

INTERVIEW WITH ORRIN LARSON
HERMAN, MINNESOTA
INTERVIEWED BY GEORGE SHERVEY
GRANT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Q. Today is September 5, 1973. My name is George Shervey. I am about to interview Mr. Orrin Larson of Herman, Minnesota who has been a jeweler there ever since the year of 1910. Now what year were you born?

Well, I was born 24 years before that, before 1910.

Q. That would be, 1894.

Ya, I guess it is.

Q. Ya.

I guess I'm 87 years old.

Q. Oh and next year you'll be 88. (Ya, next year) Where were you born?

I was born there on the farm in the country.

Q. Oh, West of Barrett.

Southwest of Barrett, south of the Lien church. (Ya) Just south of the Lien church a half mile.

Q. Sure. Ah, what was your parents name? (huh) What was the name of your parents?

Herman Larson and Christianelle Anderson was her maiden name.

Q. Oh, ya

Christianelee Anderson, she's a... I don't know whether you knew Anton

Q. No, I don't remember Anton Anderson. Were your parents born in Norway? (Sure) Did they give any reason for coming to the States?

No. I don't know because my mother was about 12 years old I think when she came. She came with her parents, grandpa and grandma Anderson you know.

Q. Oh ya, when you say Anderson was that a relative of Christian Anderson?

You mean this here, you mean (Oh, ya) Well, she was a sister of his.

Q. Oh ya? That's what you said, a sister of the pastor (Yes) Oh ya sure.

And you know, what-do-you-call-him, ya, Christian was there. Ya. Sure. Grandpa's name was Christian Anderson too.

Q. Ya. That's right. (Ya) How many brother and sisters did you have?

Me? (Ya) I had three sister and 5 brothers. We were 9 in the family.

Q. Oh how many are still living?

Four of us.

Q. The two, Ida and Laura in Elbow Lake?

And Art in Minneapolis and I.

Q. Oh, Art, he's the youngest one.

Ya, he's the kid.

Q. What did you do before you became a jeweler?

I worked for Ben Barlow in the machine shop in Barrett.

Q. Oh, is that so? In the same implement store that I worked later.

Ya, right there is where I worked.

Q. Where did you get your training as a jeweler?

Well I was a year in Hancock working for Chris Rigg. And then I went to school and then I went back for Chris Rigg for another year.

Q. Now after you started business, did you ever import any diamonds or jewelry or anything like that? Imported?

Oh sure: It's all imported you know. All diamonds are imported you know.

Yes, but, I know they are all imported but what I meant did you buy from any wholesaler in Europe?

Oh, no, not in Europe. Oh, no, I bought from here.

Q. Ya, you bought from dealers here in the United States. What was the reaction of some of these young fellows when they come to buy a diamond for their girlfriend. Was there any peculiar or were some of them quite nervous...

Oh, no. I guess I was probably the most nervous. I used to take them back to my desk back there, at the back end you know, and I used to always give them a chair and then they sit there and take a look and then I would wait on them.

Q. Well, what made you nervous?

Well, once in a while some things would happen you know and, oh I wasn't nervous but....

Q. You wasn't afraid of robbery or anything like that?

Oh no.

Q. How about couples that came and picked out their wedding rings were they, did they seem to be pretty tickled most of them?

Ya, sure they were.

Q. Did anything special...

I had that happen just last week, where they bought their wedding bands.

Q. Any special occasion that would be different from the rest? They all seemed about the same?

Oh, some were a little different. They were all about the same that time. Some were a little more finicky than others, you know.

Q. I can see that. How were collections compared to years ago and now? Did you get more cash now?

Ya. They practically all got cash.

(60--5 minutes)

Q. In the years past did you lose quite a bit of money in credit?

Oh, ya, I lost years ago.

Q. Was it during the depression? Did you have any hardships then?

Oh sure.

Q. How about the time when you started business? Did it take quite a while to get established?

You bet. When I first started I had some stuff with me, but not very much but I had a little with me. I threw my boxes I had the stuff in, you know, out back. After I had been here a few months I went out and gathered up my boxes and thought maybe I might be using them again pretty soon.

Q. What boxes did you mean?

Oh, any boxes that I had my stuff in you know.

Q. That you had packed in. You thought you would have to pack up and leave.

Ya sure.

Q. Did you have to do anything besides the jewelry business to earn your living?

No

Q. To work after hours someplace or anything like that?

No, I didn't do that. There was no such thing at that time.

