

## **Oscar Jacobson**

Interviewed by: Laura Boyer 01/30/1974

Transcribed by: Jennie Hakes 12/04/2000

Cassette tape label: *Oscar Jacobson, January 30, 1974*

## **Side A**

### ***Introduction***

Laura: This is Laura Boyer, sitting in for Florence this morning. Florence is doing a tremendous thing, to travel – sometimes many miles – to interview folks for this program. So if you enjoy hearing these wonderful stories and testimonies, your contributions will help to keep the program going. Send them now, while you have the inspiration, to Florence Smith, McGregor.

Oscar Jacobson, a long-time resident of our area, is our guest today. Oscar, would you say a greeting to us?

Oscar: Yes, I'm glad to be here this day. I'm somewhat nervous, 'cause this is my first experience, but I am going to try to do the best I can. I wish to send greetings to all the old friends who have known me for many years, and the young, also, which I always did love and admire.

### ***Oscar's family***

L: Where were you raised, Oscar?

O: I was born fourteen miles south (?) of Clarkfield, that's in Yellow Medicine County. Township was called Swede Prairie; the Swedes organized that when they came from Sweden. The group came there when my folks came from Sweden. It must have been in 1860 or '70 when my folks came. And they organized the township. Mostly Swedes, and they called it Swede Prairie, and that's where I was born.

L: How old were you when you came to Aitkin County?

O: I was 6 years old when we came to Aitkin County. That was in June in 1900. We, my folks, had bought land in Fleming Township and (*unintelligible*) moved to Fleming Township, but they no buildings on there.

*(Phone conversation in the background made the next part hard to decipher.)*

Dad bought the place at Rice River). Now it's known as Hassman. At the time we lived there, they had – that community was called Rice River. My dad bought old man Siggers (?) place, Albert Siggen is still in the community up there, and we moved into her friend's settlement. One family of Swedes among all the French. And we enjoyed and had very friendly neighbors up there.

L: There were several children in this family at that time, could you tell us the names of them?

O: Well, Albert was the oldest, and then my sister Hilda, and I was the third, Oscar, and Ernestine. And Ivanson (?). Victor was born in the fall, and I guess we came there in 1901.

L: And you had two others beside that in the family, that's Mabel and Alfred.

O: And Astrid.

L: And Astrid makes six. And several of the families still live around here. There... one of them (*unintelligible*) Hilda, and (*unintelligible*), the Erlandsons, have left us now, but the rest are here, and they still get together and have birthday parties.

*(The phone conversation in the background ends.)*

Oscar's wife, Caroline, and Ernie Jacobson, both had birthdays just this week. And the brothers and sisters all get together and celebrate the birthdays, yeah, each one, and have a grand fellowship together. What was the reason that your folks left Clarkfield and came to Aitkin County?

O: Well, my folks had a good farm in Yellow Medicine County, but Dad was bothered with asthma, so the doctors said, why, to go north in the timber country and he thought he would be relieved. So Dad tried this thing, and that was the reason he came up here.

L: That's the first time I ever heard that this country was good for people with asthma! I thought it was a bad place for them.

O: Well, it was caused by the dust from farming and Dad always had a thrashing machine, he and his brother-in-law. The thrashing machine, in those days, they fed the machine by hand, and there was, it seemed like it was the dust from that.

L: Was he better, then, when he came here?

O: Yes, as soon as he came up here.

### ***Home life***

L: You had a very interesting home life. What was your home life like?

O: Well, my folks were Christian, and we always used to have fellowship in the home in the evenings. We always had prayer. We always said scripture and prayer in the evenings, and usually we'd sing. Some of us could play instruments, but it wasn't very good, but when we all got together and sang and played, it was quite interesting! One thing that interested me was (*unintelligible*) ...with one of the Gilman (?) girls who lives now in McGregor, and she said she remembers being outside when we would sing and play, and she said their whole family would get out and listen to us. That was amazing to hear that report after so many years!

L: The quartets and things that the Jacobsons have participated in during the years have been one of the treats of our community. Anyone who has missed hearing them has really missed something! I wish we could still make some recordings of their wonderful voices.

## **School days**

L: You attended school at the Hassman School. Tell us a little bit about your school days, Oscar.

