

Erma Hendrickson

Interviewed by: Jack Christenson 11/04/99

Transcribed by: Jennie Hakes 11/21/00

Cassette tape label: ***Irma Hendrickson & Allen Cummings, 11-4-99***

Side A

Introduction

Jack: Capturing our oral history is a program by the Aitkin Country Historical Society, to interview residents and document their memories of life and happenings in Aitkin County. Today, we're interviewing Erma Larson Hendrickson. We're here at the Maryhill Manor in Aitkin. This is November 4, 1999.

Erma's family - as I said, her name is Erma Larson Hendrickson – she married John Hendrickson, but her maiden, her grandparents and parents, the property is still intact in Aitkin, and there's a lot of history there. And Erma, I'm looking forward to it, as I know everybody is, to draw these memories from you.

Before we start, I would like to introduce our video crew: Is Laell (?) Carlstrom Ferlita, and Roger and Ann Nelson, and I'm Jack Christenson.

The family

Jack: So Erma, let's start with your grandparents, and we'll go to your parents, and your siblings, but let's start with the Larson family there in Aitkin.

Erma: My grandpa and grandma.

J: Your grandpa and grandma.

I: Well, I don't know exactly the date when they came. It was in the late 1880s – 1889 – maybe earlier, I don't know. But anyway, I don't remember too much about (*unintelligible*) because I was too young, but we moved to Crosby when I was in 1911. My dad wanted to go over to Crosby and get in on the mining. They were starting to build (*unintelligible*) over there. But then we came back and visited Grandma (*unintelligible*).

J: I see in your...actually your grandpa was, his name was...

I: Ole and Mary Larson.

J: Ole and Mary Larson.

I: Yeah.

J: And then your parents...

I: Louie Larson.

J: Louie Larson.

I: And then I had two brothers, Harry and Charley.

J: Harry and Charley.

I: Charley moved to Crosby when we did, but Harry – well, Harry did, too, but I don't know just when he moved. But anyway, they all came back to Aitkin.

J: Great.

The General Store

I: Grandpa and Grandma started the store before 1900, because I knew it was torn down about 1926. '25 or '6.

J: Now that store is located where the Legion Club is now.

I: That's right, it was right there. And it was a general merchandise. They sold everything from cloth and (*unintelligible*) and coffee and all groceries that I can remember. They had the big warehouse out in the back of the store where they sold buggies and buggy whips and everything you can imagine. My dad, people would be hard up so they'd bring in wood and Grandma would buy cordwood from the farmers to pay their bills in the grocery store.

J: I imagine as kids going in there, that was a – like now it would be Disneyland with everything there! You were talking about buggy whips and everything.

I: It was great fun for us kids, too. We lived in Crosby, but my dad...the old Soo train ran from Crosby to Aitkin, and my folks would put Louise and me...

Allen: My sister.

I: ... on the train and let us come over to Aitkin to visit Grandpa and Grandma. We loved that because the store was so much fun, you know. She had a candy place, a big attraction. But under the counter were barrels and barrels of barrels of food – crackers and coffee and rice. Shelves were not like they are in the store now days.

J: No.

I: Everything was in the bulk. And they had a great big scale and she weighed everything up and ground the coffee. Us kids loved to go over there and spend overnight with them.

J: And, you had mentioned earlier about the kids playing big shot in the buggy, if you wanted to tell a little bit..

I: Oh, yeah. They had a nice buggy in the back room, and it was upholstered in red velvet, and us kids liked to get up in there and pretend we were driving. We'd get the buggy whip and pretend we were driving. Grandpa would come and get us out of there, didn't want to mess it up, you know, because he was selling that. Pretty nice stuff.

J: Sure.

I: Then Grandma had a - they lived in the back end of the store – in her kitchen she had a big, round table. There was always a cake on the table about 4 or 5 layers high. When the farmers would come to town, they were always welcome to come in the kitchen and have a cup of coffee. I can remember meeting so many different people out there. That was fun, too. Of course, we liked the coffee and the cake.

