, that Cathy, my sister's favorite memory is of you in the kitchen kneading the bread, and you're just bouncing along in time while you're at it.

R. Perry: And then come in and find that one of my loaves of bread is missing.

ME: Where was it?

R. Perry: Hack had ate it.

ME: Hack Halpin ate it. Now that I got this on tape, do you think I can black mail him?

R. Perry: He just loved raw dough.

ME: Oh, I love raw dough. You mean he'd taken the loaf of bread before it was cooked?

R. Perry: That's right.

ME: Then you were up all night with him because he was throwing up, right?

R. Perry: Nope, he seemed to have got through it.

ME: Yuck. When you quit working at Hilltop as a regular cook, what did you do then?

R. Perry: Well, for awhile, I didn't do anything. Then, different ones would ask me if I would keep their children, so then I started sitting with the

Melcher children, and then it started boomeranging.

ME: You would babysit for families when the parents went out of town.

R. Perry: That's right. Or else, they would bring them to the house, down there to the house, and I would keep them until they came back from their errands.

ME: Now again, you can't remember all the families and you said there's no way to get started on them.

R. Perry: That's right.

ME: Besides the Chadimas, the Dows's, the Halpins, the Phelans, the Melchers, the Millers, what Millers?

R. Perry: The John Millers.

ME: The John Millers. Okay.

R. Perry: Jimmy and Joan. Jimmy used to...there was either a big chair that he would crawl up in and take his nap, or there was a white rug. I had to get him a clean white rug. And he always got down in front of the radio. And he would take his nap there.

ME: Who was this?

R. Perry: Jimmy Miller.

ME: Jimmy Miller, and do you remember about what year we're talking about with this?

R. Perry: Since he was only about three years old. He's got a family of his own-- married and got a family of his own.

ME: Oh, well we all do!

R. Perry: ...got a family of his own now. He was such a cute boy. Oh, he liked to follow his grandfather around. He was always very busy doing carpenter work or something.

ME: Do you remember any other stories about the families or the kids that you took care of?

R. Perry: Oh, we always used to have a wonderful time. (laughter) And you!...when it was time to go to bed, she got up in that window, and started singing real loud...

ME: You're talking about me aren't you?

R. Perry: (laughter) Yes. "How much is that doggie in the window?" She didn't want to go to bed. And she said, "I don't have anybody to sleep with, I don't have anybody to take me to bed," So Sam would come up and take her to bed. And it wouldn't be very long before you'd be sound asleep.

ME: Ruth, tell the story about when you were sitting on the floor in the den and I crawled up on your fanny, do you remember that?

R. Perry: (laughter) No!

ME: Yes, you do!

R. Perry: There was so many of you that used to crawl up on me, I forget!

ME: Well no, you told it to me...do you remember, Sam? You told it to me just that time, a year ago, or so, when we met over in Drug Town, about-- I crawled up on your back, and I was saying, "Ruth..."

R. Perry: Oh, she was always making fun of my fanny. Because it stuck out so far. Next time I saw her, she was coming along just a 'strutting--and what should be sticking out, but this little fanny--and I said, "Uhh-ohhh, somebody else is going to have to thin down a little bit." "What's the matter, what's the matter?" She's looking back there. This one had a big fanny, too.

ME: I still do. (laughter) And my husband blames it on gymnastics--I say, "No, it's Ruth Perry!"

S. Perry: Do you do gymnastics?

ME: I did, my daughter does now. She's good!

R. Perry: It's so cute. I shouldn't say this, but the kids used to come and be talking to me, and just lay--just like it was a cushion. Right there on my fanny just like it was a cushion.

ME: It was! (laughter)

R. Perry: Oh no. Oh, we used to have some wonderful times.

ME: Well, that's what we're trying to capture. Are the wonderful times.

R. Perry: Do you remember the time...uh, Hap, I think it was, loaned all the cars. Your mother and dad had gone, and he loaned all the cars to his friends. I went to get groceries (you went with me, I was taking you with me) and when I came back, I drove in the garage, and I said, "Where are the cars?" "Oh! My friends borrowed it." Oh, I said to him, "I'll give you fifteen minutes to get them back." And you'd have thought it was a race track in the yard. They brought them back.

ME: How did he ever find them?

R. Perry: He knew who he let have them. Ah, what was the name of the lady that lived next door to you? On Fifth Avenue?

ME: Uh, Aunt Else, and then she moved over next to us on Blake, too.

R. Perry: She was so nice.

ME: That was Else Moore, M-O-O-R-E.

R. Perry: I'd taken the keys to her, and I said when Frances comes, "Would you please give her these keys?"

ME: To the cars?

R. Perry: Yes. And, so that's what she did.

ME: Frances being Frances Halpin, my Aunt Frannie.

R. Perry: That's right.

ME: Cause you didn't trust Hap with the cars.

R. Perry: I thought he might look for them again. So, I kept just the ones that we needed.

S. Perry: How about the time that you told him he couldn't go out...

R. Perry: Oh, yes ...

S. Perry: ...pillows in the bed, and covered them up like somebody was in bed.

ME: Oh, he did, he snuck out?

R. Perry: And he and Denny Meyers went out and pretty soon I looked--I went in and I --I checked everybody every night to see if every one was in bed--and

I said, "This doesn't look right." And I turned the bed back, and there was a teddy bear in the bed.

ME: How old was he?

R. Perry: Oh, I guess he was about fourteen or fifteen, if he was that old.

ME: He must have stolen someone's teddy bear out of some room.

S. Perry: Pillows, he had pillows...

R. Perry: Anyway...when they started home, they said, "We didn't leave any lights on." So when they got in the house, who should he meet, but me. And he said, "How did you know I was gone?" And I said, "You know, I always check." So he was grounded for a while. But he didn't mind.

ME: You were...

R. Perry: That's what's so nice about it. The punishment that they got--nobody seemed to mind.

ME: Well, because they could sit home and you'd feed'em, and...

R. Perry: Well, we used to always make a cake or something like that, or make cookies, and everybody was puttin' in, you know? Somebody'd put in the sugar, somebody'd put in something else, it'd all turn out.

ME: I remember that, you know, mom and dad would go out of town, and it was always that you two came to stay with us, and it was fun. We'd look forward to it.

R. Perry: I know. I had to laugh at Matt. They said, "Well, don't get Mrs. Perry

cause Mrs. Perry's too hard on us, Well, they got another lady, and they didn't say anything, but they got ready to go again--they was going to get this lady, and they said, "Nope, unless you get Mrs. Perry, you can't go."

ME: Now, this would be...

R. Perry: ...and they said, "I thought Mrs. Perry was too hard on you." Then, at least, we know where we stand.

ME: Now, when you say the Knapps, you're talking about Mr. and Mrs...

R. Perry: That's the John Knapps.

ME: This was the John Knapps, when John was a child.

R. Perry: No, this is the John Knapps. John and Bunny, and their children.

ME: Oh! Okay. All right. When did you stop...about what year did you stop babysitting for children?

R. Perry: Well, let's say I haven't stopped yet, but I go over to Sherman's--Mary's a big girl now, I think that was the last--this is the last year I'll probably be with Mary because she graduates this year from her school. But, the little ones, oh about two or three years ago.

ME: Oh, you babysat up until then?

R. Perry: Yes. But, I thought it was time to come home.

ME: Yeah, I thought it was longer than that.

S. Perry: I think so too.

R. Perry: It might be. No, I've gone different places--of course, I've stayed with



Mary.

S. Perry: Mary's the only one.

ME: Mary...

R. Perry: Sherman.

ME: Let's talk for a moment, if we could, about the different organizations you've been in. When you came to Cedar Rapids in 1941 did you notice any difference of attitude, or how were things in 1941 for a Black couple?

R. Perry: Well, they were not very good. I remember once that my brother came here well, about the only place you could go to eat, and that was along the railroad tracks, on those little joints down there. And, I remember once we went in and got a hamburger. I was eating one and the hair kept getting longer and longer and longer.

ME: That you were pulling out of the hamburger.

R. Perry: Yes. So, we haven't been back down there. I am very funny about going out anyway. Of course, when you cook yourself, you're kind of particular about your food, you know. And then another time, my brother came here from Omaha and we went in a place, and we asked him if he served Blacks, and he said, "Well, you're in, I can't very well turn you away." And I remember there was some people in the place we knew, and they called us by name, "Hello, and how are you" and this, that, and the other thing. Then the man got friendlier. And, so, it was kind of rough.

ME: But you--did you join any organizations or anything like that to become involved in the community?

R. Perry: Well, we belonged to the NAACP. We have for a long time. But, other than that, we didn't have time to go and do anything because we were busy. Very busy.

ME: When you were working for Weaver, when you moved, did another Black family move in? At the house?

R. Perry: Up there? Yes, I believe so. Yes.

ME: See, what I remember is--what's their last name? Marion's family?

R. Perry: Marion--James...McGowan.

ME: McGowan. Okay, the McGowan family. They lived up at the house. Okay, see, that's my memory, that's about as far back as my memory goes.

R. Perry: There were several before them, but I can't place them now...(clock chimes)

R. Perry: Nolan Homer went out at the house...

ME: Wait a minute...see, you forget you're on tape don't you?  
(clock chiming stops) Okay, just so the...

R. Perry: The Walkers were leaving when we went in.

ME: The Walkers.

R. Perry: Lula and Homer Walker. Then we were behind them, and then...was it James and Ellen...?

S. Perry: No, Iola.

R. Perry: No, there was another.

S. Perry: Iola.

R. Perry: Oh yes, my sister and her husband.

ME: Worked for Weaver?

R. Perry: Yes. And there was another couple in between there, just keeping up with them. Uh... but I think the McGowan's was the last couple weren't they?

S. Perry: Mmm-hmm.

ME: Why did Weaver build the swimming pool? Was that for his enjoyment or was it for the McGowan children?

S. Perry: Swimming pool? Oh no.

R. Perry: Well, he liked to swim, he used to swim at night, and Mrs. Witwer was a beautiful swimmer. But he used to go in in the evenings.

ME: Oh, I see. Okay.

S. Perry: Well, I think they wanted to build the swimming pool when they built the house. But, I guess the need at that time didn't agree, so later on, she had it built, I think.

ME: Mrs. Witwer.

S. Perry: Mmm-hmm. I think she was the one that built it.

R. Perry: I wouldn't...I don't know about that. That's kind of personal. So, really, I don't know that much about it.

ME: So Weaver always had a Black couple or a Black family working for him.

R. Perry: No, I think he's had white couples, too. Cause there was one...Well, I don't know if it was a couple or not, but I do know that...somebody used

to work for them. Worked in the house.

S. Perry: Before they built the house. See this was a weekend, they come out here on weekends and have their parties in this house up here.

ME: In this house right here?

R. Perry: That's right.

S. Perry: It had a huge screened-in porch.

R. Perry: Fireplace.

S. Perry: A huge screened in porch on the back end.

R. Perry: This whole side was nothing but a screened-in porch.

S. Perry: And then they had a fireplace in there that must've been--oh it was a huge fireplace in a huge room--a club room--and a big table. in there where they played poker, and games. I don't know what all they did play. That was before my time. And then this back room was always a bedroom and they had a white lady that stayed and taking care of it, and she was up there for a while when they first started. I guess she did everything. But...

ME: That's a big house to be doing everything in.

S. Perry: Then I guess Homer and Lula took over when she finally left and went on the farm. I can't remember her name--I did know, but I can't remember.

ME: I can't believe that that house--I remember when Evie moved in it, it was so pretty--of course, she had such good taste anyway.

S. Perry: She had it remodeled when she moved in.

R. Perry: And see, they tore all that--that big porch off.

ME: That's what I always wish there had been pictures of--of how things were.

R. Perry: Well, I said...I do have some pictures of the house up there.

ME: When you first came to Hilltop.

R. Perry: Mmm-hmm, it was..and, you know, forever saw a kid, you could see, we were bringing somebody's kid. You know.

ME: And it was a happy home.

R. Perry: I thought it was a happy home.

ME: Weaver and Hedy never had any children.

R. Perry: No, but they, they always had their nieces and nephews around them.

ME: It was always a fun house to go play in.

R. Perry: That's right. And it was...and he used to whistle; hop, skip, and whistle all the way up the steps, and all the way back down the steps.

ME: Weaver did.

R. Perry: Uh-huh.

ME: He was a neat man.

