NAME: Johnson, Harold

DATE: March 3, 1991

PLACE: The Saint Paul home of Harold Johnson

INTERVIEWER: Margot Fortunato Galt

PROJECT SERIES: Payne and Arcade: Avenues of Change

BIographical Information: Harold Johnson is the son of John Johnson, one of the original owners of the East Side Grocery. John Johnson operated the store with his brothers Charlie, Walfred, and Otto. The East Side Grocery was in business from about 1901 to 1956. During this time, the store was located at three sites on Payne Avenue, all near Case and Payne.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Harold Johnson talks about the cooperation among his family, from the time they made their way as newly-arrived immigrants from Sweden working as farm laborers and doing housework for wealthy families on Crocus Hill and Summit Avenue through the years the Johnson brothers owned and operated the East Side Grocery. He describes the store's three locations on Payne Avenue, during it's fifty-five years of existence. He gives a detailed portrait of commercial and social activity on Payne Avenue before World War II, with sketches of the Salvation Army, cookie sales, delivery and telephone service, and Swedish buying and eating practices. He brings to life the early storage and credit accoutrements of the store. He comments on his father's business and moral codes. And he tells of his own involvement with the store as a boy growing up, from the time he fetched items from the shelves, helping to fill orders, to his summers driving the delivery truck.

COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:

NUMBER OF CASSETTES: 1

TYPE OF CASSETTE: 90 minute

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 1 1/2 hours

RESTRICTIONS ON USE:
Interview with Harold Johnson
Interviewed by Margot Fortunato Galt
Interviewed on March 3, 1991
at the Saint Paul home of Harold Johnson

MG: [Let's begin by] outlining the places where the grocery store was.

HJ: All three locations of the grocery store were near Case and Payne. The first one was on the northwest corner at 963 Payne, from about 1901 to 1910. Then they moved across the street to 964 Payne Avenue, on the northeast corner. They were in business there until 1927 when they moved to the middle of the block, between Case and Jenks, at 973 where they remained until 1956 when my two uncles, Walfrad and Otto, retired.

One of the original owners of the business was a Peter Johnson who had the money. He had a successful restaurant and boarding house on lower Payne Avenue. The other two were Ole Halston, who pulled out of the business to go farming over at Spring Valley, Wisconsin, a short time later, and my uncle Charlie, the oldest in the Johnson family.

It was around 1904 that my dad, John, became a partner in the business. My dad came here in 1896 and had many kinds of jobs, including a couple of years down in Red Wing during the Depression, when he got a warm bed and overalls and something to eat and no money.

MG: [Chuckle] What was he doing in Red Wing?

HJ: He worked on a farm south of town, in an area called "Fedderston." The man he worked for was Dan Minks. He was not a Swede, and that was a good thing because my dad, for two years, lived with an [American] family, and when he left to go back to St. Paul, he didn't have a trace of a Swedish accent. A lot of people had the accent. My mother had a Swedish accent all her life.

MG: When you say "the Depression," when exactly do you mean?

HJ: That was from about 1898 to about 1900.

MG: How old was your father then?

HJ: My dad was born in 1877, on December 13, which is Lucia Day; that's a Swedish holiday. By the way, I have a
granddaughter who was born one hundred years later, to the
day, on Lucia Day.

MG: Isn't that great? That's really nice.

HJ: His brother Charlie spent the same two years on
another farm in the area. The only money they saw was in
the fall when they were on the thrashing crew going from
farm to farm. That lasted, maybe, a couple months or so.
But they really didn't have any money. When they came
back to the Cities here, they discovered a problem. My
grandfather had died in Sweden, so an uncle had to loan
them the money, and my uncle Charlie went over to Sweden
and got my grandmother and six kids. We have this picture
of them.

MG: On the picture, who is your father here?

HJ: This is my dad.

MG: Second from the right, standing up.

HJ: This is Charlie, or Carl. He's the oldest.

MG: That's the second from the left.

HJ: He was one of the three that organized [the store].
This fellow, Walfred, and my dad got in the business when
Peter Johnson went out to Dakota and homesteaded.

MG: You said that was about 1904?

HJ: About that time.

MG: What did they have to do to get in the business?

HJ: My dad had a few dollars then, so he might have
loaned money. The uncle was August Carlstrom. He was the
successful fuel dealer on Payne Avenue. In this Johnson
relation book, there is a write-up about the Carlstrom
family. He was the only one that had any money, so they'd
borrow money.

MG: This uncle, Carlstrom, had been in the United States
longer?

