

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH: VIRGINIA BLACK

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- When were you born? Where?
- How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
- 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

- 25-27--Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
- 18--Trolleys (the Interurban)
- 4-5--Horses and First Automobiles
- 5-6--Mud roads and the seedling mile
- 6-7--Hunter Airport and the first planes
- Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)
- 4,18,20--Streetcars

2. Communications

- 7--Newspapers
- 8-9--Radios
- Advertising
- 8--Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

- 9-11--Motion Pictures
- Cedar Rapids Parks
- Dances
- Carnival Week
- Chautauqua
- Community Theater
- Little Gallery
- Symphony Orchestra
- Circus
- Greene's Opera House
- Amusement Parks (Alamo)
- Camps

25-26--Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)

2. Famous Characters

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

3. Lifestyle

- 12--Life before air conditioning
- 13--Winter Activities
  - Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
  - Clothing
- 14-15--Toys
  - Saloons/Taverns
  - Farm Life

4. Family Life

- 15--Household Help
- 19--Women's Roles
  - Childrens' Activities/Behavior
- 16-17--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

- 1-3,19--Cedar Rapids Schools
  - Coe College
  - Mount Mercy College
  - Cornell College

2. Government

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

3. Medical

- 21-22--Hospitals
  - Patient-Doctor Relationship
- 13-14--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
- 23-24--Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
- 28-30--Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
- Farmers Market
- Mills on Cedar River
- Buildings Erected
- Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
- Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

5. Attitudes/Values

- Children/Discipline
- Sex/Petting
- Charity
- Divorce
- Work
- 15-16,19--Working women, Voting Rights for Women
- Patriotism (World War I)

D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community

1. Catastrophic Events

- Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
- 22--Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
- 25--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
- Great Depression



Virginia Margaret Black was born in 1915 at the Cedar Rapids home of her parents, Robert William Black and May Carman Black. She attended Johnson Elementary, Franklin Junior High, and old Washington High School, all in Cedar Rapids. After spending one year at Coe College, she transferred to Northwestern in Evanston, Illinois, where she received her teaching degree. With the exception of her three years at Northwestern, two years as a music supervisor in Mount Clemens, Michigan, and two years in Japan teaching on an Air Force base, Miss Black has lived in Cedar Rapids all of her life. While her memories include transportation and communication, Miss Black concentrates her reminiscences on many aspects of her childhood lifestyle and family life.

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PH: Where were you born?

Black: I was born in Cedar Rapids, on the corner of Washington Avenue and Eighteenth Street, in a duplex house. I was really born there.

PH: An at-home birth?

Black: My mother was afraid that she'd lose me if I was born in a hospital.

PH: That was pretty common practice in those days to be born at home. What were your parents' names?

Black: My father was Robert Black and my mother was May Black.

PH: Did you attend school here in Cedar Rapids?

Black: I went through Johnson School, Franklin Junior High and old Washington, downtown.

PH: The old Washington School would have been where Greene Square is now?

Black: It's where the Legion Lane is.

PH: Now the school--was that a one story, two?

Black: No. I think it had three stories and Fourth Avenue did not go through at that place. The Union Station was right across where Fourth Avenue came in. You went up Fourth Avenue and stopped at the railroad station. Washington High School was just east of that.

PH: How many stories were there in Washington High School?

Black: I think it was three.

PH: Do you remember how it might have been heated?

Black: I would presume with coal. I know there were some rooms that were inside of other rooms. It was so old at that point. The steps were grooved.

PH: What do you mean, rooms inside of rooms?

Black: There were several rooms where you'd walk into one room and then go on farther into another room. The inside room did not come out on the hallway. I suppose it was because it would have been even with the stairway.

PH: So, around the stairwell, they just bypassed a lot of hallway. I'm sorry that I didn't introduce you in the beginning. Virginia, would you like to tell me your name and your address, please.

Black: Virginia Black, 2418 Grande Avenue.

PH: Are you single, Virginia?

Black: Yes.

PH: What was your occupation during your adult years?