O: My first, I should say that when we first came up here then, the school at Rice River, which is called Hassman now, was down by Mississippi River back of Cartie's. And that first year – we were up here in 1900 – that school was moved up to the place where the school was been ever since. And it was my first year of school that fall. And I was, I couldn't, I could not talk anything but Swede when I started school, because that's the language that we was used to down in Swede Prairie. So I hated to go to school, because there was...then I was supposed to learn the English language, and I was kinda rebelling against the idea.

So when I did get to school, we had a schoolteacher by the name of Ralph Graham. And I wouldn't get up in class with the rest of 'em. In those days, they had a chart with dogs and frogs. And the schoolteacher made such an interesting showing on that chart, but he had it turned so I couldn't see from where I was sitting, so the next time I was at the class, I was willing to go along and enjoy the fun the primary class did have.

One thing I remember was, at that time, we had two boys came to school – outsiders – one was name of Henry and one George. And they were there just to cut up (?), and our school teacher at the time, Mr. Graham, went out and got two willow switches, and he gave each one a hot application on the west side of the pants - that's where the sun sets! And from then on, we had no trouble with discipline in school.

L: Do you think it would be a good idea if we had a little of the willow switch today?

O: Well, I think it would be, in many cases, if it's done right. I can mention another occasion where Albert Myeth (?) was detained after school for not doing his work, and Mrs. Myeth needed him home for chores, so she asked the school to punish him some other way, but let him go home and help with the work. So he went to extremes and started to punish Albert Myeth the next day with a whipping. He went overboard, and his sister, Nellie Myeth, came up and interfered, so he punished her also. By that time, Mrs. Myeth was called in, and she intervened, and he says, "Well, you told me to punish him." Mrs. Myeth said, (*changing his voice to imitate a lady's voice*), "Yes, but you didn't need to kill him!" So that's how that happened. It can be overdone, too.

L: That's right. A little of anything is good, but when it's overdone, that's not always a good thing.

## **Sharing within the community**

L: Now let's go on to another happy time of your life, and that was when you grew a little bit older, and you were thinking about starting a home of your own. Did you have an eye for the girls?

O: Well, I was always a little bashful. And I think I'll go back to telling you about some of our neighbors around there. I think it would be nice to mention that we have some left there, like Lee and (*unintelligible – sounds like "Jaw – less – ton"*) because he's one of my... and Albert Siggen lives up there. And there's some of the younger Cartie's, and Felix Cartie. We're about the... Felix and Albert Siggens and Lee and Joll are about the

oldest group. Albert Siggins and I started together. And we really enjoyed our neighbors.

Mrs. Myeth was a wonderful lady. She took care of all accidents or...and when you were born, baby just arrived; it was always Mrs. Myeth that helped deliver with no charge. The thing that seems interesting to me, that we didn't have any welfare conditions in those days. Everybody worked together and helped each other. We had a...whatever one family had it was divided up. I think so often of Mrs. Myeth, who helped, and then I think of Joll (?), he usually provided peas (?) for the whole group. Anybody who was out of peas would get peas from Joll. And Dusty Cartie was real good at shootin' game. Whenever Dusty Cartie had some meat, it was shared in the community. And (*unintelligible*) was a family with (*unintelligible*) Arneson, it seemed like the community, they always helped (*unintelligible*), and they got along just fine without any welfare. That's the amazing part of that community. I still admire the things that were done for us.

L: All right, and we still have a wonderful community there, we're together. Now let's go on to your marriage, and tell us just a little bit about your courtship and your marriage.

O: Well, my folks were Christian people, and I always wanted a Christian girl. And I wondered where I could get the kind of a girl I wanted, and by looking the situation over, I did find a girl that worked for Tucker, in McGregor store. But I was too bashful, so I took my sister along the first time...the first time we went in to see her. And the first time I was afraid to turn in, but my sister encouraged me enough to stop in and see this girl that I was admiring at the time. And one thing I liked about her, she was just not a common, ordinary girl, she was an import from Sweden, and that had some effect. I thought I should marry a Swede.

L: So Oscar and Caroline were married in 1917, and they had, was it five or six children that you had?

O: We had six.

L: You had six children. They had, Carroll, their first son, and then their daughter, Evelyn, and then the twins – Hubert and Herbert, then Jim, and Leonard. And there were two of them that were taken from them in infancy, or at...quite close together. And that was Carroll, and Hubert's twin, Herbert. The rest of the family – Jim is a Methodist minister in California, and Hubert lives on the home farm with his family. Leonard lives in Minneapolis, and Evelyn – Mrs. Ole Thornton (?), lives with her husband and family at the Refuge at McGregor. They raised a wonderful family, and have many grandchildren.

Now during these years that Oscar has been here in Aitkin County, he has served with many different boards. How long were you on the town board, Oscar?

O: The first year I came up there, I was put on the school board, but the following year I was on the township... I was put on the town board, and my wife was on the school board, and I was on the town board for 28 years.

L: You were also County Commissioner. How long was that?

O: Well, I resigned at the town board, and was Country Commissioner for four years, and since I got off of the county board, I was assessor for about 15 years. And I am still assessor until this year, and now this is my last year.

L: And besides that, he served on the creamery board, the oil board, and the fair board.

### ***Fellowship in the Fleming Methodist Church***

L: One of the important parts of Oscar's life has been his work and his work and his fellowship in the Fleming United Methodist Church. When did that church get its start where it is now, Oscar?

O: I think it was in the year 1931 that we moved the Lansford Church over to Fleming. Before that time, we belonged to the Swedish Methodist Church, and as long we was speakin' the American language anyway, it was advisable to join...with the United Methodist Church. And we moved the church over from Lansford to Fleming. And it seemed like a big undertaking. A bunch of us figured it could be done, and we had a neighbor there, Tom Thurbick (?) says, "When you fellas get that church moved to Fleming," he says, "I'll preach!" he said. That's one of the things that he promised us he'd do. But when we got the church moved, he didn't feel like he wanted to preach.

L: You've had some wonderful preachers, though, haven't you?

O: Oh, we've had good ministers ever since. It's always been my aim to make the world better. It's not just that it's a Methodist church, it's more of a community church, because we all work together. We're of different states (?), but we're all workin' for one cause, and we all, it seemed like our mission here is just to make the world better, and not make it worse. I often think, to me, "Have you been a blessing, or have you been a curse?" And that's always been an inspiration to me.

And now, as years gone by, we used to, Mother and I were leaders of 4H for about 12 years. And as the years gone by we've even got letters from the 4H-ers that grew up and are leaders in different parts - in different parts of the United States and once in awhile we get a letter in appreciation, and it's about the greatest reward a person can get.

O: Oscar and Caroline have been a wonderful inspiration to everyone that has come in contact with them. And I'm certain that everyone agrees that they have made the world a much better place in which to live.

L: Sometimes we are questioned about the Bible, Oscar. What is your belief about the Bible?

O: Well, I've always believed the Bible. There are so many people have certain things they say they can't believe. But there's...the thing that bothers me most is so many denominations makes it so hard for to be a Christian. Ever since the day, since Christ was here, those that believe in Christ are called, were called Christians, and (*unintelligible*)... And it seemed like, if you don't believe in Christ, and it's just, accept him for your salvation, that's the only way for salvation. By accepting Him, then you are a Christian according to the way Christianity first started. If you don't believe in Christ, I don't see how you can be a Christian, because Christians are "of Christ."

L: We have that wonderful fellowship together. Being brothers in Christ, haven't we?

O: Yes.

### ***Curing a cold with horse blankets***

L: Oscar has so many interesting stories, I think we could sit for a day, and listen to some of the things that Oscar and his brothers like to tell about the past. One of the interesting things was the cutting and hauling of logs. Oscar has one story – I'd like to have you tell – about hauling logs over to Kimberley.

O: Well, we used to take (*unintelligible*) from Spruce to Kimberly. We'd worked hard, and I had such a bad cold. Frank (?) Spencer was helpin' haul, too, at the same time. And he wanted me to shoe his horses at Kimberley for him. The roads (*unintelligible*)... and he didn't have a blacksmith that could shoe horses. So we made two – one trip to Kimberley, and hauled a sack, and then I did shoe his horses for him. And then we unloaded our loads, and I had such a bad cold in my chest that I was just about played out.

Goin' home, I tied the one team – we had four horses – and I tied one team behind the sled, and then I tied up the line and let the others go home, and I took those warm blankets that the horses had on, and I wrapped myself in, and laid down on the sled and let the horses take me home. And by the time I got home, my cough, my cold in my chest had loosened up, and by next morning, the cold all had left me, and I felt just fine. I felt pretty good the next day. I was wondering if it was that horse blankets had anything to do for a cure. Maybe there's a remedy there for a cold in the chest!