HJ: Yes. It tells in this book. When they came, they
moved around to different places. They even bought forty
acres up by Amery, Wisconsin, real cheap and had the
grandmother and the little kids up there. They would go
up in the spring and put in the crops, and the neighbors
were very helpful. They did that for a few years, but
that got to be tiresome, so they moved them down here.
Then my dad and this brother, August, who was a policeman,
bought a duplex, and the whole family lived in the duplex. That was on Bradley and Magnolia, about a mile south of here. Next door was Uncle August, the guy they would borrow money from. Another uncle, Otto, was across the street. There were three of the family in one place.

MG: Had your father's father died?

HJ: He died in Sweden; he never got here.

MG: I see. And that could be one reason why the family decided to come?

HJ: They had to come here because there was no source of income, and there were no jobs in Sweden. That's why my wife's family and my family and all the relatives came to this country. My dad had one cousin in Sweden. Everybody else came to this country--most of them to the East Side. At the church we go to, there are lots of relatives, second cousins of mine.

MG: It's almost like the whole town just picked up and came across the water.

HJ: Yes. The East Side was Swedish; so, in 1900, if you walked down Payne Avenue, it would all be Swedish.

MG: People speaking in Swedish.

HJ: Yes. Everybody was talking Swedish.

MG: The first store, what was it called?

HJ: "East Side Grocery." It had that name from the start, had it all the years. In the early days, it took a lot of manpower to run the store because so much was in bulk. Like prunes, they'd buy a pound of prunes, and you'd put them in a bag. The counter in the grocery store had drawers in back of the counter. There would be many dried fruits, like apricots and pears--more than you see now. It was all bulk and came in wooden boxes. You'd just put the box upside down and plunk it down in. There were things like peas, brown beans, white beans, and things like sugar, even flour. There was so much. It wasn't like today, where everything is all packaged.

Most people did not have telephones. (Looking at a picture of the store) My uncle Walfred, here, is standing with one of the horses they had, and he had a buggy. I was born in 1912. So this would be when I was, say, five years old; that would be 1917. He had certain areas and certain customers on certain days. If he would stop in our neighborhood, I'd jump up in the buggy and have a ride for a block or so.
MG: [Chuckle] What was the horse pulling?

HJ: Just a small buggy, with one seat.

MG: And the food would be delivered?

HJ: Every customer had a book. The book would open up like a book. That book showed all the transactions—what they had bought, what date, how much they had paid on the bill—a running history, page by page. And that customer had that book, so then, when my uncle would come to her, maybe she wanted to pay ten or fifteen dollars on the grocery bill; he’d write a credit, so much, new balance. Then she had her order ready, and he’d write down the order and take the book with him. The next day they delivered the groceries, and that wasn’t too big a wagon. The grocery boxes that they delivered the groceries in looked like this.

MG: Like a wooden box to hold milk cartons. I’ve seen them that size.

HJ: Yes. Those boxes were made at a company in Minneapolis, Crosby-Worth. Now this says “Michaud.” There’s a company out near you that has a liquor store, Michaud? They’re on Grand by Lexington. My dad worked for Michaud. They were on Seventh and Wabasha, where Walgreen [Drug Store] is. This was before he got into business at East Side Grocery. They would deliver the groceries in those boxes. And the book would go back with the order, so their accounts receivable records were all among the customers, not in the store. [Both Laugh]

MG: Pretty remarkable.

HJ: Well, you could trust everybody. It’s a different age now. That’s the way it was way, way back. Later on, they got books like this.

MG: Those look more familiar to me, you know, with carbon paper.

HJ: They would have a book for everyone. There was a rack where the books were kept; they were in there at a slant, in alphabetical order. They would write the name here.

MG: They’d write the name on the edge, and they’d just be able to pull it out.

HJ: Yes. It was, maybe, this wide and hinged so it would fold together like a book, and maybe, that tall. They had two of those [racks], and they went in a big safe at night to be fireproof. Later on, there was a company called
McCaskey that made one that had a register in the front and a spring. They could take that book when they answered the customer on the phone, and then write up the thing. They would look up the name and there was a spring thing so they could just file it behind.

MG: Oh, sure. There used to be phone books like that. You'd move an indicator down and then flip it, and it would flip up to that particular number or name.

HJ: Yes. Then, at night, they would just close it because that was fireproof. So they didn't have to worry about putting everything in the safe. First of all, they didn't have to run to go and get a book; they had the book.

MG: Yes. So you're saying that once the telephone came in...

HJ: There were two telephone companies in town. One was the Northwestern Telephone Company and one was Tri-State. This lists two telephone numbers, for the two different companies: originally, one was Tower, the 0488, and the other one was VanBuren. When they merged, I think it was Bell that owned them both, Northwestern Bell.

MG: That's interesting. Was Tri-State independent?

HJ: They were both independent. Bell didn't own any of them at that time.

MG: When did it start, and how long did it last? Do you have any recollection of that?

HJ: I don't remember when they merged. To be in business, you had to have two telephones because some customers had one company, some customers had another.

MG: Was the division geographical?

HJ: For the whole Twin Cities.

MG: So it wasn't that one company was on one side of Payne Avenue and one company was on the other.

HJ: No. This telephone company was for the whole area, the Twin Cities.

MG: I see. Both of them were.

HJ: Yes.

MG: Was there ever a fire in the store?
HJ: No. They never had a fire.

MG: That's good.

HJ: The first building was smaller, so they needed more room.

MG: So that's why they moved?

HJ: Yes, from 963 to 964 across the street, before World War I. This picture of the store on the corner, at 964, shows the warehouse that my uncle built.

MG: Behind it.

HJ: Yes. That was a warehouse. This second store had more floor space.

MG: The address of this was 964 Payne.

HJ: That's 964. Yes.

MG: What was upstairs?

HJ: There was an apartment up there. Next door, to the north, was a millinery store run by Emma Nordstrom. (Before her, there was a movie house there called the Palace Theater. It held forty people. He put a drape across the windows and set the projector on a box.) In those days, women all wore hats. We had about three millinery stores on Payne Avenue at that time.

MG: That must have been fun. Very different from these days when hardly anybody does.

HJ: Oh, yes.
   Talking about Payne Avenue, here is a record [of Swedish-American songs].

MG: Oh, I have that record. I know her, not personally, but I know of her.

HJ: Well, on the back, it tells about Minneapolis, Cedar Avenue and St. Paul, Payne Avenue; and then, it tells about Chicago--there's a Chicago Avenue someplace--and in Brooklyn, there's a Scandinavian area.

MG: This is Memories of Snoose Boulevard: Songs of the Scandinavian Americans, by Anne Charlotte Harvey.

   Back to the store. Is this a picture of the second store?

HJ: That's 963. That's the first one. 1963 is the first. 964 is the second. 1973 is the last one.
MG: I'm curious to have you talk about some of the items in here, some of the things that are very different from the way they are today. You talked about the bulk items. How were other foodstuffs packaged?

HJ: Well now, take a thing like breakfast cereal today. You, maybe, had Quaker oats and Kellogg's corn flakes, and they were the big sellers. And oatmeal, just the plain oatmeal, was what most people had.

MG: Did they buy that in bulk? I mean, did they just get it in a paper bag?

HJ: Well, I remember way, way back, it came in a cloth sack. But Quaker has had it in boxes for a long, long time.

MG: Yes. I suppose that goes back.

HJ: I have a cookie jar that was sent for--up there, you can only see a corner of it--a big Quaker.

MG: Oh. Yes, sure.

HJ: That isn't very old, but that's the way they looked. When I was small, that sold well. And it's, maybe, better for you than what we have today.

MG: Oh, sure it is, on the whole.

HJ: I remember that when I worked on the delivery truck, certain customers were old-fashioned, and they had funny ideas. Like for flour, a hundred-pound sack of flour was a huge sack, but they would not take two fifties, because the flour was better in a big sack.

MG: Was there anything to that?

HJ: No-o! Pillsbury flour was Pillsbury flour, but they had those ideas.

MG: Maybe they just wanted the big sack.

HJ: Well, maybe the big sack was more useful. Because my wife, now, her underwear when she grew up, it all was Pillsbury; it wasn't any other brand. [Chuckle]

MG: [Laughing]

HJ: That's true!

MG: I'm sure it was.
HJ: And a sugar sack, they'd get a hundred pounds of that. And potatoes, they'd buy several bushels in the fall. I can remember one family, one of the last of the old old-timers. In the fall of the year, they would have six, eight of those boxes full of stuff, plus a hundred pounds of sugar and a hundred pounds of flour. It was a different world.

MG: They were really storing things up.

What kinds of vegetables could people get from the store?

HJ: Fresh vegetables weren't a great big thing, I think people had gardens more. [Vegetables sold in the store] came a little later on, at 973.

I worked in the store in the late twenties and the thirties, and then things were changing. There were more packaged goods, but there was no frozen food, nothing like that. And there were a lot more canned goods than in the beginning.

In the early days, too, they wouldn't be wasting money; they didn't have money. They wouldn't be buying cookies much.