Black: I was a teacher at Arthur School for many, many years. I started out as a music supervisor in Mt. Clemens, Michigan. In those days, you had to teach two years outside of Cedar Rapids before you could come and get a job here. When my two years were up in Michigan,

I came back to Cedar Rapids and went to Arthur School. With the exception of two years in Japan when I was teaching on an Air Force base, I was at Arthur School until I took early retirement.

PH: So, you've lived most of your life, except for those four years, in the Cedar Rapids area?

Black: I went to Coe College for one year, and then I went three years to Northwestern in Evanston, Illinois.

PH: We were talking a while ago--to back up a bit, when you were talking about going to Washington High School--it was downtown, across from the Union Station or close by it. Did you walk to school in those days or were there other means of transportation?

Black: I took the streetcar down, and I even came home for lunch, at times, took the streetcar back. Sometimes we went down to Killian's tearoom for lunch, depending on how wealthy we were that day.

PH: You didn't have lunches available at the schools, evidently?

Black: In junior high school, we did have a cafeteria, but not at Washington High School. We had to furnish our own. Sometimes I'd get a ride home. The doctor next door used to bring me home in his Model T. He and his daughter would pick me up and bring me home. Of course, I thought a Model T was terrible. I would rather have come in a fancier car, rather than be grateful for the ride.

PH: Can you remember what it cost to ride the streetcar?

Black: I don't know. It couldn't have been more than a dime.

PH: Did it come to your place?

Black: The Grande Avenue streetcar came up Third Avenue to Sixteenth Street and branched off on Grande Avenue. It went on up, just one block farther up from our house, where Blake and Grande come in together. We used to stay in the house, look out, and when we'd see the streetcar going up the block, then we would go out and we could get the streetcar right at our driveway. By the time he went to the end and made the switch--the trolley line, he'd have to go out and bring down one and put one in the back-up or vice versa, then come on down. By that time, we were outside.

PH: Was the turn-around...?

Black: It wasn't a turn-around. He just went from the back to the front and vice versa.

PH: So he ended up on the other end?

Black: He started up on the other end.

PH: I think you mentioned to me one time about horses and the horse fountain that was in your area.

Black: Right there, where the Grande Avenue branches off of Third Avenue, there was an old horse fountain--a great, big, metal horse fountain. As I remember, it had a fountain on the other side for us to have a drink, also. I don't know where it went.



PH: When you were much younger, in the period when you were very small, do you remember many people using horses along the streets for transportation?

Black: I don't think that we had that many horses. I remember my folks came out here in 1913, 1912, and they came in a car. It took them two days to get here from Chicago.

PH: Why did it take two days to drive?

Black: The roads weren't paved. It took them that long to make it.

PH: Was there any highway that they might have talked about coming into Cedar Rapids on?

Black: They came in on what we used to call Lincoln Highway, from Mt. Vernon--came on in and they went directly into Marion. There was a seedling mile out there, which was paved-- one mile of paving out there, and the Lincoln Highway turned to the left. There's a little dog-leg there. It turns to the left now, but originally it went straight on. This seedling mile was put out there. There were apparently paved roads in town, but they were trying to placate the farmers by giving a little bit of cement out there in the country. We used to ride out that far, just to ride on the paving.

PH: Now, can you pinpoint where the seedling mile might have been?

Black: It was east of Camp Good Health. When you go across the bridge by Camp Good Health, and then there's a little turn. Oh maybe about a mile farther on is quite a definite turn to the right

when you're going toward Mt. Vernon. That's where it was, but the old road used to go directly into Mt. Vernon from there.

PH: The seedling mile that you're speaking of, is that still, or did that become part of the Lincoln Highway?

Black: That became part of the regular highway.

PH: And then you mentioned that it came into Marion.

Black: The old road went into Marion from that particular point. It's still there. It's gravel as I remember now.

PH: I wanted to ask you--you mentioned that most of the roads were mud. You were talking about out of the city. Did you have any use--to go out to the airport; was that paved out to the airport?

