

Mr. Waffle was born in Marion, Iowa where he has lived his entire life. Born in 1905, he has many recollections of railroad and trolley travel when horses and mud roads were the norm. He tells us about the Depression era and gives us a verbal tour of Marion businesses and topography from those early years.

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JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Norman T. Waffle

Conducted by Carolyn Wellso
June 19, 1985

956 13th Street Marion Iowa
Transcribed by Sue Daugherty

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Junior League of Cedar Rapids
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Conducted by: Carolyn Wellso
Date: June 19, 1985
Place: 956 13th Street Marion, Iowa

Waffle: I am Norman J. Waffle, who was born at 897 13th Street, Marion, and have been living for 49 years at 956 13th Street. So I haven't moved very far in my lifetime. I'll be 80 years old the 25th of this September. I was born in the house at 897 13th Street. That means I was born in 1905. I'll try to reflect the times. I was in a square block that had three barns built for the horse and buggy age--only one horse by the time I came along. They were just horse barns with stalls and room for hay and stuff like that. Because a little bit earlier than this time of my birth, the only transportation we had was horses. So even the better parts of town and the ones closest into town had to have barns and horses.

I was educated in the Marion schools, putting in all of my elementary years at Emerson. Then moving to Lincoln High School, for three of my four years and completing my last year at the "new high school" as they called it, that was built in the modern twenties. We moved into it in about January of 1925. One of the best places to read about the Marion schools and how they pioneered high school work in Iowa is The History of Marion written by Marvin Oxley. The set is in four volumes and is available from the Marion library, or the Cedar Rapids library,

or the Masonic library. It has never been published, but the one set that Mr. Oxley made has been photographed and reproduced for use at these other points.

The town, in my early years, was quite different in some ways. People walked, people went home for lunch or at noon for most of their lives. It was a railroad town and most of the people to work even if it was to the roundhouse out in the east end of Marion. We had no automobiles, they were just beginning to come in as I was in the middle of grade school.

The make up of the town by nationality and by origin was quite different from what it is today. There weren't too many people born in Marion, although my mother was, most of them came from the East: New England first, then Ohio, then Illinois.

Our houses were different. We had houses with gingerbread on them, and sometimes elaborate carving inside, and we had big porches that we sat on. You could watch your neighbors go home to dinner, you would watch the school children go home to dinner (at noon, I mean, we'd never heard of a school lunch in those days.)

If you wanted to keep your food cool, you took ice. The ice wagon man chipping a big chunk of ice at the end of the wagon and carrying it in was quite a common sight. Sometimes they gave you a card that had different numbers on the four sides of it and if the hundred was up, you wanted a hundred pounds of ice, and if the fifty was up, why, a smaller piece would do, you weren't quite out of it yet.

My house, the house I was born in, was made for gas lights

before we had electricity. The water company--we had our own here in Marion, and later under private management, it became quite a burden to the city because you couldn't get water extended to a new lot or a new section of town unless the owner thought he could make a profit on it. The city bought the water company about 1951 or so. Immediately they had several bond issues and great expansion so that as soon as possible after that time we could give anybody water that wanted it and who could pay for the necessary hook-up. The town could lay the mains. Otherwise, we've stayed with Cedar Rapids on the gas and the electricity. The same company serves both towns. Sewage, while I'm on the subject here, was originally sent to a concrete tank out between Marion and Cedar Rapids, down towards Indian Creek. Then during the Depression, about 1933 or so, they built a plant in Marion, down between the cemetery and the railway right-of-way to Cedar Rapids. But that was outgrown later. So, now we've combined with Cedar Rapids and our sewage goes down there. We pay quite a bit for it, but we're quite happy and satisfied, I guess, with the arrangements.

(Missed on tape). . . was noted for the first church in the county, the Congregational Church. While there's a little dispute about it, I think it had the first bell, in Marion anyway. When Cedar Rapids needed a church, I think some of the people in the Congregational went over there and they founded a new school Presbyterian Church, if you can imagine that. I think it had something to do with slavery. Because it was before the Civil War and the new school, I believe, did not hold

with slavery whereas some of the old schools, they called it, permitted slaves. The Congregational church was founded quite close to the New England people, the Daniels, and people of that stripe who came out here as some of our first merchants. I think they had the first pipe organ in town as well as the first bell. They had two church buildings on the same spot. They tore it down and it was in shambles for about two years and then they raised the other one on the same spot.