MG: What does this picture show? Describe this, because it's kind of unusual.

HJ: These are metal boxes, that square. When Sunshine came and delivered the cookies in these boxes, they took the old boxes back. This box had a glass window in it. You can, maybe, make it out; it's in the bottom part of the box. This box was set into a shelf. When they picked out the cookie they wanted in that window, you pulled out the handle and the box came with it, and you opened up the box. Then you put the cookies in the bag and weighed it up, gave them a pound. At this particular time, this was Sunshine, a brand we have today. The man in the white, he was at the store all week. When people phoned in, everybody else would tell them about what they had this week going with Sunshine. At this time, now, this is only a few of the people that worked. There's no one that drove the truck or anything. There's the old Model T Ford truck back there. See it there? They had two trucks like that, and one truck delivered on the east side of Payne Avenue; the other truck delivered on the west side—with those boxes there.

MG: Was there any difference between the east and west side in terms of who lived where?

HJ: No, there was just too much work for one truck. There weren't many cars, see, so most people walked. And the women were not working outside the house; they were home raising their kids, and they had bigger
families, too, then. So [the store] had two big Model T's, and they were fairly good-sized trucks.

MG: What year was this?--with the trucks. What would you guess?

HJ: Oh, this is before the Depression. This is sometime between 1927 and 1930.

MG: So you remember those trucks when you first started working there.

HJ: I remember this picture, when it was taken.

MG: Is this a give-away? Sunshine is giving these cookies away?

HJ: No. They sold them, pound for pound.

MG: How many did they sell?

HJ: In a week, one ton. That's two thousand bags of cookies in a week.

MG: [Chuckle] That's a lot of cookies.

HJ: Now, just to show you the traffic the store had, this store during World War I, which ended in 1918, was, maybe, the biggest grocery store on Payne Avenue in volume. There was one more that was pretty much the same size.

MG: And which was that?

HJ: That was Nelson Brothers. They were at Lawson and Payne. [Our store] was East Side Grocery, sometimes called "Johnson Brothers" too because [the owners] were Johnson brothers. A salesman came, and there was a candy company in Minneapolis that had gone bankrupt. They had twenty sacks of sugar. Sugar was non-existent; you couldn't buy sugar. He says, "Do you want it?" Of course they wanted it. So they delivered twenty sacks--hundred-pound sacks--of sugar. Well, they called up Nelson Brothers and sold them ten, and they kept ten, which would be--ten times a hundred is a thousand. They weighed up 1,000 one-pound bags of sugar. This was a Saturday morning, and they sold it all in one day. A thousand people came in, and, of course, another thousand went down to Nelson, just to get a pound of sugar.

MG: It was so rare because of the War.

HJ: Of course, in these days, everybody knew each other, so gossip could really spread. Where, today, we don't
know who our next-door neighbors, practically, are. It was a different world.

MG: So what gossip do you have in mind? Do you remember any major scandals?

HJ: My dad knew an awful lot of things about different things. There were a few deadbeats around.

MG: [Chuckling] I bet.

HJ: One time at this location, a kid came in and got some groceries, and then he didn't have any money. He said, "Charge it." And my dad said, "What's your name? You're in the wrong store." (There was a Palmquist Brothers Grocery Store down the block.) He said, "Your folks buy at Palmquist Brothers." They knew! And the kid said, "No. We don't buy groceries there. They wanted money, and my dad quit."

MG: [Laughing] That's great!

HJ: [Laughing] So that's the way they knew people. Credit losses were not high; they were very low.

Talking about credit, among the Swedes, there were a lot of tradesmen, like carpenters, stonemasons, bricklayers, and plumbers. That's why they say these older homes in this part of the country are well-built. The Scandinavians knew how to work with wood. You take Italians. It's all stone [in Italy], where it's all wood in Scandinavia. My wife, Eleanor, her dad was a carpenter, and he had three brothers who were carpenters, and a brother-in-law. They all were carpenters. So things would be slow. It wasn't like today [when] they wrap up a building in plastic and stay inside and get these gas heaters. Then it was slow. So during the winter, the accounts receivable could go up and up, and then you'd get paid back in the fall or summer.

MG: That's how your family helped the community along. You carried a lot of families when they couldn't pay.