J: And the cake!

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I: My grandmother always kept her cow, and she had a big garden behind the store. Grandpa had a barn right down on the river. I don't know how they got up and down that bank. But anyway I can remember the barn on the riverbank there. He had his cows in there. That was his (*unintelligible*) dairy milk.

J: The Knox bridge was there and then how about the railroad bridge? Was the railroad there at that time?

I: Oh, yes.

J: That's the track of the railroad.

I: Yeah. My grandpa and grandmother had a peacock strutting around in their back yard, and I remember one day it flew away and it went over across the bridge to Arndt's (?). Knoxes lived there then, you know, of the Knox Lumber Company. And Grandpa had to go over there with a stick and drive the peacock out. Of course, us kids were scared stiff of it, because it would spread its wings, and we were scared.

J: Sure!

"Larson Alley"

I: But my grandmother was a real businesswoman. She was always doing something. So she got busy with building all the buildings behind the store. She had three houses in a row there that she rented out, besides the other one that was the apartment lot. That was a big two-story building, and he had the Holy Roller meetings upstairs. And about 1930 the top burned off of that building, so then she just replaced the roof on one story. And now that's the apartment house that I take care of.

J: Oh, I see.

I: (*unintelligible*)

J: Actually, your grandmother then was instrumental in forming what is now the Assembly of God, but was the Gospel Tabernacle...

I: Yeah.

J: ...by this, I think you mentioned that she referred to it as "the mission?"

I: When she went, when that burned, grandma went uptown and bought that lot where the posts (?) were...

J: The old Moose building.

I: The old Moose building. And they built that, that building there for a tabernacle. And they carried on there until they outgrew it, I guess, then they went outside and built a new church.

J: But your grandmother was the, actually, instrumental in beginning that congregation here in Aitkin?

I: Absolutely. And when they had their dedication out there, they invited Don (?) and I to come out to...

J: Wonderful!

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I: ...they acknowledged, you know, that Grandma had done the work in getting it all going. I guess everybody thought that was Holy Rollers (laughs) rolling around up there. I never did go to one of the meetings, but what caused the fire was, when we left Crosby in 1926 when I graduated from high school, we moved all our – my mother had died – so we moved all our furniture over to Aitkin and stored it in the top of the mission.

J: Oh.

I: Because they weren't having church there anymore. And it burned up top of that building and it burned up all of our stuff. So I had a lot of records and stuff that I lost, too, in that fire. An old lady lived up there and she had a fire in her living room. Probably (*unintelligible*) or something caught fire.

J: Well, those buildings are... some of them are still there, those little apartments...

I: Just the apartment is there. All the rest of them were torn down. Grandma's big stucco house has moved out south of town behind the Southside Grocery. You know, on that road that goes out...

J: Oh, yes.

I: That house had moved out there and remodeled. And I think the Balls got it. And the rest of 'em were torn down.

J: Because I remember I had the, my, one of my aunts in Duluth – she was a McGilla – she was a Hurd – this is years back, and she was 82 when she died – but we were driving and then we were crossing the Knox bridge and Iola said, "I was born there." I mentioned Larson Alley, she said, "I was born in there."

I: Could be,

J: Yeah.

I: Yeah, and a lot people came and rented out of that...

J: So they were renting...it was pretty there, right up the riverbank.

I: Sure. And there was another house – two houses – on the other side of the store, towards the bridge. I was born in one of those houses.

Evergreen Cemetery

J: Oh! Well, anything that you recall about early Aitkin, or neighbors or people. But I do not want to miss the Evergreen Cemetery is more or less Larson... they began that cemetery and it's still... do you take care of it?

I: We still own it.

J: You still own it.

I: I'm trying to get rid of it. I'm trying to give it to somebody, but nobody wants it, you know.

J: (Laughs)

I: It's not a moneymaker. It's a lot of work.

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J: It's a pretty little cemetery.

