

Interview with Julia Westman

(b.1915)

Newberry Michigan

May 10, 1983

1 tape, side A

Jackie Erikson (JE): This is an interview with Julia Westman of Newberry. Interviewer is Jackie Erikson. What is your name?

Julia Westman (JW): Julia Westman.

JE: Where were you born?

JW: Right here in this house in Newberry.

JE: Tell me about your family

JW: Well, there was four of us, my father and mother and my brother and I.

JE: What did your father do?

JW: My father was yard superintendent down at Newberry Chemical Company.

JE: When did your father and mother come from Sweden?

JW: My mother came from Sweden in 1900 and my father came a little later than that.

JE: Do you remember the exact names of the town in Sweden?

JW: My mother came from Torsby and that's in Värmland, and my father came from Muran and that's in Västmanland, that's Swedish. [chuckles]

JE: Then they met here?

JW: Yeah. My mother had, my mother's sister lived here so that's why my mother came here. And my father had other relatives or friends that he knew that lived here, so he came. And then they met at my Aunt's place, my father roomed there.

JE: That's romantic.

JW: Just about everybody took in roomers to help make ends meet.

JE: What was it like in Newberry when you were a child?

JW: Well, I remember the wooden sidewalks and we had to make up our own fun. And we had a lot of good times.

JE: What were the streets and sidewalks?

JW: Well, it was boardwalks around here for a while and the only road we had was, it was brick road in the middle and the sides were all sand. And we finally got paved, the road paved out here so.

JE: Did you have sidewalks?

JW: We had sidewalks first before we had pavement.

JE: Where did you go to school?

JW: I went to the old Newberry High School, and I went down to the John Street School for my fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

JE: Where was the John Street School?

JW: It was what is now the Annex.

JE: Did you work anyplace as when, in your young teenage years?

JW: Well I was sick so I had to drop out of school. I almost died during scarlet fever in my freshman year, and after that I was never well and so I dropped out. But then I felt a little better so I went back and took up a little, a few business courses and I worked for Mr. Burman for a little while and then I stayed home and helped my mother after that. My father died and...

JE: What were some of the businesses in Newberry? What kind of stores?

JW: Years ago?

JE: Yes.

JW: Well I remember there was a Jewish store and they were opened on Sundays. And I remember my father took me down one Sunday morning and bought me a summer hat. I'll never forget the hat. It was a straw hat with little tick forget-me-nots on it and a little streamer on the back.

JE: But it was unusual to have a store open on Sundays?

JW: Yeah, um-hmm. And there were several Jewish stores here then, and then there was Joanne's Candy Store and Moose's made \_\_\_\_\_'s [?] ice cream parlor, and Laborer's tea shop store, and and then on Newberry Avenue we had Harris's food store, that's the, that used to be Dean's store. And A & P Store was in that building some years ago.

JE: Were you aware of any bad feelings between the Finns and the Swedes in Newberry?

JW: Uh. Well not in our home, there was no feeling like that because my father had a lot of Finnish men working for him, and they were men that he could depend on, so he'd put them in places where he knew that there would be no fires started or that it was, amongst with the charcoal. And you didn't have to check, he knew they were there and he didn't have to check them every day.

JE: He knew they were dependable?

JW: He knew they were dependable. And I never was aware of it but I heard other people say that there was between. Well, they say there was tension between, a friction between us Norwegians and the Swedes too, so might some jealousy in there someplace.

JE: Was there really a Finntown and a Swedetown?

JW: Oh, you bet! We had, the Swedes settled in the west end and the Finnish people settled in the east end. I think the east end is older than the west end. I think the Finnish people were earlier.

JE: There were two Lutheran churches in town, which one did you belong to?

JW: To the Swedish Lutheran Church.

JE: and then there was the Finnish Lutheran?

JW: Yes, yes.

JE: When did they merge?

JW: In the `60s, late `60s I would say. After `65.

JE: Why did they merge?

JW: Well, the synod, the Suomi synod and Augustana synod and the United Lutheran churches merged and formed the Lutheran Church of America. So they thought, being we all belong to one church that and the two small churches that would be better to merge.

JE: Have you enjoyed?

JW: I sure have, I've met a lot of good friends.

JE: It makes for a larger congregation.

JW: It does and it is so nice to come to church on Sunday and have the church filled.

JE: According to several references, such as *Newberry News* and Minnie Ida Mattson's book *History of Luce County: Volume One and Volume Two*, there was a near riot in June of 1937. Can you tell me about that, Julia?