HJ: There were things like the Salvation Army on Payne Avenue. When I was a kid, the sign outside said, "Fralsningsarmen." That was in Swedish, "Salvation Army." They used to come around--the Salvation Army lassies in the bonnets and all--they would come around on Saturday. The stores would be open until nine o'clock. They had a paper called The War Cry, and [the Salvation Army girl] had them on one arm. They sold this. This was one way they made money, because the members in the Salvation Army weren't the [wealthier] professional people, like doctors or dentists. They did a lot of good in the community, so they spent more than regular churches. They had The
War Cry, which was in English, and Stridsropet. "Strids" is "war," and "ropet" is "cry." So they would have both. They sold Swedish ones or English, and the Swedish ones sold the most. My dad would always bring that home Saturday night, when he came from the store.

MG: Was it local news?

HJ: No. That was a national magazine. They sold them at every Salvation Army.

We used to go to the Salvation Army quite a bit, although we weren't members there, because they would have concerts and things like that. They would sell tickets, and we'd use them. That thing on the mantel like a beer stein?

MG: It looks like a little tankard.

HJ: Yes. The Captain gave that to my dad one time. It was made in Sweden.

MG: That's very colorful. reddish orange. What kinds of concerts did you hear?

HJ: They had a band, and then they would sing. They'd sell tickets, and then they would, half way through, stop for collection. [Both laugh]

MG: So they hit you up twice. That was some entertainment!

[Back to the store.] What was the biggest volume on a busy day?

HJ: The last year they were in business, the business was nearly as big as it was at any time. I remember that on Saturdays, their income would be way over a thousand dollars. This was when I was a little kid. People were paying bills and things.

I saw an article, not long ago, about Morelli [on lower Payne Avenue]. They're still in business. Their volume today is $200,000. Where, back in '57, when prices were a lot different, they did $90,000.

MG: A year.

HJ: We had seventeen people, back in the early thirties, working on a Saturday.

MG: That's a lot!

HJ: That is. Yes.

MG: Do you think that was the heighth of the success?
HJ: That would be about when things were at their peak. There were Fairway stores in every community. [And East Side Grocery was part of the Fairway system.] Fairway [headquarters] was out on University, near Raymond, and my uncle was on the board of directors. [Fairway ran an ad in the [Friday evening] paper, so a lot of business was on Saturday because there were good prices.

MG: Sure. That makes sense, and the families would probably come down as a group.

HJ: Yes. Out on Grand Avenue, there was a Grand Avenue Grocery, and they delivered to those well-to-do people. And then, there was Michaud. Between the two of them, they did the most [business].

MG: Did people come into the store for purposes other than buying food? To gossip, to talk?

HJ: Yes. If my dad wasn't down in the store by seven o'clock in the morning, if he overslept, he really was [in trouble with his friends]. He had an old friend, Eric Larson, who was a machinist for the Northern Pacific down here on Mississippi and York. [Eric] would get a ride, and he always came to the store. [He and my dad] read the Pioneer Press and talked about fishing and anything that came along. People would come in just to say "Hello." I remember one fellow, one of the early employees at 3M. He lived up north on Rose Street, and he'd walk to work. He would stop, in colder weather always, and visit, just to say "Hello."

MG: Was there a lot of coffee drunk at the store?

HJ: No. They did not ever have a coffee urn. But all the time, in those days, they had what you have in the supermarket today. On Friday, you go through the store, and you could, practically, have supper?

MG: Yes, you can.

HJ: Well, they had that all the time, where the [salespeople with free samples] would stay a whole week at each store. That was going on all the time.

MG: Describe that in more detail to me.

HJ: In the front of the store, there'd be a table set up for this gal--she'd always be dressed in white. When people came through the door, the [saleswoman] would approach them with whatever she was selling and make them
familiar with it. She usually would have a better price on it too. Many times it would be a new product.

MG: That's what happens at the stores today.

HJ: It's the same idea as we have today, on Friday in the supermarkets.

MG: Except you had this every day of the week.

HJ: [We featured] that one product. When she would come Monday morning and set everything up, she was there until Saturday night.

MG: Was there a new product every week?

HJ: Not every week, but pretty regularly.

MG: Did the kids get handouts?

HJ: They came around for bananas. Bananas come on a stalk. Now, you know, they cut the bananas off right down in Central America. They pack them in the cardboard boxes right there. Then they put them on pallets, take them to the dock, put them in the big containers, and put them on the ships. But in those days, they cut the stalk off, so we got a stalk--the whole stalk--and hung it up. You had to be afraid: you could, once in a while, run into a tarantula.

MG: It's kind of scary.

HJ: Yes. You watched it. The kids would come in, several a day, and ask, "Have you got any specks?" They were overripe bananas with speckles on them. They called them "specks." That was every day.

MG: [Chuckle] It was a treat.