R. Perry: I thought he was.

ME: I have never met another one that equalled him.

R. Perry: We said, when we stopped to think of it, he was very good to us. You

know, I think we treated him like he treated us. One time...is that on now?

ME: Uh-huh. You're being just fine.

R. Perry: I said, one time, he said to Sam, "You left that damn hose on last night," Sam says, "You damned liar, you left it on yourself." And he said, "By God, I did." (laughter)

ME: Well, so see, you didn't have to treat him as a high and mighty, you guys traded quips back and forth.

R. Perry: At one time, he said to me, when he was getting ready to pay me, "You should say, 'Weaver, I'm so glad to work for you.'" And I said, "I'd be telling you lies, I'd rather work for anybody but you." (laughter)

ME: What'd he say?

R. Perry: He liked to have died, he started laughing! And Mrs. Witwer said "I'll pay you," And I said, "Well, Mr. Witwer paid me." And I got the biggest tip I ever got in my life. She said, "God bless you." (laughter) Now, just things like that went on, you know.

ME: Uh-huh. But they took care of you well. How long have you lived in this house?

R. Perry: How long have we lived here?

S. Perry: Let's see. I can give a little hint. We lived up there three years. Two or three years down below here. I can't remember if it was three years... See, when we went out of the house, we moved down there.

R. Perry: About a mile down the road.

S. Perry: About three years and the barn and the chicken house--they had chickens in it and I took care of the chickens and worked down...

End of Side One

S. Perry: With chickens and eggs and things down there, so I had to give it up, and then he said we could move up here.

ME: So probably three years tops in the house down the road. So you must've moved here like...

S. Perry: It must've been in the fifties.

ME: Early fifties. And you've been here ever since--over thirty years. People don't live in houses thirty years any more, so that's really a record!(laughter)

S. Perry: Well, when we came here, oh, this was the worst looking house...It was the worst looking house you ever saw in your life. By the time we scrubbed the walls and everything, and when Mrs. Witwer came in and she said, "I don't believe it's the same house."

ME: Well, who had lived here before then?

S. Perry: Oh, different ones.

R. Perry: Oh, some of the people who had worked for him.

ME: So, it had been built for the help on the property.

S. Perry: You wouldn't believe it--there used to be a big-bellied stove sitting right there where you're sitting.

ME: A big pot-bellied stove right where I'm sitting.

P. Perry: But you see, it was just three rooms. And they put--Lonnick and Burger put the upstairs on it.

ME: For you?

S. Perry: No

R. Perry: No. For another family--the Davises

S. Perry: The Davises taking care of the...

R. Perry: ...the horses.

S. Perry: He was the horse shoer. See, he had horses on his farm at that time. He did all his farm work with horses. In the wintertime, well, he kept them shod all the time, but the ones that was on the road, they had...in the wintertime when it was icy, they had to have shoes with...

ME: Spikes?

S. Perry: Spikes in them so they wouldn't slip and fall. So he kept a horse shoer he had all the time. And they lived here for I don't know how long.

ME: Those are by-gone days. The big horse farm...

R. Perry: Yes, cause when we came out, this was all dirt road.

ME: East Post Road was a dirt road?

R. Perry: Yes, it was a dirt road, and it was lots steeper than it is now, and closer to the fence. Let's see, then they moved it out--cut it down and moved it out.

S. Perry: Moved it this way. Over on Witwer's property.



R. Perry: Uh, the only one that would get up the hill in the winter--when it was in the spring of the year would be Weaver.

ME: In his pickup?

R. Perry: And then if he got stuck they would go and get the horses--pull him up the rest of the way. We had to leave all the cars down below the hill.

ME: Where did he meet Hedy? Do you know?

R. Perry: No. She told me once, but I forgot.

ME: Was she from here?

R. Perry: I thought she...I forgot now, she told me.

ME: Well, that's over and about. Thank you very much for the interview.

R. Perry: And he was raised on a farm, I know.

ME: Well, he grew up around here.

R. Perry: I know, around here somewhere. I remember one time at Me-Too, I mean... well, yes, it was Me-Too, I met his uncle, and he was talking about how they was raised on a farm.

ME: And look what he built up.

End of Side Two  
End of Interview

