

Viola Hoffman
Narrator

Joy M. Nielsen, Grand Schmit
Interviewers

November 16th, 1990
Interview done for the Golden Age of Radio Oral History Project



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.

GS: 00:01 —to do so. Okay. It's 11:15, and we're talking with Viola Hoffman. Viola, when were you born?

VH: 00:09 Do I have to tell you?

GS: 00:11 No. You had already—

VH: 00:12 Well, I was born August the 16th in 1906.

GS: 00:17 1906. And you shouldn't be embarrassed about that because you look way younger than you are.

VH: 00:21 Oh, well, thank you.

GS: 00:22 That's amazing. And how long have you been a resident of Stevens County?

VH: 00:27 Well, I guessed we figured that out. Did we figure that out?

JN: 00:29 Since you were 12 years old.

VH: 00:31 Since I was 12. Um-hum.

GS: 00:31 Okay. Since 12.

VH: 00:32 Yeah.

GS: 00:33 Okay. And where did you attend school?

VH: 00:37 Just in the country school. District 8 at Morris.

GS: 00:41 Okay. And the eight years of school was what you attended there or any high school afterwards?

VH: 00:47 No. Just—no. Un-huh.

GS: 00:47 Just the—okay.

VH: 00:49 Not that I wouldn't have liked too, but there wasn't any buses that went around there. You know?

JN: 00:52 Um-hum.

GS: 00:53 No doubt. Did you live on a farm or in the—

VH: 00:56 I lived on a farm.

GS: 00:57 All right. Seems to be a popular thing out here. How many people were in your family?

VH: 01:04 Let me see. I had a sister and three brothers.

GS: 01:08 Okay. Another big family. Were you married later?

VH: 01:15 Oh, yes.

GS: 01:16 Okay. Okay. And what was your occupation?

VH: 01:20 Farming.

GS: 01:21 Farming and housewife.

VH: 01:22 Right. Right. That's right.

GS: 01:24 Great. Great. That's it.

JN: 01:26 Okay. When did you first start listening to the radio?

VH: 01:31 Well, I suppose whenever they came out which I don't know—

JN: 01:42 Well, did you start listening as a child or—

VH: 01:46 No. We didn't have a radio until after I got married.

JN: 01:50 Oh, okay.

VH: 01:50 And it was a battery radio, the first one we had.

JN: 01:52 So you first started listening to the radio after you got married?

VH: 01:54 Um-hum.

GS: 01:55 Okay. And the first time you ever heard a radio when you actually got one in your own house?

VH: 02:00 Um-hum.

GS: 02:01 Okay.

JN: 02:01 What year did you get married in?

VH: 02:03 1928.

JN: 02:06 Okay. So you got your first radio after you were married.

VH: 02:10 Um-hum.

JN: 02:11 And what was it like? De—

VH: 02:15 Well—

JN: 02:15 Describe what the radio looked like or—

VH: 02:18 Well, it's just mostly like a box that was run by battery. A battery like you have in a car. So we could use it until the battery run down.

JN: 02:31 Then—

VH: 02:31 Then we had to wait and take it to town and get it charged up again.

JN: 02:34 Oh.

GS: 02:34 You're saying it's a box about—

VH: 02:35 Yeah. Yeah.

GS: 02:36 —couple feet by couple feet. Okay. Just—

VH: 02:38 Um-hum.

GS: 02:37 —rather small. Okay.

JN: 02:40 Is there any particular reason why you bought your radio?

VH: 02:45 Well, we didn't have a telephone, so we wanted to know what was going on outside.

JN: 02:50 Okay.

GS: 02:50 Information. Okay.

JN: 02:51 Wanted to be informed. Do you remember what stations were available, what stations you got?

VH: 03:01 That I don't remember.

JN: 03:02 You don't remember.

GS: 03:03 Was there quite a few of them? Do you remember having a big choice of radio stations, or just a couple?

VH: 03:08 I think just a couple.

GS: 03:08 Just a couple. Okay.

JN: 03:14 There wasn't any stations right around the area that were really close? Can you remember?

VH: 03:19 I don't think so.

JN: 03:20 They were mostly from far away?

VH: 03:21 M—yeah. Because I know Morris radio didn't come till long time after that.

JN: 03:27 I see. Before you had gotten your radio, what did you do for news? How did you get your news? Did you get a newspaper?