I: Grandpa and Grandma started it, and she and Grandpa took care of it, because there was so many people coming over here, starting to farm, and they didn't have any money, and no place to bury anybody. So Grandma had that 40 acres out there, and she started that cemetery in 1900. She just more or less let people be buried there. I don't think she got money out of them. Grandma took care of it, and my dad took care of it for years until he couldn't – got blind and couldn't do it anymore. And then there was nobody left here except my husband and me, so we got stuck with it. Now we're, we've had it since 1935. Now, just this last fall I got rid of it. My nephew, Tom Fielder (?), has taken it over, management over.

J: Oh, good.

I: That's good. And there's about, over 200 graves there at the cemetery.

J: Most of them, like you said, your grandmother, just like her cake for the customers, here were even burial spots for people that couldn't afford a regular plot.

Andersonville

I: That's right. She just gave 'em a place to be buried. And my grandmother's sister and her husband moved to Aitkin the same time Grandma came, and they bought land and built a home up in what is now Andersonville.

J: Oh, yes.

I: And their name was Anderson, so it was named after them, because they owned most of the land up there.

J: This was your sister's husband, was Anderson?

I: No, my grandma's sister's...

J: Your grandma's sisters' husband.

I: My grandmother's sister. They were neighbors, Mrs. Anderson.

J: Mrs. Anderson.

I: Yeah, and they settled in that area, you know.

J: Right.

I: Bought land. That house on the corner there, that Weimer's lived in, you know? With the great big tree in the front of there, my grandma's sister planted that tree and they just took it out of there 2, 3 years ago. I always thought of that tree when I drove by there, that my great aunt had planted it, you know. They had a little house there on the corner, and later, I suppose, somebody else lived there, that Weimer did. I don't know who lives in it now. Right on the corner there, when you turn to go...

J: Yeah, there weren't...I've often wondered in my life...of course, we always knew downtown or Andersonville, but I know there's been a number of people said where did they, did it come from – Anderson? Now I know!

I: My great aunt.

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J: I don't imagine there were too many homes up there at that time?

I: Oh, no. It was pretty desolated. (Laughs) I know the land went down to that little river that runs across the road over there.

J: Oh, yes.

I: Mud River, isn't it?

J: Right.

I: And I know one time somebody called me up because they had Andersons on their deed, or their abstract, or something. I said, I really can't tell you anything about it, all I know is that my great aunt lived there. And they owned that land at one time, and I don't know how it got distributed. (*unintelligible*)

Grandmother's three boys: Dad and Charley and Harry, all moved to Crosby to get in on the mining, 'cause that was just starting up, you know. In Hassman, kind of a janitor around the bank? (*there seems to be a break in the tape here, then it starts up again*) And there was a storm. (*another break*) Dad was 91 when he died.

J: ...a history of long lives there.

I: Oh, yeah. But Grandma didn't get so old, she was 86. The boys were old. Charley... Harry probably would have lived to be old, too, if he hadn't been electrocuted. He and my dad ran that garage, you know. (*break in the tape*)

J: The garage came, the garage kind of replaced where the store was?

I: Yes.

J: OK, that's... 'cause I remember the garage well, myself.

I: Yeah. Now that's where the store was.

J: And that's exactly where the store was. And where the Legion Club is now.

I: That's right.

J: That was a good setting there, by the river.

I: And, of course, the Legion Club owned the land behind the Legion Club now, way down to the river. All I owned was a building with a road in front of it.

J: Oh, OK.

I: The apartment house.

J: The apartment house. That used to be two stories.

I: Yeah, used to be the mission. (Laughs)

J: The store, too. I remember going – whether the store was there, or the garage – was there a second story on that with stairs outside?

I: Oh, the store was two stories.

J: That's...

I: That was a hotel.

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J: Because I remember always seeing that staircase up to...

I: Yeah. The traveling salesmen came to town, they stayed up there. Because those days, the traveling salesmen went on the train. There were no cars, you know. I mean, they didn't do like they do today. They traveled by train, and then they'd come and stay at Grandma's upstairs. She had about six rooms up there that she rented out.

J: Oh.

I: Yeah, even schoolgirls that were coming for the school, you know? Had a room up there. She had all kind of schemes to make money.

J: (Laughs) She sounds like she was really on the go all the time!

I: Oh, yeah. She was very generous. She was always helping somebody out (*unintelligible*) across the road? You know old Smith, the road master?

J: Oh, OK.

I: Remember Smith? He had some sisters, and we would go to there playing with them, I can remember that.

J: That was the days when the passenger trains, of course, came right through.

I: Oh, that was a big thing, you know. Go down to the depot and watch the train come in. The conductor would be there with that little bench, and help everybody out the train. Us kids would be standing there watching. But they didn't have a (*unintelligible*) or anything.

J: That was an artery line, just like a lifeline for Aitkin, was the railroad.

One of the first hospitals in Aitkin

I: You know where the Schedin (?) house was on the corner across... it was a stone, kind of a brick house there on the corner? That was a hospital, way back then, because Margaret Franz worked there. My Uncle Harry Larson married her. That's how they got acquainted; they were across the street from each other.

J: Oh!

I: (Laughs) And Aunt Margaret... you know George Franz on the (*unintelligible*)

J: Oh, yes.

I: That was Margaret, one of the sisters.

J: That was, like, was it a maternity, or just regular...known as a hospital. Probably just a hospital.

I: It's possible, I don't remember. I don't know. And later on, it was...people lived in it, you could live there. When I grew up, and (*unintelligible*) Schedin's were living there, and they had the restaurant.

J: I remember where Schedin's lived. And that was the former, was a former hospital.

I: Yeah, in the beginning.

(*break in the tape*)

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J: I'm sure that there's more, and as soon as this is finished, you're going to thinking about a dozen things, and I'm going to be thinking about a dozen things.

I: Yeah. I've thought about a dozen things in my life that I wished that I'd asked Grandma, you know?

J: Yes.

I: Then it's too late. You don't do it!

J: No.

I: Now there's nobody to talk to.

J: This is why it's fortunate in this program, it's just like yourself, that we can get this information from you, because then we'd say, "Gee, I wish Erma... if only we'd talked to Erma Hendrickson -or Erma Larson – we would have known this!" But we wouldn't know it, except for...

I: Well, just like me, I think, "Why didn't I talk to my dad a little bit more about the early days?" And coming over to this... of course, he was only four when he came over here, but he could probably remember a little something about it.

J: Surely.

I: But you don't think about those things.

(*break in the tape*)

J: Did your parents ever mention about how your folks...was the railroad in when they came to Aitkin? Did they come via railroad, or was it – lot of people came in covered wagon yet...

I: They must have, no the railroad must have been there when Grandma had her store.

J: Uh huh. Oh, yeah.

I: That was of course 19...whenever she built it...19...right around 1900. She went out of business in 1925. That's when they tore it down, built that garage. (*unintelligible*) First came, when we were married, we came back to Aitkin. Grandma was just starting to build that church?

J: Um, hm.

I: And we used to...(*unintelligible*)

J: Oh!

I: (*unintelligible*)

(*break in tape*)

Early days of the Aitkin County Historical Society

J: Well, this has been real enlightening. Before... and if after, at the end, anything else comes to you, Erma...but I'm also thinking on this video, you were one of the early members of the Aitkin County Historical Society.

I: Not too early! Not too early.

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J: Well...

I: I suppose it's in the records someplace, when Kaplan was the president, or he was the treasurer. That's when I was secretary, when he was treasurer.

J: Oh. OK.

I: At here.

J: But this, you were actually a member, was it before they obtained the Depot? Were you meeting in the...

I: No, I just met in the Depot.

J: You met, you started to meet in the Depot.

I: I remember where that log cabin was, down behind there, courthouse (*unintelligible*)

J: You know, we have reams of minutes and everything in writing down there, but I think part of this video pertaining to the Historical Society...Ann Nelson, who is here, part of the video crew, is an ex-president, and I know that for, just knowledge to the Historical Society, and like you say, you weren't at the beginning, but there's, it's different than what it is now.