HJ: These were kids who, maybe, didn't have bananas at home very often. I remember a family; the kids were all redheads. I'll bet there were, maybe, three kids--boom, boom, boom. These redheaded kids from that family came for years. [Both laugh]

MG: Very noticeable, with red hair.

HJ: Yes.

MG: Tell me about buying things wholesale.

HJ: At that time, there were many wholesale grocery companies in St. Paul, in the warehouse district downtown. My dad, at one time, worked for one called "Foley Brothers
and Kelly." That was an all-Irish outfit, except for about five people: my dad; his brother, August, who later became a cop; another fellow from Arcade Street who was a Swede; and an Englishman from out in the Midway area. But the rest of the place was all Irish. They had pull with the Democratic Party, so a lot of their volume was what they shipped to government installations out West, through the Dakotas, Montana.

MG: Oh, interesting.

HJ: To show what good Democrats they were, on Election Day, the non-Irish, which would be four or five people, kept the place going in case there were emergency orders. All the others would come to work dressed up, and here would be a line-up of these hacks they had in those days, and all they did all day was vote. See, there was no registered voting, so you voted all day long.

MG: [Laughing] Slightly illegal.

HJ: Then they would wind up at a saloon where they had a buffet set up for them for lunch and something to drink. All these Irishmen were out voting all day long, at Foley Brothers and Kelly.

[Another wholesaler] was Griggs-Cooper. Their brand is brought out by someone in Minneapolis. You know "Home Brand"?

MG: Yes.

HJ: Well, that was Griggs-Cooper. There was a Seabury, there was a Hubbard, there was an Allen Quinlan—they were on the corner of Sixth and Broadway. Foley Brothers, by the way, were on Fourth and Broadway, and right in back of them was Griggs-Cooper. They, later on, built out on Fairview and University, on the northeast corner. The Griggs Building?

MG: Sure, I know the Griggs Building. When you say "Broadway," are you talking about downtown St. Paul?

HJ: Downtown St. Paul in Lowertown. Do you know on Seventh Street where that big car wash is?

MG: Yes.

HJ: Well, going down the hill there, that's Broadway. That got all tangled up because of the freeway. Broadway used to go north quite a way, but the freeway took it all out.

There were many wholesale grocery houses that you bought your groceries from until this company, Fairway Foods, came along. [Fairway] had certain stores.
They had their wholesale house out on University Avenue, in the Midway area, in the Minnesota Transfer area, and they would only sell to certain stores. There was a Fairway store in each community. They only picked good stores, so their credit losses were non-existent, practically. They had a modern warehouse with conveyors and things, and their prices were a lot lower. They had no salesmen. You called in your order, and if they were busy, you'd say, "I'll call you back." So they had no salesmen, and it was a much cheaper way of doing business.

MG: When was this started?

HJ: Fairway would be, maybe, around 1920 or so.

MG: After World War I.

HJ: After 1920, even. This was operated like a co-op. A store had to buy stock in this company. This did not belong to someone else, like the Griggs family owned Griggs-Cooper. The stores earned dividends. At the end of the year, the profits were on the basis of what you bought from them.

MG: Interesting. There was a real incentive to do business with them.

HJ: Yes. This was a concept that really went well. Of course, today, with Cub, these warehouse stores, their profit is way down there. Out in the country towns, there might still be some Fairway stores.

MG: There are Fairway stores; I've seen them.

HJ: I've seen their truck. I think that today the Fairway stores' warehouse, which is now down in Northfield, is owned by Erickson Petroleum.

MG: That's an interesting shift.

HJ: Was there a particular person in the store who took care of all the wholesaling?

HJ: My youngest uncle had the crummy job of getting up early. This was in later years when there were a lot of vegetables and fruits, more so than way, way back when there weren't as many. He got the job of having to get up early in the morning in order to be at the St. Paul Market. The public market used to be located where the Embassy Suites hotel (now called the Sterling Suites) now stands. That was where all the grocery stores went to buy their vegetables during the summer. Across the street from the Embassy Suites site were various wholesale fruit companies that sold bananas, oranges, lemons, and what have you. There was a Tubbesing wholesaler; a Nelson.
There was a fellow by the name of Hjorth, and there was a Ciresi. And Dore-Redpath.

MG: These were all wholesalers.

HJ: They were wholesale fruit dealers.

MG: Oh, I see, yes. So he had the crummy job of getting up really early. [Chuckle]

HJ: Yes. But he was the youngest in the family.

MG: So he could bear it better.

HJ: My dad's job was to see that the shelves were stocked. That's one reason for going early when nobody was around. The third brother, Walfred, took care of the ordering and the accounting, putting the money in the bank.