Black: When I was young, the airport was on the old Lincoln Highway. I can't remember the name of the street now. It was Hunter's Airport.

PH: Did you have occasion to go to the airport? I thought you mentioned one time you might have.

Black: In about 1928, my grandmother was very ill in Waukegan, Illinois. The trains didn't run very often and there was no direct transportation. We had no airplanes at that time making definite trips. My mother chartered a plane from Mr. Hunter to take us in. It was a four-seated thing--Mr. Hunter, and then there was another young man with him (I suppose he was the co-pilot) and my mother and I were in the back. It cost \$185 because we went 185 miles. It must have been rather bumpy from the standpoint that, after a while,

Mr. Hunter passed my mother an upchuck bag. When we got there, it seemed as if we landed in a field, but it was their airport. It wasn't built up at that time.

PH: Was the plane enclosed?

Black: Oh yes. It was four-seated, enclosed, like some of the little ones that you see now at the airport.

PH: Did you enjoy it, or were you apprehensive?

Black: I had a fine time. My mother was scared to death.

PH: Do you remember anything about ferries they might have had on the Cedar River here?

Black: No.

PH: What kind of communication did they have? For instance, the Gazette-- was that the only newspaper we had?

Black: The only one I can remember is the Gazette. One thing I do remember is the fact that when something spectacular happened, they would have an "Extra" and all of the paperboys would come out hollering "Extra, Extra" and you'd have to go down and buy an extra newspaper.

PH: So you knew something happened.

Black: When you heard the boy coming out, you knew that something had happened. You couldn't turn on the radio or television and find out.

PH: What do you mean, you couldn't turn on the radio?

Black: We didn't have anything.

PH: No television?

Black: No.

PH: How about for other communication? You would have had the telephone.

Black: Yes. We had the telephone.

PH: Did each one have their own phone, that is, each house?

Black: Yes. We all had a telephone. We had a party line--5239J was our telephone number when I was little.

PH: Was that common practice for them to have a party line?

Black: Yes, I think so. It was quite expensive, as I remember. We usually didn't call long distance unless somebody had either died or was terribly sick. It was a three-minute charge, so you tried to get everything said in the three minutes. I guess maybe we were penurious, but we never called back and forth unless it was something drastic.

PH: It was like the "Extra, Extra"! You knew something special was happening.

PH: You mentioned a while ago that you couldn't turn on the radio to find out what was on this "Extra, Extra." Didn't you have radios, then?

Black: My father had a radio that had a speaker on top. There were three dials and you had to twist them just right in order to get the station. If you didn't do it right, it would squawk. Of course, they never let me play with it because I didn't know how to do it. I remember he was very pleased when he got Pittsburgh on the radio. It was a big occasion.

PH: Did we have local stations here in Cedar Rapids?

Black: There was a station on Fifteenth Street and Second Avenue. It was just in a house. It had a round turret affair in front. I've forgotten his name. I thought it was Farmer. He was, as I remember, the first one--at least the first one that I was aware of.

PH: Did their stations run twenty-four hours a day? Do you remember that?

Black: I don't know. I doubt it because not too many people had them at the beginning.

PH: It would have been unusual to have them in your home. What did you do for amusement? Were there picture movies to go to?

Black: We used to go to the movies. Yes, we had quite a number of theaters. The one that is the World now was originally the Strand when I was young. We used to go down and sit up in the balcony. That was exciting. Before we went to the movie, we always stopped at the little candy store next door. I think Mrs. Dysart ran it at that time. We always got toasted coconut marshmallows to eat



while we were at the movie. I remember the first movies that Al Jolson sang in.

PH: Was that the first talkie?

Black: The Jazz Singer. As I remember, it wasn't a talkie all the way through and then they would have the captions on. You had to learn to read fast in order to know what was going on.

PH: Can you remember what it cost to go to a movie then?

Black: No. Maybe a dime. I don't remember.

PH: Would that have been in the 20's or 30's?

Black: That would have been in the 20's.

PH: Well, they had more than one theater in Cedar Rapids, didn't they?