VH: 03:34 Just from the neighbors whenever we'd go to town.

JN: 03:36 Okay. And then, what did you do for news after? Did you use the radio for news after you got your radio?

VH: 03:44 Um-hum. Yes. Um-hum.

JN: 03:49 What'd you do for music, then, before you got your radio? Did you have any kind of musical entertainment?

VH: 03:55 Well, we didn't really have any. Of course, when I was a—

JN: 03:58 You didn't have a piano or anything or—

VH: 04:00 No. Un-huh.

JN: 04:05 What did you do for—did you listen to music on the radio, then, after you had gotten the ra—

VH: 04:09 Oh, yes.

JN: 04:13 What would you do for entertainment before you got—

VH: 04:16 Go to house dances.

JN: 04:19 House dances?

VH: 04:20 Sure.

JN: 04:22 Did you have lots of family gatherings before you'd gotten the radio or—

VH: 04:28 Not too many. Once in a while, but not too many.

JN: 04:31 And then, did you use the radio as a good source of entertainment.

VH: 04:34 Um-hum. Yes. Um-hum.

GS: 04:39 How often did you get into town since you lived on the farm, you're saying you had to get into town for information? Was it—

VH: 04:45 Well, you'd have to take the cream and the eggs into town, you know. And that'd probably be a couple times a week.

GS: 04:51 Okay. And that was usually your main reason for going to town?

VH: 04:56 Oh, sure.

GS: 04:56 You didn't head in for movies or other things?

VH: 04:58 Oh, once in a while we'd go to the movies. Yeah.

GS: 05:00 Okay. Okay. And do you remember what programs you heard on the air?

VH: 05:07 Oh, sure.

GS: 05:08 Okay. Um—

VH: 05:10 Huh?

GS: 05:13 A couple of—

VH: 05:13 Ma Perkins.

GS: 05:13 Ma Perkins. Yeah. We've heard that.

VH: 05:14 Yeah. Everybody's telling you that.

GS: 05:16 Oh, yeah. We've heard that in class too.

VH: 05:18 Oh, I betcha. And Jack Benny. Oh, there's—I think a lot of them have told you some—I think—

GS: 05:32 Name anything you remember hearing. It's fine. At least you haven't mentioned Amos and Andy.

VH: 05:40 Oh, yeah.

GS: 05:40 That's the whole world. So—

VH: 05:41 Yeah. Right. Well, Amos and Andy—

GS: 05:42 That seems to be—

VH: 05:43 —all there like, you know.

GS: 05:45 Seems to be everybody's only—

VH: 05:46 Yeah.

GS: 05:46 —only show, lately. And what were your favorite shows?

VH: 05:54 Ma Perkins, I'd imagine.

GS: 05:54 Ma Perkins was your favorite show? And that was during the afternoons when—

VH: 05:59 That was in the afternoon.

GS: 06:00 Okay. Okay. Were there any shows that your husband or other family members, really, I guess, liked?

VH: 06:10 No.

GS: 06:11 No. Okay. Okay.

VH: 06:14 You know, it's been a long time ago. It's kind of hard remembering that.

JN: 06:17 That's okay.

GS: 06:17 Oh, no joke. I can't remember yesterday.

JN: 06:21 Okay. Now, in the following questions I'm going to mention the word listening. And that's whenever you would have the radio on. It doesn't have to be that you're just sitting down listening to the radio, but it could be if you're doing housework while you had the radio on. It's just listening to be listening.

VH: 06:35 Well, we had to be a little careful with it too being that it was battery, you know?

JN: 06:39 Um-hum. Okay.

VH: 06:41 We had to save that for Jack Benny on Sunday evening. Be sure and have that on.

GS: 06:45 That was a big show for you, Jack Benny?

VH: 06:46 Oh, sure. Sunday night we'd have to—my husband would do the chores early so that—and I'd have supper ready, so we could eat supper and listen to Jack Benny on the radio.

GS: 06:55 Right. It was important to get things done—

VH: 06:56 Oh, you bet it was.

GS: 06:57 —before you listened to shows?

VH: 06:58 Oh, you bet.

JN: 07:00 Okay. How many radios did you have in your home then after—

VH: 07:03 Radio?

JN: 07:04 Yeah.

VH: 07:04 One. Just the one.

JN: 07:05 Just one? Okay. Where was it located in your house?

VH: 07:09 It was on a shelf in the dining room by the dining room table.

GS: 07:14 Oh, we've heard that before. In the kitchen was a good place.

VH: 07:16 Yeah.

GS: 07:17 I know we have a TV in the kitchen, so I don't think it's unusual.

JN: 07:22 Okay. Did you usually listen with your husband or with the rest of your family?

VH: 07:25 It'd be our family all together.

JN: 07:27 Um-hum. So you would usually all sit down and listen to the radio toge—

VH: 07:30 Pardon?

JN: 07:30 You'd all sit down and listen to the radio together?

VH: 07:32 Oh, yes.

GS: 07:33 Okay. Do you think it was something that brought your family together then?

VH: 07:37 I imagine it did, yes.

GS: 07:38 Okay.

JN: 07:42 Was there any certain rules for listening? Did you have to get your work done before you could turn on the radio?

VH: 07:50 Oh, get the chores done because I want to list—

JN: 07:51 Get the chores done. Was there specific shows that you listen together with your family? Like you mentioned that you always waited for Jack Benny to come on and—

VH: 08:02 Hum. Well, I know I didn't dare go down to mother's—she lived a half a mile away—when Ma Perkins was on because, boy, we had to be quiet. I remember that.

GS: 08:17 You usually listen to Ma Perkins alone yourself?

VH: 08:20 Oh, yeah. Sometimes.

GS: 08:23 Were you ever doing anything in the afternoon then while you were listening to Ma Perkins, like doing housework?

VH: 08:29 I suppose I was darning socks. I suppose doing some patching.

JN: 08:35 So was the radio on—you did have the radio on some of the time during the day, then?

VH: 08:40 Oh, yes. Sometimes. When there was something I wanted to—

JN: 08:43 Was it usually on every evening or—

VH: 08:46 No, I wouldn't say it was on every evening because my husband would do a lot of reading, and I'd sew carpet rags.

JN: 08:55 So you really only turned the radio on when you wanted to—

VH: 08:58 Yeah.

JN: 08:58 —really listen to it.

VH: 08:59 It isn't like it is now. We'd have it on, we don't—we really aren't listening to it. We just got it on to have noise in the house, I suppose.

GS: 09:04 Yeah.

JN: 09:11 Okay. I think it—I think she's already covered this.

GS: 09:14 Yeah. And you've gotten to the time of day when you listen to certain programs—you're saying Ma Perkins in the afternoon, and then Jack Benny sometimes at night.

VH: 09:23 Um-hum. Jack Benny was mostly on on Sunday nights.

GS: 09:26 Sundays.

VH: 09:26 Sunday evening.

JN: 09:26 So weekly.

VH: 09:27 Yeah. That was a weekly.

JN: 09:28 Just on once a week?

VH: 09:29 Um-hum. Yeah.

GS: 09:30 And that was something you looked forward to all week?

VH: 09:32 Oh, yes.

GS: 09:33 Jack Benny. Were there other comedians that you liked listening to or was he the one?

VH: 09:38 Oh, there was George Burns. Yeah. I don't want to forget George Burns.

GS: 09:43 No. No. Still like him a lot. Did you ever talk about the shows that you'd heard with other people or with your husband or with other people in the town? Did you guys talk about Ma Perkins, or did you talk about the Benny Show?

JN: 09:56 Well, you said your mother listened to Ma Perkins, did you—

VH: 09:58 Oh, yeah. Well, sure.

JN: 09:59 —talk about it?

VH: 09:59 We—yeah. Right. Just like people do nowadays talking about their—you know, Days of Our Lives.

JN: 10:06 Um-hum. Did you discuss what happened that day on Ma Perkins?

GS: 10:12 And then, in Ma Perkins or a show like that in the afternoon, did you ever identify with some of the family situations going on in that kind of show?

VH: 10:22 Oh, sure. You would. Um-hum.

GS: 10:23 Seemed pretty reasonable and relatable.

VH: 10:26 Oh, yeah.

GS: 10:27 Okay.

JN: 10:28 How did—what kind of situations that you could relate to? Can you remember any certain—remember any certain, remember any of the plot lines that were in the show?

VH: 10:44 Well, just like it is nowadays, raising a family, you know.

JN: 10:47 Raising a family and the—

VH: 10:47 It's what we'd hear.