My father was in the book business. He traveled on the road selling books to schools and libraries. That gave me all the employment I wanted. Of course, he traveled by train in those days. So that there was a job for me with a coaster wagon going to the depot and bringing back his samples of books that he carried with him. In fact, he had me do that for other people that came in sometimes, such as an uncle of mine. That was my introduction to the book business. Though I got a card from my mother in Chicago once, when I was 12 years old, saying to send an International Dictionary by express to the library at Marshalltown. That indicated my father had taken an order and forgotten to turn it in to anybody at the office and then thought of it later. But, at twelve years old, they trusted me to wrap up a \$12 book and mail it. I've been in the business almost continually ever since, though I went into it full time in 1931. So I put in, altogether, more than 50 years selling books, being on the road part of the time, always being my own boss as a independent jobber--either in partnership with my father or I carried on using his name some years after that. I

retired in 1984, January 1984. I sold my business, though the books still stay in the house that I had converted. The house I was born in I converted to book storage about 1955.

While growing up, my social life was pretty much centered around the church. I was a member, because my parents were, of the Congregational church which was just across the street from us. In those days, 1905 to World War I, most churches had three services a week; morning, evening and a Wednesday night prayer meeting. When I was small, it was easier for my mother to take me to prayer meetings than it was to get a babysitter, so I go in on most of those. Most of our pastor's sermons for Sunday night were along literary and historical lines that I kept quite interested in. Of course, I went to Sunday school every Sunday because my parents did. I was active in the young people's work which they called Christian Endeavor. That was an interdenominational movement. It was to some of the other churches what the Epworth League was to the Methodist church. By the time I came along, the church was dwindling in numbers. Most of the young people went away to college and then went away someplace to work. Church didn't reproduce itself, didn't have children enough among the members to keep it up and pretty soon it got so small that it wasn't really what you might call viable and it closed in the late 1940's or so. Since then I've gone to the Methodist church where my wife had grown up and quite content with it there.

One of my boyhood activities was to belong to the Boy Scouts. We had a scoutmaster named P. V. O'Kelley and we met in Memorial

Hall. He said sometimes--not jokingly either--that we met Friday or Saturday night and then Monday morning the ladies that owned the hall called him up and gave him a report of the things that were broken the meeting before. We had some overnight hikes and he was followed by other scoutmasters. That did quite a bit for us and we learned a lot in that work about organization and how to conduct a meeting and a little bit even about Parliamentary procedure, not to say a lot about bandaging and first aid and stuff.

To digress into World War I, I was too young for it, just as I was too old for World War II. In World War I, I was in junior high school, I guess, and all we could do was to run errands on our bicycles for the Liberty Bond drives. We did errands for the bankers that were sitting in the back room sending messages to the people out front who were maybe calling on house to house selling bonds. We had also troop trains through Marion. I must talk more about it being a railroad town here. But it was a division point which meant all trains stopped here, passenger trains, that is. The women got so they took down coffee and doughnuts or something as well as knitted socks and all sorts of things for them. I even know that there was one marriage resulted from a woman who knitted a pair of socks or something and it parlayed into a marriage in at least one case there. Then I suppose I should talk about Armistice Day at the end of World War I. Of course, it was a time of great rejoicing and celebration and the first one I'd ever seen. One thing, it was fun to ring church bells. I remember in the Presbyterian

Church, it was reputed that it was because they rang two bells at the same time, that the heavy clapper--about as big as my head--fell down through the plaster, just narrowly missing a couple of people in the entrance there. So I kind of tried to stay out of church bells after that. In the evening there was a big celebration in the city park, jammed with all the people that could get into it. The thing that drew my attention the most was a blacksmith, I guess, with an anvil. I never thought of an anvil as a noisemaker, but they had something there, they put a little gunpowder underneath it and then he got about three feet away with a red hot wire and ignited it and it would blow the anvil up in the air at least a foot high. So it was not out of control and with a loud bang that made everybody happy. There was even some people there that were celebrating so hard that they went around giving away money to kids. I remember that very much. So it went on most of the night. The first Presidential election that I can remember--being born in 1905--in 1912, I would be seven years old. I remember some of the cartoons that they had and a little bit about the unusualness of having a Democratic President. My first political awareness, you might say. Then, of course, after World War I, we had a series of Republican administrators, and I remember the death of Warren G. Harding, when his body was carried from California to Washington--or Ohio, someplace in the East--on a special train on the Northwestern Railroad. It was, of course, draped in black bunting and so forth. The people lined up almost continually to see, take off their hats,