Black: That was the Strand. On Second Avenue, we had the Isis and the Palace. On First Avenue, where Stouffer's is, was the Rialto. Then on A Avenue and Third Street was the Majestic Theater. They used to have plays come there. I never did get into Greene's Opera House until it was made into a garage. I never had attended anything there.

PH: Where was Greene's Opera House located?

Black: It's where the Brenton Bank would be--right across from the Roosevelt Hotel.

PH: They had shows come through, you mean?

Black: Yes. Yes. They had wonderful things for that time.

PH: Did any of the theaters sort of specialize in different types of movies, or did they all show the same type?

Black: I think the Strand was a little higher class at that time. Then, of course, later on came the Iowa Theatre and the Paramount.

PH: Do you remember if the Community Theatre was going in Cedar Rapids at that time?

Black: I don't remember.

PH: Did you have any amusement parks you were aware of that you might have gone to?

Black: We used to go to CeMar Acres, out where Jack's is on First Avenue.

PH: Would that have been in the 1930's maybe that they had that or not?

Black: I would say it was close to the 30's. I don't remember, of course, when it started.

PH: Did they have any other amusement parks that you can recall?

Black: I was not aware of them. Maybe they wouldn't let me go.

PH: Did you get to go to any camps, like for girls?

Black: Oh yes, I went to Camp Wapsie Y. It was the boys' camp for a while. Then, when the boys were through, the girls got to go. Then we went to Stone City later on--the Camp Fire Girls.

PH: Do you remember any people who might be famous characters that were associated with Cedar Rapids, like the Cherry Sisters?

Black: I remember seeing the Cherry Sisters walk on the sidewalk, but I never saw them in the theater.

PH: Or Marvin Cone or Grant Wood?

Black: I saw them, but I never had any of them for a teacher.

PH: Would you like to elaborate what it was like living before air conditioning? I assume you didn't have air conditioning.

Black: Well, if you live in Iowa, it gets hot in the summer. We had no air conditioning. One year it was so hot, I remember sleeping on a cot up on the shaking porch, in the back here. Then Mother and I would go and sit in the basement and read. It was so hot during the day. It was miserable. I can remember one time going downtown on Third Avenue, just below the Catholic Church, and people were sitting out on the roofs of the porches. It was so hot! Just anything to get a little cool air.

PH: You mentioned the shaking porch. What's a shaking porch?

Black: It's a little porch, right above the kitchen, here. It's not enclosed and you used to go out and shake the dustmop there.

PH: In the summertime then, you had to go sit outside in the evening, or go to the basement during the daytime to cool off.

Black: It was just in the heat of the day that we went to the basement. The rest of the time we used to sit around out in front on the porch. We also visited with our neighbors all of the time. We'd go back and forth. Now, with air conditioning, we don't get out to see them as much.

PH: That does keep people in, doesn't it? For winter activities, you lived close to a park here so you could...

Black: Yes, we used to go tobogganing, skiing--had lots of fun. It wasn't cold in the wintertime, when you're young and like to slide.

PH: Where did you go tobogganing or skiing?

Black: Out at the country club--Cedar Rapids Country Club.

PH: Did you have any accidents?

Black: I fell off the cannon in the park and broke an arm once. They used to have a cannon out in Bever Park. For World War II, it was dismantled for the war effort. As youngsters, we used to climb around on it and, unfortunately, I fell off once.

PH: You mentioned that it was dismantled. Do you mean that it was melted down?

Black: I believe it was.

PH: When you broke your arm, did the doctor come to you or did you go to the doctor?

Black: The doctor lived next door and he took me in his old Model T Ford down to Mercy Hospital and they set it down there.

PH: Did you have to have a big cast on it?

Black: It was up so close to my shoulder that they couldn't put a cast on it. They just taped it to me.

PH: How long did you have to have it immobilized?

Black: Oh, I don't remember--three weeks maybe. I don't remember how long it was, but it was in the summer so it was hot.

PH: Do you remember what you might have had for toys when you were young?