During the Depression, in the thirties, my dad always took pride in that the store always discounted every single bill. They had enough money to pay within ten days and get a discount. The reason they could was that the third building they were in, 973 [Payne], my dad bought that building himself in '27. He remodeled the building and built the warehouse on the back.

[Sometime before this] Hank Anderson [had] wanted to sell the building. Mr. Griebler, a baker who bought out Jacobsen, went to the bank and wanted to get a loan to buy the building and the business. When my dad bought that building, later on, and he was going through the deed, [he discovered that] this banker (he was a fast operator, but he got caught up with later on) had bought that building from Mrs. Anderson, held the building two weeks, and then, sold it to Mr. Griebler for $2,000 profit. And this was when $2,000 was lots of money.

MG: Yes, I bet.

HJ: Now, [a sidelight to this is] Mr. Griebler, a baker, did not get a clause that Mr. Jacobsen would not go into business again. After a year, Mr. Jacobsen didn't know what to do with himself; he started up a Jacobsen bakery [a few doors down. Eventually Mr. Griebler was forced out of business.] In the supermarket today, you'll see packages of Jacobsen toast?

MG: Oh, it's the same company?

HJ: That company is over in Plymouth now, but that was the Jacobsen toast. [The Plymouth Company] bought the bakery on Payne Avenue years and years later, when the son of Mr. Jacobsen got to be an old man and wanted to get out
of business. They only bought it to get the toast business.

MG: Must have been a very successful toast.

HJ: The sad part of it is, they ruined the toast. The toast they were looking at, the original toast, was something!

MG: Was that a Swedish specialty?

HJ: Well, it was "scorpa." Yes, Swedish. "Scorpa" is Swedish for "toast" [or "rusk"]. (Mr. Jacobsen was Danish. His name is spelled with s-e-n because he was Danish.) That toast was terrific. Sugar and cinnamon were wrapped up [in it]. Oh, it was good! I could cry when I look at the junk that this other outfit [makes]. They got the name, and they distribute [using] it. We know people out in Seattle. Jacobsen's toast is on the supermarket shelves in Seattle. They sell it all over the country.

MG: Interesting. You know what, I bet, is gone? I bet that thick layer of cinnamon and sugar is gone. It's kind of just sprinkled on the top.

HJ: That's right.

MG: That's too bad.

HJ: During World War II, people bought that by the bags and packed it in boxes and sent it to the GI's over in Europe.

MG: Is that right? That's great!

HJ: Yes. They did. They had good pastry too. It was real good.

When Mr. Jacobsen started business, he took all the business away from Mr. Griebler, and Mr. Griebler went broke. So then when that building at 964 was standing empty, the Johnson brothers were renting. My Uncle Charlie had died in '21. My cousin's mother had died when they were little kids, and her sister moved into the home of my uncle. (This is a family affair I'm telling you now.) His mother's sister moved in, and she was the housekeeper. For some reason, she wanted nothing to do with the Johnson family. I think she was hounding my cousin, because when she was gone, things got all straightened out. But my cousin doubled the rent of the grocery store. I think it was because of her. He owned a half of this business, even, and yet, she switched. She wouldn't buy groceries where the boy owned half of the business. She bought her groceries from another store.
MG: Really. Her son owned half the business, and she still wouldn't...?

HJ: Her nephew. He owned half of the business. Right away as soon as my uncle died, she started buying her groceries from another store. So she was the one. When they doubled the rent, my dad bought that building, after Mr. Griebler had gone broke, in 1927. That's why they moved the store. So the first move out of 963 was because it was too small. Then the move out of 964 was because of the amount of the rent.

MG: Do you remember how much he paid for the last building?

HJ: At 973?

MG: Yes.

HJ: When my dad got through, yes. When my dad bought the building and he built the addition in the back, he had [paid] $13,000. That was in 1927, and the sad part, he had to pay it back during the Depression.

MG: Yes, that must have been hard.

HJ: But my mother was a very frugal, good manager, and he had a lot of help from home. That's what did it.

MG: Good. You were going to tell me about the business during the Depression. How did it do?

HJ: Before the Depression, you did have people who would run out of money during the winter, you know, and our public welfare wasn't that big. The Wilder Foundation had Wilder Charities, and this was a store that had the Wilder Charities. Also the regular welfare would call, and when those people were told, "You can have a ten-dollar order at East Side Grocery," they came in, and believe me, they had it all figured out, what to get that would get the most for ten bucks. It wasn't like today where they have food stamps, and you walk behind--I see it all the time--they have a cart with four cartons of cigarettes on top, and then they have food stamps. I don't understand it. [Chuckle]

When the Depression came, [the charities] wound up setting prices for the cheapest kind of stuff, which [the East Side Grocery] didn't carry. They carried medium, decent stuff, you know. And then the people [on welfare] were argumentative, so they forgot about that business during the Depression. They had their own customers.
MG: So what you're saying is that the welfare, Wilder customers, essentially, fell away. They fell away during the Depression.