and watch it go by. Of course, then there was Coolidge, and then, of course, there was Hoover. Hoover started out with a very fine reputation and the best background to be President of anybody we ever had. But his methods of dealing with the financial problems weren't quite ordinary and he got blamed for everything. I'll tell the story at the time, of the taxi driver who went around a corner and knew something was wrong and he turned and he got out of his car and looked at the tire and it was flat and he says, "Damn Hoover!" We blamed him for everything, (Laughter) though he really recovered quite a bit of his esteem. And then, of course, the long term of Roosevelt. It's of no great concern, but the community was pretty much rock-ribbed Republican, you had to be a Republican to get into the legislature almost. I know of one man in a small town east of here who was a Democrat and didn't feel safe without carrying a gun to a precinct meeting. People thought it was quite a tragedy when Hughes failed to defeat Wilson for the second term, I remember.

Well, that brings us to the Depression. I had gone to school at Iowa City and taken my first job with the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, New York, which was a lot closer to the stock market than Marion, Iowa, was. I guess when the Crash came in October of 1929, I was the only fellow in the training class at Kodak that didn't own some stock. Those were the days when bootblacks and everybody bought some stock on margin. The crisis there in the East was much more felt than it was in this small town of Marion. The stock market crash and the red ink

that came back from foreign branches of the Kodak company for the Depression started in Europe and came into this country later, all of these factors made the company drop their training class. So I found myself out of a job in the end of 1930. I came back to Iowa and my father needed help in the book business, so I've sold books continuously ever since, until my retirement, as I mentioned. We found that the book business of ours was mainly with schools and libraries, so it didn't drop clear off during the Depression. But the country was in bad shape. If we went through Chicago, we found veterans of the war selling apples on street corners. But it was not without its merits, too. You could go to Centerville, Iowa, in 1931, and get a chicken dinner for 25 cents. (Laughter) And it was good food and about all you could eat. Prices went down but, of course, at the expense of the farmers and there were many people [who] lost their farms just as they're doing today.

I was married in 1932, to a girl I had met at Iowa City, who was a teacher. I guess you could say I lived happily ever after, because I'm still living with her after 53 years of married life.

The schools, as I said, were customers still, though there were some places where people wondered whether they could keep open or not. In those days, we had to, if we wanted to sell big ticket items like encyclopedias or big dictionaries many times we would have to go to the school board member, the Superintendent or the Librarian didn't have authority to buy them. I remember trying to sell an encyclopedia to a man out plowing corn.

They'd told me that's where I'd find the board member who was most influential. He said, in the consolidated school in Story county, "Look at here, there's no town in our district. All we've got is corn and hogs. Corn got as low as 9 cents a bushel and hogs as low as \$3 a hundred." And, he said, "At those prices, we just can't buy anything outside of this district." Of course, that didn't last very long, most of them found some ways to go ahead. While there was a big shake-up in farms a lot of people lost to the insurance companies then. Seemed to be where farms ended up. Still, they were hard times, which only solved when World War II came along and we got into stepped up production for that.

One of the things that World War II brought was rationing. You not only had to have a coupon for automobile tires, but you had to have a coupon for sugar and for gasoline and things. Even if a serviceman came home on a furlough, he had to go down to the American Building and stand in line and get some stamps which would let him buy sugar because he would be another member of the family there. I forget now whether meat was rationed or not, but those were the problems we had. There were so many people that moved in to commute, I mean people from Manchester and Springville and no telling what that drove 40 - 50 miles to work in Cedar Rapids war plants and they got the tires. ~~So that~~ there were no tires for book salesmen in spite of the fact, that when Roosevelt addressed a convention of booksellers he said the booksellers were very important to the education and information for the country. But that didn't influence the

Rationing Board.

[Can't] talk about Marion without talking about Cedar Rapids for the two towns have worked together more closely as time has gone by. It's more of one community. The low point of the public relations between the two towns is probably the battle over the courthouse. Marion had been the county seat here from the start and of course, people wanted that business here. But in the late twenties, after some rather bitter battles, they moved it to Cedar Rapids. I guess it served more people and was maybe a logical move, though some said, well, you could build a less expensive courthouse in Marion and it would look like a palace. But when you'd build one in Cedar Rapids, you took twice as much money to make one that would stand up to the other buildings down there. Well, I guess you know how it came out, I won't put any more time in on that.

CW: How did it affect Marion?