Black: Dolls--always had dolls and one that would say "Mama" and shut her eyes.

PH: Were they plastic, rubber?

Black: They had what I thought was real hair. I don't know. They were beautiful, I thought. A big one--I remember my Mother carrying it and it was just as if she was carrying a child, it was so big. Then we had Bye-Low dolls, baby dolls that would kind of cry and shut their eyes. We had great fun with those.

PH: Bye-Low?

Black: That was the name of the brand--Bye-Low Dolls. They were little baby dolls.

PH: And you just took care of them?

Black: Yes, very busy.

PH: I bet it was a lot of indoor activities.

Black: Yes. We did typical little girl things. We played house when the leaves came down in the fall. We would rake them around and make it into a floor plan of a house. We had the kitchen and the dining



PH: Then if women did hold jobs, what kind of jobs did they hold?  
Perhaps clerking, maybe?

Black: Clerking, I would say mostly. I'm thinking in terms of my own mother. None of her friends ever worked out. I don't know.

PH: Now, if you went to the clothing stores or the stores downtown, were they primarily women or men who were sales people or clerks?

Black: I think they were women in the women's departments. The men had the men's departments.

PH: Do you know anything about how the management might have run? Whether or not most of the management were men or whether...?

Black: I think it was all men, at that particular time, in management.

PH: For department heads and the stores and that?

Black: Yes.

PH: Do you know of any women who might have run any businesses?

Black: Off hand, no.

PH: Otherwise, it was mostly service work that you were aware of. On Sundays, for instance, were the stores open?

Black: No, heavens no!

PH: What was a typical Sunday day for you as a child?

Black: We would go to Sunday School and then come home for dinner and then go for a ride in the afternoon. My father, when I was young, smoked

cigars. The cars did not have any of the little vents on the side that you could open up, so no air conditioning in cars. He'd puff away on his old cigar. The car was just blue with smoke. If he opened the window to air out, because I was in the back seat, I always blew away. It was very windy.

PH: He'd roll the window down, you mean, instead of the little side vents? Did you have windows in the back of the car, too?

Black: Yes. I remember for a while we had an open touring car. We had isinglass curtains that went up in the wintertime to keep us warm. It had running boards.

PH: Was it heated? Was it like we have our cars now?

Black: We always had a heavy, heavy fur robe to put around us, over our laps, when we were riding in the wintertime.

PH: Did you go for a Sunday ride in the winter as well as in the summer?

Black: If the roads were all right, yes.

PH: How long did you usually ride? Did you go for a ride for an hour or so?

Black: Oh, I would say an hour or so. We'd always ride around, looking in the country, sometimes around town.

PH: Did you stop for treats or drive any special place?

Black: We always drove past our house where we live now. My mother always had to drive up Grande Avenue to Park Terrace, then up to Bever and back down to Nineteenth Street.

PH: We were discussing one day, was that a streetcar or an interurban that went down Eighteenth?

Black: Both. The interurban went to Mt. Vernon. It came up Fifth Avenue to Eighteenth Street, curved around, went down Eighteenth Street to Blake Boulevard, up Blake Boulevard in the center where they now have the trees planted and grass in the middle, to Forest Drive, turned and went to the left there and finally ended up over at Sinclair. The interurban continued out the right of way to Mt. Vernon, but the streetcar stopped about Sinclair.

PH: When you're speaking of Sinclair, are you speaking of what we call Bruce more?

Black: The street--Sinclair Street or Sinclair Avenue.

PH: Did the streetcar and the interurban use the same tracks?

Black: Yes.

PH: But the interurban went on out to the town of Mt. Vernon?

Black: Yes.

PH: Rather than just to Mt. Vernon Avenue?

Black: No. No. It didn't go out Mt. Vernon Avenue at all.

PH: Were there any Indians, at all that you knew of, that lived close to the town here?

Black: I don't remember of any Indians around.

PH: Were there any areas that were strictly Czech, Greek, German, that would have been in your section of town?

Black: Not where I happened to live. I know they used to be down on the southwest side--the Czechs.

PH: Were there a lot of jobs? Can you remember that or were you too young?

Black: When I got out of college, jobs were very hard to get. I had to practically beg a job. I finally got one, but it was hard work getting one.

PH: You told me you were a teacher. Were there many men teachers or mostly women?

Black: There were mostly women, especially in the grade school. You had to have taught outside of Cedar Rapids for two years before they would hire you to teach in Cedar Rapids.

PH: I remember now, you mentioned that you had to go and then come back. What about in the management of the school system, were the principals and superintendents men or women?

Black: The grade schools always had women principals. As I remember, the high school had men.

PH: In your grade school, you went up past sixth grade?

Black: Through sixth grade, then we had junior high school. That was a woman principal when I was in school, Miss Byers; high school was a man.

PH: You mentioned, I think, for your junior high, did you go to Franklin?

Black: Yes, I went to Franklin.

PH: For college, you went to Coe here for one year and then went away. Do you remember hearing any discussion of the dispute between Marion and Cedar Rapids for having the courthouse?

Black: No, I don't remember that.

PH: Or even remember hearing your parents talk about it?

Black: I guess I wasn't interested. I remember when Kenwood was a separate section.

PH: Were there more stores out there?

Black: No. I don't remember there being as many stores as there are now.

PH: Was there a space of land between where Cedar Rapids stopped and Kenwood started?

Black: I don't think so. The streetcar went out that far--the First Avenue streetcar.

PH: Then it stopped at Kenwood, or did it go farther?

Black: I don't remember. Part of it was brick--First Avenue, part of it was brick. Then there was a horse stable out about across from Lindale Plaza on First Avenue.

PH: On the south side there?



Black: On the south side, yes.

PH: A stable?

Black: I'd say it was about where Menard's is, in there some place.

PH: You mean they kept riding horses, or for horse and buggies?

Black: It was just a stable. That's all that I remember.

PH: Can you remember anything about the hospitals? I think one time we were discussing about one time when your mother had surgery.

Black: My mother had surgery, I think maybe in 1919. In the old building of St. Luke's. I remember walking up the steps out in front--a long flight of steps. She was kept in bed for at least ten days after an appendectomy. She had a private nurse who was on duty for twenty hours. She had the afternoon off. I think her bill was five dollars a day and she had to pay one dollar for the nurse's meals. I think the operating room cost fifty dollars. I've forgotten what the doctor's bill was, but it wasn't very much in comparison with today. No insurance, nothing like that.

PH: Did you get to go up to visit her when she was in the hospital?

Black: Yes.

PH: They let children go up?

Black: Yes. Children could go up. It was a big excursion for me.

PH: You were young and got to go to see your mother. You couldn't have been too old. Did doctors make house calls then?

Black: Oh yes. Doctors always came to the house if you were sick. Also, you had quarantine signs put on the house if you had chicken pox or scarlet fever. Depending on the color of the sign, was whether people could come in or out. For instance, if you had scarlet fever, Father couldn't even come home. He had to stay some place else.

PH: Because they figured that he could be a carrier?

Black: Yes.

PH: You mean that everybody in the house would be quarantined and have to stay in?

Black: Yes.

PH: You mentioned to me one time that you could remember the Douglas Starch Works when it blew up?

Black: Yes, it was an explosion. My father worked and my uncle worked at the Douglas Starch Works. My uncle was down there at the time. Everybody was so concerned that he was in the place, but fortunately he was not hurt at all. I remember, after that, they always had a party for all the children of workers who were killed. They'd give presents. It was at Christmas time and they would give presents to all of these children.

PH: Can you remember what time of year it was that this happened? And your dad just didn't happen to be there?

Black: It was in the evening. As I remember, it was around dinner time, but I can hear the explosion.

PH: Could you hear it where you were, out this far?

Black: Yes. Dad said that was what it was.

PH: On the retail businesses, were there just as many stores, or more than we have now? Do you remember the names of any of them?

Black: Killian's, Armstrong's, Denecke's, then Newman's.

PH: Was that before...?

Black: Craemer's.

PH: Was Denecke's before Newman's?

Black: Yes,

PH: Did they have restaurants downtown?

Black: Yes. We used to go to a restaurant in the basement where the Iowa Theatre is now. You used to walk down the stairs, I remember, and it was a cafeteria down there. Then there was another one called the Mandarin Inn, up above the theatre on Second Avenue. It seems to me that they had a dance floor there. It was Chinese.

PH: Second Avenue and what?

Black: It would be above where the Capri School is now, in through there. That was the Isis Theatre and across the street was the Palace.

PH: The Mandarin Restaurant was up above the theatre?

Black: At least it was close enough there, right in that section.

PH: Was that Witwer Market?

Black: Oh, that used to be the post office. That was the post office until the one on First Street was built.

PH: Before it became the Witwer Senior Citizen Center?

Black: It was a grocery store.

PH: Yes, I remember when it was a farm market.

Black: I remember going into high school and having a tour of the post office there.

PH: What was on the corner of Second Avenue and Third Street?

Black: That's the post office.

PH: Were there other restaurants, like for instance any in the downtown area that you were familiar with?

Black: We used to go to Bishop's.

PH: Were there any nationalities, for instance, like the Greek?

Black: They had two Virginia Cafes. One was on Third Avenue and the railroad tracks and one was on Second Avenue and the tracks. I think they were Greek. I don't think we went there.

PH: Any particular reason?

Black: We just didn't happen to go.

PH: Do you know how long it would take--if you'd see a building that they were putting up--would that be a long process or the same as now?

Black: I don't remember.

PH: We were discussing the bank closings one time when you and I were talking about it, and you said that your teacher had taken you downtown?

Black: Yes. It was when I was in Washington High School. At noon, we went down and watched the people line up to take their money out.

PH: They knew that it was going to close?

Black: Apparently they had gotten word that they might close.

PH: Was the public library there?

Black: Right where it is now, before their moving to the new one.

PH: Do you remember, how about Greene Square, the park, was that always there also?

Black: Yes, the park was there and then there was a little cupola, made out of stone. It had benches around it. It was right in middle so that people (it had a roof on it) could go and sit in there when the weather was bad.

PH: If they wanted to be outside? Sometime back you mentioned the Union Station. That would have been where Fourth Avenue didn't go through. It just would have blocked the whole avenue.

Black: Fourth Avenue stopped at Fifth Street, and then continued on the other side of the Union Station. There was just nothing there. When we went to Washington, we had to have gym (the girls had gym) at the YW.

PH: Because you didn't have a gymnasium?

Black: We didn't have a gymnasium. I don't know whether the boys had gym. I haven't the slightest idea.

PH: Did you go to any other activities at the YW that you can remember?

Black: Yes, they had what we called Hi Y-ettes, which was sponsored by the YW for girls. Now, I don't know what the boys did. I'm afraid I wasn't interested.

PH: When you were so close to the train station, did any of you just enjoy watching the trains come in and out, or did we have very many passenger trains?

Black: It seemed that we had a number of them. When they went through, classes more or less ceased because it was so noisy. It was right on the railroad tracks.

PH: Did you ever have an occasion to take a train ride?

Black: Oh, yes, we always took the train to Chicago. One time we went to California. In those days (I was small), we had a berth--lower and upper. On the way, I don't think the train we were on had a dining car, but they'd stop at those Fred Harvey Restaurants and everybody would pile out and go in and have a meal. Then they'd come back, and get on the train, and off we would go again.

PH: Could you remember what year that would have been?

Black: That was in 1922. In Albuquerque, Indians had their stands along the tracks. You'd go and buy things.



PH: Do you remember how long it might have taken you to get there?

Black: No, I don't remember, but they had a club car at the back. It had an observation platform outside. It was great fun to go and sit outside and watch the countryside go past.

PH: They didn't have any dining cars?

Black: Some trains had dining cars, not all of them. The one that we were on apparently didn't.

PH: Were you able to get on the train in downtown Cedar Rapids?

Black: As I remember, we got on that one in Chicago, from the standpoint that we were visiting my grandmother and went from there out to California.

PH: I was curious about whether or not it would have been possible to get a train from here.

Black: We came home and got off here.

PH: Do you think that maybe the children in the twenties and thirties were maybe more disciplined and stayed a little closer to home?

Black: We didn't have as many things to do outside. The family life was the important part.

PH: So, you always did things with your family. I know you mentioned going to Illinois to visit relatives and so the whole family would go in that case. Did you think that there were many charitable organizations during the twenties and thirties, especially back in the thirties' would have been Depression days? Can you remember

hearing any discussion on that or what they did for people who were out of work?

Black: I remember the CCC put unemployed young men to work. I don't remember any...

PH: Otherwise, you don't remember seeing people in breadlines or souplines or anything like that.

Black: No, I don't remember any.

PH: A while ago, we were discussing businesses and that, and I wanted to ask you about grocery stores, and if the groceries were like our big supermarkets, or little neighborhood groceries.

Black: I think they were more mom and pop stores, and you'd go in--we even called on the telephone and have it delivered. If you went in, he'd write it all down on a slip of paper and add it up as you were waiting--no adding machines. He did it in his head. We had ice delivered to the house. We put a sign in the window. Depending on which way you'd put it, you got 25, 50, 75, or 100 pounds, and the man would put a leather thing over his shoulder and hoist it up on his back, and as soon as he got around the house all the youngsters in the neighborhood would climb up and get ice chips to eat.

PH: You mean off this truck?

Black: Off the truck. The things--when he chopped the ice to the right size for whatever the woman wanted. The milkman came, I think...

END OF SIDE ONE - BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

PH: When you said that your ice was delivered and mail twice a day?

Black: Mail was twice a day.

PH: Did the postman come around to your house on foot?

Black: Our postman here came in a little car. He was always here by nine o'clock in the morning and two o'clock in the afternoon.

PH: What about ice cream?

Black: We always would call up East End Pharmacy, over on Fourth Avenue and Sixteenth Street. Oliver Woukon would come over with a quart of ice cream. He'd come over on his bicycle. Of course, we had just plain ice in the refrigerator, so it wouldn't keep very long. You couldn't get it ahead of time and store it.

PH: So they just delivered it when you wanted it?

Black: Yes, when they wanted it. I can remember my brother having a pop stand on the corner of Grande Avenue and Nineteenth Street. He let me take charge of it one time and I was so afraid I'd have some business because I was so young that I didn't know how to make change.

PH: At the pop stand, was the pop in bottles or cans?

Black: Yes, they were in bottles and he had a great big wash tub. He'd buy ice from the iceman and then put the bottles of pop in. As people would come along, he'd sell them a bottle of pop.

PH: Where did he obtain the pop?

Black: I suppose somebody delivered it, a distributor.

PH: Was this a pop stand for people driving by?

Black: Just driving past, yes, or youngsters in the neighborhood.

PH: Did he do that for a period over the summertime or real hot weather?

Black: In the summertime, he had it for a couple of years. He had canvas around the side of it. Oh, it was fancy.

PH: That sounds like fun and a good way to make a little money. I remember when they had popcorn stands, outdoor popcorn stands.

Black: They used to have one down on Third Avenue at the railroad tracks. I had one friend who would stop and buy a bag of popcorn every afternoon.

PH: Was this when you were younger?

Black: Yes.

PH: The popcorn stand went during the good weather, or close up during the winter?

Black: I would presume it was in the best of weather.

PH: They weren't able to have any ice cream stands or anything like that out, were they?

Black: I don't remember of any. We'd go to the store.

PH: To get the ice cream because of the ice? What about rootbeer stands?

Black: Well, that would be like the pop.

PH: Would they be mostly like your brothers', though you mean, or buildings?

Black: I think it was mostly like my brothers.

PH: Just go into business for themselves.

END OF SIDE TWO - END OF INTERVIEW