I: Oh, absolutely.

J: And I think if Ann Nelson, now, can take over, and she'll talk to you as an ex-president and you can tell her as a long-time member, just what went on, OK"

I: OK.

J: Thank you, Erma.

Erma's participation in the ACHS

Ann: Hi, Erma, how are you?

I: I'm fine.

A: When did you join the Historical Society?

I: I don't remember. (Laughs) Oh, gosh. Must be 30 years ago.

A: OK. And you said Mr. Kaplan was the treasurer...

I: Yeah.

A: ...when you were in there.

I: I was secretary.

A: You were secretary.

I: I worked so well with him. When I was in there, that's the year that we instigated getting people on the National Register. We worked on that.

A: OK.

I: We got about, I think, seven different people in there.

A: Do you know who was president of the Society at that time?

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I: That little house over there, near the beauty parlor, Celia? That little house next door, what was her dad's name? He was the president.

A: (*unintelligible*)

I: No, I mean the house next door. Aklestad, John Aklestad was his name.

A: OK. Why did you decide to join the Historical Society?

I: Oh, I just got interested. It was fun. It was so much different than it is now, you know. We had all that old stuff in there, and people just come in and browsed around. We didn't accomplish anything like he has, now I think it's more of a learning center, don't you?

A: I agree. I think history is such fun anyway.

I: Yeah. We just had all that old stuff, and people would just come in and browse around and look at it. People would bring in stuff and we would put it the record, you know.

A: Uh ha. Did you make out cards or have a file of some kind?

I: Oh, sure. Everything was recorded. They gave it or they loaned it, so we had to be sure that they gave it, you know, or else they'd come back and say, "Well, I just loaned it." We didn't really have any problems with anybody. It was fun. I got to open doors and sit there and let people in.

A: How many members did you have back then, do you recall approximately?

I: Oh, when...we met in the City Hall...

A: Uh ha.

I: ...instead of in the Depot. I would think there would be about fifteen of us every meeting. But all those people then are in nursing homes now, or dead. Few of them left. You know, the Kaplans and (*unintelligible*)

A: Were there problems with things back then?

I: No.

A: Or did everything seem to go pretty smooth?

I: It went pretty good. Only thing about us, we had that money that was given to us from the Sweetman Estate, you know. \$25,000. And of course, there are a lot of things we could have done with that money, but we decided to live on the interest. It's still sittin' there, I guess.

A: I think that's what they're doing.

I: I mean, we could have gone ahead and done a lot of things, but we were too cautious. And Kaplan wasn't a man who wanted to spend, you know. He just kinda hoarded.

A: (Laughs)

I: We all hoarded everything.

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A: You got a lot of interesting things in, though. If you look back over some of the things they've had on display in the past and all, there have been some fantastic things that have come in from people.

I: Oh, yeah. We had a doll buggy down there with a doll in it. And Georgiana Davis moved to California. And one time she came back to visit, came in the Depot to look at (*unintelligible*)...if the doll was still there in the buggy, and it was. She was so happy about it, when she got back to California she sent us a check for \$50. And that was a lot of money then!

A: Yes, it was.

I: That was so wonderful. Everything was well taken care of there. We picked up things in the fall that we thought should be packed up. We weren't open in the winter.

A: Oh, I see, more seasonal.

I: We had to keep it all wrapped up in blankets and stuff so nothing would (*unintelligible*).

A: What were some of the names of the people who belonged at that time?

I: Well, there's a couple women at the Manor, I can't think of their names. Dorothy Hakes and her husband belonged, and they came. There were fifteen of us. We were just volunteering to keep it open.

A: Did you have dues to pay back then? Membership?

I: Yeah. I was thinking of State dues. We had some kind of State dues that we went in to the national... I think they were about \$2 a year, probably – the membership. It isn't much more now.

A: No, it isn't. For us, anyway, it isn't. Were you involved in selecting someone to come in and work part-time, or looking for a director – were you involved with that at all?