Q. No I don't suppose.

Oh, I used to help Josey Johnson in the restaurant just for the heck of it.

Q. Here in town?

He had the restaurant for the first year I was here. Josey, you remember Josey.

Q. Ya, but from Barrett? (Ya) Oh, did he have a restaurant in Herman?
(Ya) Oh, I didn't know that.

Oh ya. The first year I was here he had a restaurant here.

Q. I can remember that you had the theater here. Do you still operate the theater. (Ya) You still operate it? When did you start that?

It was the year the war was over.

Q. Oh about 1919?

It could have been. (World War I) I had it in my head that it was '16.

Q. That's when the war started about there you know. ('16?) Ya, '16, '17 about there. Well maybe I'm wrong.

I don't remember what year it was.

Q. No.

Well Jordahl was with me then, see. There was two of us. (Oh, you had a partner?) Ya, there was two of us. (Who was that? Freeman Jordahl?) Ya, Fremont. Ya Fremont and I, we had a show house for quite a few years.

Q. Oh, I see. I suppose you own the building? (Ya)

Ya, I bought it later on. I didn't own it then but I bought it later.

Q. I suppose you noticed a lot of difference in the attendance after TV started getting so popular? (Ya that's for sure) I know like Hoffman and Elbow Lake both had to quit you know but I see you're still able to operate. Do you intend to retire?

Don't intend to. No.

Q. You enjoy what you are doing?

Sure I do. Sure

Q. You know that means a lot in a man's life if he can do what he likes to do. Isn't that right? There are some people who go to work every morning and they just hate to go to work because they don't like their work.

No. I don't do that. I don't hate to go to work in the morning. I go to work in the morning, there's nothing to that.

Q. Are you bothered with any rhuematism or anything? (No) Wonderful. (Ya sure it is) And your eyes seem good considering all that fine work you have to do. That means a lot too. If you couldn't see why then of course you'd be lost in your work.

If you were a little bit nervous you couldn't work.

Q. No if you were a little shakey. (Not on little things like those little fellers here you know.) Ya, like those tiny little wrist watches. I can see you've really got to be steady. You know sometime in the past I asked you about General Barrett. Of course He was dead and gone before you came here. But you did know his sons.

Ya, I knew both of 'em. Both Dick and Bob. I knew both of 'em.

(120--10 minutes)

Q. Do you know the daughter? Georgianna? Remember her?

No. Well I never met her. No, she was married and gone. I don't even know who she married

Q. I was told that she was married about seven times before she died. (Oh is that right?) Her cousin told me that.

Oh I see. I don't know. I didn't know anything about that. I know who Dick married. He married Spooner.

Q. Ya, that's right, from Morris.

Ya. A Morris girl. But ah Bob, his wife either died or left. I don't know.

Q. She was from down between Morris or Cyrus or in that area someplace.

Bob's wife?

Q. Wasn't she?

I don't know.

Q. That Bob was kinda unpredictable wasn't he?

Ya, but he would work though.

Q. He was a good worker?

He was back here you know some years ago. He farmed out here a ways not too long ago, not very long ago.

Q. Ya (Unintel

Ya. That's just the way it goes. (He didn't stay long) That's just the way it happened. I guess he probably ran over there and told them how things were here and I told Knute Mordahl about that later on. He lived south of town here. And he says, "Sure, that's just what was the matter." You see they didn't believe 'em. They said he was lying. You see those old people

over there were more confined in those days than they are today you know.

Q. Well, they're well read (Sure) and of course they've got radio and TV, so they know.

Why sure! Why sure! There was no such thing at that time you know.

Q. No. There wasn't, they didn't even have newspapers, I don't suppose. (No, I don't suppose) Couldn't afford it. (Not the American newspaper) No. (No of course not) And the Norwegian didn't know anything about things like that, I don't suppose. About the farms and the conditions here. (No, You see given at that time, of course farming is even bigger today than it was then but, but in some ways why it was pretty big in those days too.)

Q. Yes, because I understand if a man had a really, he was well fixed there in Norway.

Oh sure.

Q. And even if he had a couple acres of land he would be rich. (I suppose. I suppose) Sure. Ya, I remember them saying that. Most of them were renters you know. In Norwegian.

I know Knute Nordahl, he had a nice....(indistinguishable)

Q. Ya. Ah, how many children did you have Orrin? I forgot to ask you that? Did you have more than two boys?

Oh ya. I got three boys living. I had five. Everett, Washington. (Washington) Ya. Washington

(162--13 minutes)