JW: I sure can. There had been talk that there was going to be, they were going to come into town and start a strike down at the sawmill. And a couple of days before the riot started, they, there was talk around town that they were coming into town, so we were out driving one night. We drove by the Communist building and there were a lot of people around there, and then the next morning when my father went to work, he stopped in at, was either the chemical building or the furnace. And they were talking and they got a phone call from the mill that there was some strikers down there. So they all left and went down to help the mill men. And they chased them out and they said, "Well, we'll come back tomorrow morning." And they said, "Well if you do, you'll get the same!" So I think the lawyer, the company lawyer called Governor Murphy about what was happening and he told them, "If you don't want a strike, protect yourselves." So I guess they started making plans around town, what they were going to do if they came back. And they decided that the fire whistle would blow if the men started out. And sure enough, six o'clock, either, may have been a little after, the fire whistle blew. And I got up pretty fast and got dressed and went down to my cousins who lived in an apartment on Newberry Avenue. I thought, well maybe I can see something there, what's going on. And sure enough, after a while we could hear a noise coming up the street. And it sounded just like a herd of cattle coming, so and then we finally saw the men come, running up the street. And, herding them out of town just like a

bunch of cattle. And they said that they took them way out as far as the Teaspoon Crick ridge. And I guess one of the men dropped dead from exposure or from over, exhaustion. And then they tarred and feathered one man and they went to the building, Communist building and wrecked the inside of that. They threw oatmeal up in the ceiling and they wrecked the piano, and I don't know what they did to Stalin's picture and the red flag, I think my father got part of the red flag. And then, I guess they said they were going to come back again the next day, so I think they contacted Murphy again, and they did send extra police into town. So they were out around McMillian I think it was, they said. And just not let them come into town if they came, but nobody came I guess.

JE: The second day?

JW: Nobody came.

JE: What was the feeling in town after that happened?

JW: Well I think that people were, I know the communists they, a lot of them left town.

JE: Is that when the four Finnish families moved to Russia?

JW: It may have been, I can't say exactly. But I remember reading or hearing about some leaving but I really can't place the time they left.

SKIP IN AUDIO

JE: How has Newberry changed in the last twenty or thirty years?

JW: One way, we don't get our groceries delivered now. I miss that. It was so nice that you can call up and then they deliver it, no matter how little it was, they never said no. Now you have to go and carry it home yourself

JE: How about like, the population?

JW: Well there's been a lot of changes right in our block. There's only two of us that are the old-timers left in the block. The others are all new people moving in and a lot of old friends have moved out.

JE: How about the shopping area, the stores?

JW: It's different, Bastille's had a department store, you could go in there and buy your meat and your groceries and they had just about everything you needed, and then groceries and dry goods. If you wanted to \_\_\_\_ a \_\_\_\_\_ they'd put it in one order \_\_\_\_\_ then you'd get it with their orders.

JE: A one complete shop?

JW: It was a one complete shopping place, and I miss that when you're used to it.

JE: Was there anything special that comes to mind that you'd like to tell me about maybe the War years?

JW: The rationing, in World War I it was the flour, but I remember more of it than any of the other children. And then my mother had an awful time I recall she had to substitute all kinds of cereal instead of flour.

JE: Cereal in bread?

JW: Um-hmm. Oatmeal and whatnot, um-hmm

JE: What about in World War II?

JW: Well I know there was a sugar ration. They had to go declare how much sugar you had on hand and [laughs]. And meat, well, it got to be quite a line up in some of the stores. And one of the stores that we traded at, you went to get your meat and they handed you a package and you didn't know what you had until you got home. We were never disappointed though in what they gave us.

JE: What were some of the things that you got in your supplies?

JW: Well I remember smoked, I think it was smoked pork chops.

JE: Well that's good.

JW: Yeah, that was good. And there was this, I'm sure it was pork chops and not smoked pork sausage. It was pork anyway.

JE: Well, have you enjoyed your life in Newberry?

JW: Very much so. It's been very nice. I've said I think I'd be lost if I had to even move into another part of town, because it's so convenient, just a block and a half down to the grocery store and the post office. Everything is convenient.

JE: I know that you have been church organist for many years, very active in the church. And you were rewarded by a plaque and what else was it?

JW: I got a beautiful comforter, one of those new quilts.

JE: I'm sure you deserve it after all those years.

JW: And money. After that, after I had gotten that, more people heard about it, they sent me more money. So I was really surprised.

JE: Well you certainly have done your civic duty

JW: Oh I enjoyed doing it.

JE: Well you have been an asset to the community too, and I really appreciate that you're doing this interview.

JW: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW