

Ed Hilbrand
Narrator

Lee Tempte
KMRS
Interviewer

1977

Interview done for the Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota KMRS Feature



The transcription of this oral history was made possible in part by the people of Minnesota through a grant funded by an appropriation to the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Any views, findings, opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the State of Minnesota, the Minnesota Historical Society, or the Minnesota Historic Resources Advisory Committee.

- LT: 00:00 This is *Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota: a Saturday, KMRS News Feature*. We are talking with Ed Hilbrand of Morris, who lives here at Villa St. Francis. Ed, maybe you could tell us where you were born, first of all.
- EH: 00:16 All right. I was born in Ackley, Iowa—Hardin County—in 1880, November the 15th.
- LT: 00:27 You lived on a farm when you were growing up. Your dad died at an early age, so you went to live with—
- EH: 00:33 Yeah, I was three—of blood poisoning. Then I was the one that was most bother to mother. I had an uncle and aunt, they wanted to help out. So they took me to raise. So I was on the farm, that's where I was raised. The boys used to call me hayseed because I was from the farm, and they were in the town.
- LT: 00:58 But you earned your keep on the farm, though, didn't you?
- EH: 01:01 Yeah, I went to the country school, and I graduated from District 9, Coldwater Township—Butler County, Iowa—in 1897. I went to parochial school four years before that—four winters—from Thanksgiving to Easter. There was a Lutheran Church establishment; that was the only one that was there. So I was confirmed in 1896.
- LT: 01:42 During your lifetime, there has been a lot of things that have changed and maybe we could go through some of the

things that have really changed a lot during your lifetime, like some of the diseases. You remember when there were quite a few people, in fact, from your own family that died of tuberculosis.

- EH: 01:59 Yeah. I had a sister and a brother—and the sister’s girl, 18—they all died of TB and nobody knew where it came from or caught it from. Finally, years after that, they found out that it was traceable to a cow that mother had that was just full of that disease.
- LT: 02:35 There were quite a few families that lost a lot of people.
- EH: 02:38 Oh, yeah, a lot of people died from what they called then consumption. Later on, it was called tuberculosis, and we called it shortly, TB.
- LT: 02:52 Some of the wells back then weren’t the best either. There was typhoid that they got from that?
- EH: 02:58 Yeah, they got typhoid fever and things like that from shallow well. That is all the farmers had. They didn’t have no good water. One winter we had enough water for four horses and four cows. We had to melt snow for two weeks to keep them going.
- LT: 03:28 They had a flu back then too. I guess maybe they got different kinds of flu now. What did they used to call the flu?
- EH: 03:34 “Drip”, that’s the same disease we call flu now.
- LT: 03:39 Of course, they are still wondering what causes that, so I suppose there wasn’t too much you could do about that.
- EH: 03:44 No. They’ve got something that they claim that helps with flu, but I’ve never had it very bad so I don’t know. I hadn’t that experience.
- LT: 03:59 During your lifetime, they introduced cars and tractors, and I suppose with the mechanization of lots of different things. You remember when horses were in the majority and there were only a few cars. There were a lot of people afraid of cars, weren’t there?
- EH: 04:16 Oh, yeah. Horses and chickens, they all were afraid of cars. When a car come down the road, the chickens on the other side of the road would all fly to their home place and crawl

under what we call the grainery and corn crib that was built up on just rocks and it had the space to get under.

- LT: 04:40 You remember one of the newspaper articles that they had a story about cars.
- EH: 04:46 Yeah. They had a special council meeting to solve the car problem because there was as high as three cars drove through Main Street last week, and it scared a lot of horses. They had some runaways, and they had to do something to keep the cars off of the Main Street.
- LT: 05:11 Were there many farmers that were afraid of tractors when they first came out, or did they seem to think that tractors would be better than horses?
- EH: 05:19 No, it was awfully slow; it always is with the farmers. They think what they are doing is it and something different isn't. Besides, it cost money too.
- LT: 05:39 Speaking of money, the Depression was a time when a lot of people didn't have anything. You saved up your money and you had your own farm, but during the Depression you had some problems like everybody.
- EH: 05:52 No, I didn't have my own farm. I had it bought, but I couldn't pay a cent down on the mortgage. Year-after-year, all I got was enough to pay the interest and taxes and the insurance. Then when I quit farming, I sold out. I had a pretty good sale. I moved to town, and that was the fall of '29 when we had the greatest Depression of all time. Good corn was selling for 10 cents a bushel and oats even less. It was only a person that has plenty of money that would buy a little to help somebody out.
- LT: 06:40 Then after you quit farming, you had lots of different jobs. You worked at a packing house and you worked as a guard. How old were you when you started as a guard?
- EH: 06:51 I was 80.
- LT: 06:53 Tell us how you got that job.
- EH: 06:55 At the packing house I was 63. I was past Social Security age, but I didn't say nothing about it. I worked there 11 years and 2 months, and paid in my Social Security money.

- LT: 07:23 How was it that you got a job when you were 80 years old? You must have been in pretty good health to be able to get a job like that.
- EH: 07:30 Well, I knew this manager of Titus Manufacturing company, and he called up one day. He said, “We need a guard and watchman and he said I thought of you. How about it?” I said, “I’ll drive down tomorrow morning and see you,” which I did. I was hired out to him and had my medical taken and started to work the next day. Then it was a week from then when he was making the record, he asked me how old I am. I told him I was 80 last November. “Are you that old?” he said.
- LT: 08:18 You must have been in pretty good health most of your life then?
- EH: 08:21 Yeah, I was.
- LT: 08:24 You came to Stevens County to be closer to your family, and you’ve been here at the Villa only a few weeks now, right?
- EH: 08:32 Yeah, seven-eight weeks.
- LT: 08:35 Well, there’s one question that I always ask people—the times have changed so much during your lifetime. Are you glad you had the experiences that you’ve had?
- EH: 08:44 Oh, yes. Yeah, I wouldn’t want to live through them again I don’t think. But I’ve seen the changes, and I’d like to pass it on to those don’t know about it.
- LT: 09:01 One more question, Ed, and that’s your age. You mentioned when you were born, but it seems almost unbelievable. How would are you?
- EH: 09:08 I’m 95, and I will be 96 this coming November the 15th if I make it.
- LT: 09:16 Well, the way you are going, I’m sure you will. Thank you very much. We’ve been talking with Ed Hilbrand of Morris, on *Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota: a Saturday KMRS News Feature*.