I: We were talking about it, but it never materialized when I was there.

A: Who decided what to display, or did they try to display everything?

I: Yeah, we did. People would come in, you know, and they would say, where is this thing that I gave? And of course, we always tried to have them (*unintelligible*). But it's still there, isn't it?

A: It is.

I: They must have given it back.

A: You did take a lot of things just on loan then to display, and they wanted it back eventually.

I: Sure. I suppose after awhile they had no use for it, so they let us have it.

(break in tape)

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I: I wasn't active too many years, you know. After the (*unintelligible*). People are in there now. It's more like a learning center now, I think. They don't have that old stuff on display that we have.

A: Well, we still have it, though, and I think they rotate it so that everything gets out and you can see a little bit more.

I: It's different now, but it's nice. It's really lovely.

A: I don't know if you were there the day we visited when we first moved up here. And I remember seeing a big huge quilt rack in that, ah, oh, the ticket agent's room there?

I: Oh.

A: ...with a quilt on it. And Mr. Holdum (?) was there at that time. And he was explaining things and about things.

I: He didn't come to the meetings, though.

A: Oh, didn't he?

I: Floyd Hogan. I don't remember him at all coming to meetings.

A: Were you there when Mr. Quie came – the governor – came, and made it official to be on the National Register?

I: Yeah.

A: Were you?

I: Yeah. I wasn't on the picture, but I remember seeing that picture.

A: How long were you secretary?

I: (*unintelligible*) years.

A: (Laughs) Well, it's nice when everybody takes their turn and helps.

I: Oh, sure. That's the way it should be.

A: Sure. I know I've enjoyed you come in and visit when I've been down there. It's always, it's so interesting to talk to people that have history involved in the area and their heritage.

I: And then, of course, I remember that eagle from when I was a kid.

A: Oh, I'll bet!

I: I was so happy when they, the Historical got it. Because it's a nice building.

A: Yes, it is.

I: It's been well kept. It's really nice.

A: The log cabin is certainly a treasure as well.

I: Oh, yes, very precious.

A: Thanks for coming and visiting with us today, and telling us about...

I: Happy to do it!

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A: ...your past and present and sharing with us. OK.

(break in tape)

I: May Taylor, isn't it? May Taylor? Isn't that her name, that lives at the Manor? She used to belong to Historical. She did a lot of volunteering down here. (*unintelligible*)

A: She could be. That's in MacGregor.

(end of side A)

(Note: Side B is an interview with Allan Cummings. It is transcribed separately.)

(From the Aitkin Independent Age newspaper)

Erma V. Hendrickson, 98, Aitkin

Wednesday, September 20, 2006

Erma V. Hendrickson, 98, died Aug. 29, 2006, at Aicota Health Care Center in Aitkin.

She was born on Dec. 29, 1907, in Aitkin to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Larson. In 1909, the family moved to Crosby where her father worked in the mines. She attended school in Crosby, graduating in 1926. After graduation, she entered the Kahler School of Nursing in Rochester. In 1929, she married John Hendrickson in Minneapolis and they returned to Aitkin and built and operated the Westside Grocery for 39 years. She was a member of First Lutheran Church, the Aitkin County Historical Society, Friends of the Library and other organizations within her church. In her later years, she especially enjoyed quilting with her friends at the church.

Memorial services will be held Fri., Sept. 29, at 11 a.m. at the First Lutheran Church with the Rev. Lance Isaacson officiating. Burial will be in Evergreen Cemetery. Friends may call at the church one hour prior to the service.

She is survived by her son John Hendrickson, Rock Lake, N.D.; sister, Eleanor Fielder, Aitkin; nieces, Clarice Estey and Dianne Fielder and nephews, Mike, Lee and Tom Fielder; and cousins, Eleanor Scott, Donald Carlson and Harold Larson, Willmar. She was preceded in death by her husband, John; her parents and sister, Louise Vanderpool.

Arrangements are with Sorensen-Root-Thompson Funeral Home in Aitkin.