Waffle; When we lost the courthouse--as we expressed it up here, we felt kind of sad about it. But I don't know that it hurt us too much. I don't think it was the blow to the town that losing the Milwaukee division point was. Of course, the basis of that was simply that railroad travel fell off due to the automobile and the airplane. But there was a change, this was a division point and some of the big brass got the idea that if they could move the division point to Atkins, they could get about another 30 miles or whatever the distance is out there off their work crews at almost no extra charge 'cause

I think they got a full day's pay no matter how far they traveled or how short the distance was. That was more of a blow to the town, because Marion was a railroad community like you wouldn't believe in the old days. There was about twenty-six trains a day going in and out of Marion. Of course, you got good service. If you wanted to go to Springville or Anamosa or any of these little towns around here--Center Point. My father was a traveling man and one time took me up to Center Point with him to make a call and he found he had to stay all night. I was quite worried . . .

[Tape fades here and is blank till the end of side one. Side two is also blank until almost before the halfway point.]

Waffle: One thing you won't believe is that the road between Cedar Rapids and Marion--the main boulevard highway here--wasn't paved until fairly recent times. When I was a boy, the basic rock road there--I think they called it "macademized"--had so many holes in it filled with sand that it was quite a feat that a junior high boy could brag about if he was able to physically run a bicycle--pump a bicycle--up the hill there. The sand that they'd thrown into the holes in it was so deep that it somehow encased the bicycle tire. And you almost had to get out and push it up the hill. If you did that, then you could see over on the right-hand side as you went to Cedar Rapids what I guess we called the Turtle Pond. There was a rock in it almost always had some turtles on it. But later that got drained away when they improved things out there. Across from that, a little farther towards Cedar Rapids, there

was something called the "Jack Barn" where I think they raised mules for export to Europe or brought them in from the farms and concentrated them there. We didn't know very much about that. I should mention the street cars though as the best form of transportation between the two towns. They ran pretty regularly and you knew right where to catch them and where they stopped and where they'd let you off. They went clear as far as the Union Depot in Cedar Rapids, so that travelers had pretty good service and didn't need taxis like you need now to get to the airport.

CW: Where did it stop in Marion?

Waffle: There was a depot down about where the present post office is in the middle of the block there, surrounded by restaurants. Rubeck's Cafe was about where the present post office is. They advertised that as the "best cafe in town" or the best eating place. However, when I was a boy, they served food at the Daniel's Hotel. That was the building that now has the Balster Furniture Company in it, only there was several stories on top that have been taken off. It was a bigger building and really quite a hotel in its day. Then the Royal Hotel, which is still in existence, at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Twelfth Street also served meals.

[Transcriptionist unable to hear interviewer's question]

Waffle: We had two or three other hotels. One was up on Seventh Avenue--I forget the name at the minute--and then there was a big house on the corner just west of where the post office is today, which would be Sixth Avenue and Eleventh Street. And

then there was something over where Murdock Funeral Home used to be called the "Teeple's House" I believe. T-E-E-P-L-E. That also took in roomers. And there was a first moving picture theatre I know anything about over there in that same block and of course the Masonic Temple was there. For a while, the post office was in the Masonic Temple building. If you wanted to go to the movies, it was almost a better deal to take the streetcar over to Cedar Rapids. I had a friend who lived in Cedar Rapids and for a certain time--which you might call a "Golden Age"--my parents used to let me take a streetcar over every Saturday afternoon and he and I went down to a matinee at one of the theatres downtown. I think it was about 25 cents, I don't know whether that included popcorn or not.

I'd like to say something about the phones in Marion. They started out--they numbered from one (1)--and so the two banks had numbers one and two and the meat market was number five and the freight depot was number nine. And I don't really know of any numbers above Four hundred eighty-four that I remember in my time as a kid. We got pretty good service, only if you wanted to make a long-distance call you said, "Give me the toll-girl".

[Tape starts again] . . . and had some big fires. 1894--you can see the traces of it yet in that uptown what we call the First National Bank building on Eleventh Street and Seventh Avenue. The buildings there are newer than the rest of the block because the quarter of the block on Eleventh Street was

burned down in the year 1894 and promptly rebuilt on the same spot. I personally witnessed the fire when the Pile Lumber Yard--which was on the spot where the Pizza Hut in Marion is today--burned up and the flames were so hot it melted the glass in the windows at the library west of it or in the Ben Mentzer house north of it. They even dismissed school--from Emerson school, anyway--for people to go up and watch it. It was totally destroyed and I guess the biggest fire that I ever was close to.