L: That's right! The horses were good for something besides just hauling, weren't they? It always amazes me that they were able to go home and find their way without anyone directing them. They knew where home was. I guess there are lots of animals will do that by instinct, to follow their way home.

### ***Condition of roads***

O: I would like to tell about the roads in those days. When you left Aitkin - you went out for the airport just now - from the airport you'd...the road just angled from the airport to Philip Cartie's. It had some curves and crooks for the highest places. But it run on the knoll that ran from where the airport is now, to Philip Cartie's place. That was... before you got to the Groten (?) place there, there was a low place in the middle, there's a butternut (?) tree, I would say a quarter of a mile. Which had been corduroyed (*note: this was laying logs across the width of the road as a primitive sort of paving, providing traction and preventing erosion*) when we came up in 1900, otherwise it was just the road you followed until you got over by Vilna's (?).

And there was an old bridge laid there, but the one time when we were goin' go uptown, the bridge had gone out, because the flood had taken...the water had risen and the logs had worn, so we had to swim the horses across and pull the wagon across where the rope and the chain where you had, and then drive on from there. We had to do the same when we come back, in order to provide getting' caught in the bridge, what was left of it. We had to go by the side of the bridge.

L: All right. There's another interesting story that you have, about a log drive and a couple of teachers that became involved in it. What was that?

O: Well, there used to be a drive every summer. One year, there was two different drives. C. P. Delait (?) had one, and Oscar and Alex Kangas and John Graden, it was, they had one almost every year. And they... the biggest truckle (?) was by Rice River bridge, if they had a dam there - they did have at one time. The logs jammed at the river, and it raised the water so high and all the logs flooded our place and logs went all over the land on both sides. And they had quite a time to get that straightened out again. But during one of those years we had our horses were just by a hedge in the bank, and those booms that were laid to keep the logs from going straight under the bridge...when the horse...the bank caved in, and the horse came up on that, on the inside with the logs, and couldn't get back over them booms.

Well, it had just happened a few nights before, there was a hobo came along at 9:00 in the evening and was askin' how far it was to the Wamigan (?). And it was quite a ways, and Dad says, "You aren't goin' to be able to make it tonight, because it's dark." And it was raining a little bit. So Dad said, "You'd better stay overnight."

And he said, "I can't stay here, 'cause I have, I'm not clean enough. I have bugs." he said. So he slept on the, in our kitchen. And Mother made him a breakfast, and he started off in the morning. That day, the horse got in the river, and couldn't get over that boom, he was full of spry (?), and he came and helped us, and he says "I am goin' to save this man's horse or else I am goin' go down with her," he said. And he called for help for those that were on the bridge, and they saved the horse for us. So that was a reward for the kind deed we did to the man before.

### ***Hard times and good friends and neighbors***

L: OK! In your life, you've always worked for Christianity, and been a Christian. But does being a Christian mean always mean that things will always be easy?

O: No, it didn't seem that way for us! When I first started out, I thought I was gonna be a success for farming, and make money, and then give the Lord some money as I was prospering. But it seemed like, it didn't seem that's the way it's gonna go, because after we had farmed a few years, things went (*unintelligible*), and in about five years, then our fates began to go the other way.

It's when we had our sickness, and lost our two boys, and our oldest boy died the day Jim was born. And we lost the two boys the same week. And then we had hailstorm, and tornado took part of our building, and set us back. We'd gone way back. We worked a lot more than we ever worked. (*unintelligible*) that experience, it's kind of soft in my old bean, and I thought I'll just do the Lord's work forever...and that's what I've tried to do from then on. I appreciate it.

During those hard times, we were always reimbursed by the neighbors and friends in the community. Even in '55 when our house was burned, we had the same experience. The friends and neighbors kicked in, and it seemed like the more you give to people you try to reward for what's them, but they've always outdone us on what we've done for them.

L: This has been an interview with Oscar Jacobson, long-time resident of Aitkin County. We thank you, Oscar, for your wonderful interview, and we thank you for the wonderful life that you have lived here, showing the rest of us what it has meant to be a Christian.

*Aitkin County Historical Society*

This has been the Florence Smith program. This is Laura Boyer, sitting in for Florence today.

*(end of tape)*