JN: 10:47 —ups and downs.

VH: 10:48 Um-hum. Yeah. Right.

GS: 10:51 Did the radio ever help you or a family member solve problems like household tips or farm information, things like that?

VH: 11:03 Oh to a certain extent, yeah.

GS: 11:08 You ever feel like Ma Perkins sometimes helped you when you'd have a relationship problem or a problem with something else around—

VH: 11:19 My husband?

GS: 11:19 Yeah. Stuff like that. Did it help you solve a problem like that by saying what would Ma do?

VH: 11:26 I suppose. I imagine it did. Yeah.

JN: 11:35 Did the radio change the way you'd look at political events? Did you listen to election results or the Fireside Chats by listening to political things on the radio?

VH: 11:47 I suppose.

JN: 11:49 Do you recall any of them that you—anything specific?

VH: 11:54 Not really. Of course, back then it wasn't like it is now, today. Especially this—

JN: 11:59 Do you feel like you were more informed by having a radio?

VH: 12:02 Well, we weren't very well informed those days, neither. About elections, you mean?

JN: 12:07 Yeah. Or about any—about just politics in general. Do you feel like you were more informed by having a radio in your home?

VH: 12:13 I imagine we did.

JN: 12:20 Did you listen to the commercials on the radio, or did you—

VH: 12:24 I don't remember that there was commercials on the radio. Maybe there was, I don't remember that there was.

JN: 12:28 You don't really remember the commercials?

VH: 12:29 Un-huh. I don't remember that there was commercials. I suppose there was, really to—

GS: 12:34 Must've been a couple of them, but they really weren't that important to you.

VH: 12:36 Yeah. No. Un-huh.

JN: 12:37 You don't—you never really used the—

VH: 12:39 No. Un-huh.

JN: 12:42 Maybe they were on, but you just didn't want to listen to them, so you don't remember them.

VH: 12:45 That's right. I don't remember having to listen to commercials on the radio, but there probably was.

GS: 12:51 But your—oh. Skip it. Go for it.

JN: 12:56 Was there anything on the radio that had emotional impact on you, that really made you happy or sad, like any events you heard about on the radio or the shows?

VH: 13:09 Not necessarily.

JN: 13:10 Did you—I know some people have talked about when Kennedy was shot.

VH: 13:14 Oh.

JN: 13:15 Was that one of the si—

VH: 13:15 Of course, that wasn't too long ago, really. Because we had television too, then, you see.

GS: 13:20 Okay.

JN: 13:21 Yeah. That's what they were saying too.

VH: 13:21 Yeah.

JN: 13:23 But did the—like Jack Benny, did it give you a really happy feeling inside?

VH: 13:28 Oh, sure.

JN: 13:28 Did it give you a good vibe?

VH: 13:29 Oh, yes.

GS: 13:31 After—you were saying that you tuned into TV for when Kennedy was shot. Did that take over as your main source of news then?

VH: 13:41 It was and that's all that you talked about—

GS: 13:43 Okay. The—

VH: 13:43 —because I was living in town then.

JN: 13:50 Did you get much war news on the radio that—can you remember World War II or about Pearl Harbor? Or was that more—did the TV have more—did you get more information about that from the TV?

VH: 14:06 Well, yeah. The—

JN: 14:14 Do you remember hearing any war news on the radio at all?

VH: 14:17 Oh, yeah. We used to get that on the radio too.

GS: 14:21 We're pretty much down to the end of our questions. Is there anything else that you feel that we missed that you'd like to add about radio?

VH: 14:32 Well, I don't know what we'd done without it. I know when the first that we had had a big horn on it. Only one could listen in at a time. I imagine you've been told that before here. Um-hum.

JN: 14:42 Is that the one that you got when you first were married.

VH: 14:44 Um-hum. Had a great big horn that you'd—

GS: 14:48 Could only get—you had to get in there real tight.

VH: 14:49 Yeah. Right.

GS: 14:51 Okay. Sounds great. You've been excellent. If there's nothing else that you'd like to add that helps immensely. We've got some people down here today. It's been great. It's been super.

JN: 15:04 Thank you for your time.

VH: 15:05 Yeah. Well, you're welcome. I don't think I was very good at it.

JN:	15:08	No.
GS:	15:08	No.
JN:	15:08	You did just fine.