[Interview asks question, tape stopped then started again]

Waffle: . . . I mentioned that the first settlers in Marion were from New England and there was the Daniels and the Mentzers and early merchants were well, I guess I'll skip to my time because I'm more familiar with them. Ed Siegfried ran a clothing store, Horace Ryder ran a grocery, Ed Gordon ran a grocery, and for a time L. O. Dickey did, Atz (A-T-Z) Atz and Cunningham ran a meat market, a man named Whitney sold coal and ice and salt. The coal business was pretty important in the old days. If you watch the old houses, most of them had a driveway up to a coalbin window and we put in our coal in the fall and then we had to go up and down stairs hundred times in the course of a winter to take care of things. Automatic heat was virtually unknown and as a boy, that was a chore that the youngest kid had to take care of, going down to watch the furnace and to carry out the ashes and so forth. [Tape starts again] . . . Like they used to be.

[Interviewer asks question] Yeah.

Waffle; One of the prominent elements of our society here were the Cherry sisters. The summary of their excellence was that they were so bad they were good. I didn't ever see them in their high day when they were going strong but I saw a couple of revivals of them when it was just seeing something that used to be good and they were not in very good financial shape in my time and lived rather humbly out--I think--south of Cedar Park someplace.

Marion, being the county seat, had what they called the Marion Interstate Fair--out where the Indian Creek Country Club is today. That meant that every year they had horse racing and all sorts of acts and of course, they gave premiums for the good things that they raised or that the housewives prepared in the kitchen. My experience there was when the Boy Scouts--during the war, during World War I--sold what they called. . . well, we served all the refreshments. We had the refreshment concession in the grandstand. And they sold what we called a "Submarine Chaser". We were so interested in war terms. And actually, it was prune juice, had the base of it--something sweet that didn't take sugar in it--and I guess it was it was a success, we didn't sell as much as we would have if we'd had pop and stuff to sell. But, at any rate, that was my introduction to the fair really. The grounds were torn down in the late twenties or early thirties to make room for the golf course.

One thing that I found in my collection of local history was a program from the Marion High school dated in the 1870's or

1884 when they gave programs for the benefit of the library-- the school library. The admission was 10 cents a piece and they were going to use it to buy books for the school library. It doesn't say how many books they bought. Another thing that amazed me was--I've got a program here for the high school graduating class of 1907 (my brother was a member of it) and they had the nerve to put down the grade points of all of the people on the program. The girls had higher points than the boys and the ones that went into college preparatory department had higher points than the people who took the general course. They ran from about--the highest was 39, a girl naturally. The lowest was about 32. But you had it right there on the program as to what your score was at the end of your high school period. Thanks for listening to me and if you want to know anything about Marion that I know, call me and I'll be glad to oblige.

[End of Tape One]

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? --Marion, Iowa
- What are your parents' names?
- 1--Where did you go to school?
- 9--Are you married or single?
- Did you raise a family? How big?
- 4,9--What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

- 1. Transportation
 - 6,11--Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
 - 13--Trolleys (the Interurban)
 - 1,2--Horses and First Automobiles
 - 12--Mud roads and the seedling mile
 - Hunter Airport and the first planes
 - Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)
- 2. Communications
 - Newspapers
 - Radios
 - Advertising
 - 11--Telephones

B. People in the Community

- 1. Amusements/Recreation --16
 - 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
 - Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)
- 2. Famous Characters
 - 16--Cherry Sisters
 - Grant Wood
 - Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
 - Marvin Cone
 - 7--President Harding

- 3. Lifestyle --2
 - Life before air conditioning
 - Winter Activities
 - Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
 - Clothing
 - Toys
 - Saloons/Taverns
 - 10--Farm Life
- 4. Family Life--2
 - Household Help
 - Women's Roles
 - 5,6--Childrens' Activities/Behavior
 - 5--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 --17
 - 1. Education--1
 - Cedar Rapids Schools
 - Coe College
 - Mount Mercy College
 - Cornell College
 - 2. Government--8
 - 3--City Services
 - Streets/Roads
 - 11--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
- 15--Retail Businesses /Department Stores
- Professions
- Banking and Finance
- 13--Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
- Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
- Farmers Market
- Mills on Cedar River
- 13,14-15--Buildings Erected
- Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
- Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

5. Attitudes/Values--4

- 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
- 6-7 --World War I
- Roaring 20's
- Prohibition
- 8-9 --Great Depression
- 10 --WWII