HJ: Wilder Charities. Then Wilder Charities pulled out of it when the public welfare took over.

MG: I see, yes.

HJ: I remember that when I started at Macalester in '31, all kinds of gals took social work because there were jobs galore for the city. Then Wilder pulled away from that; they didn't have to. Wilder was a remarkable organization, you know. They had a Wilder bath by Seven Corners because people lived where they didn't have baths; so they would go there, and for a quarter they would get a bar of soap and a clean towel and go in the bathroom.

MG: That was a real public service.

HJ: They had all of these day nurseries. We had one on Edgerton. I knew a couple of kids. When they were little, their mother brought them there; their dad had died. Wilder was a remarkable outfit.

MG: Yes, they were.

HJ: Their office was down by the north end of where the Ordway (Music Theatre) is now, on Fifth.

MG: Right. There used to be a big building there, the Wilder Building.

HJ: Yes. A good-looking building.

They had all of that business before the Depression. But in the Depression, business also was good. That was in the thirties, and still, a lot of people didn't have cars, and groceries were delivered. Then, after the War, that's when 'cash-and-carry' started coming in, like Klein's and Applebaum's, some of them. Of course, I wasn't around the store much then because I was working. I was out of school. The life of Klein's and Applebaum's, that wasn't that many years, when you think of it. Now we have Rainbow and Cub, mostly.

MG: Which of the big supermarkets--as you say, the 'cash-and-carry' ones--came onto the East Side first?

HJ: Before the supermarkets came, we had several chain stores on Payne Avenue, like A and P was there. There was one out in Minneapolis, Consumers, that went broke because it was a promotion scheme. Some guy made a lot of money and ran away with it all.
MG: Never heard of it.

HJ: Then, National Tea, C. Thomas. None of them was very successful. You'll read in this article about the store, that there was a family who started trading in the East Side Grocery Store when it first opened up and they were a young couple; they were still customers fifty-seven years later, when the store went out of business. This is the way it was on Payne Avenue. You had your meat market, you had your grocery store, you had your hardware store. They were your friends; it was personal! That's how all stores were. I suppose, sometime, somebody might get mad, and they might switch stores for some reason, you know. But you always had the store you liked. There was more than [one to choose from]. For example, Jacobsen did the most business, but there were two other fair-sized bakeries on Payne Avenue. So everybody had their favorite store.

In this calendar, here, there are listings of stores that were on Payne Avenue in 1935. If you look at this, you will notice a lot of businesses still have Scandinavian names, even in '35. Of course, if you go back before that... I worked with a fellow who ran the payroll at 3M, Bernie Gerber. His dad made the mistake of starting a dry goods store on Payne Avenue: he was German. Up the street was Peterson Dry Goods Store. Well, Peterson was a Swede, and when the Swede lady came in, they talked Swedish. Why go where the guy doesn't know what you're talking about? They'd be more comfortable talking Swedish than English. Mr. Gerber didn't stay long. He went out on University Avenue and started a dry goods store. He moved his business out there where they talked English. That's the way it was.

MG: Did this Swedish contingent of customers stay with the store all the way up into the fifties?

HJ: Yes. They'd stay, and of course, when they died, maybe some of the kids were there.

MG: What has happened, do you think, to Swedish speaking? I don't see it as such a big item any more.

HJ: No. In Minneapolis, there is the American-Swedish Institute, you know. Have you ever seen that building?

MG: It's a beautiful building, yes.

HJ: Well, that building was built by [Swan J. Turnblad]. He had a weekly paper, Svenska Amerikanska Posten, which we got. That was general news printed in Swedish. It had national, international, and local, plus Swedish news. There were columns about things from Sweden, so every Swede liked to take it. He was born in Red Wing; he was
not born in Sweden, but he was very fluent in Swedish. He was just like a native Swede, because that's all they talked where he grew up. I only know of one couple that belongs to the Swedish Institute, but they go every weekend. Myself, when I started kindergarten, I couldn't talk English. In our block, where I lived, there were two families that were German; the rest of us were all Swedish, so us kids, we must have talked Swedish.

MG: You must have, yes.

HJ: Yes. I have a friend who grew up out in Kensington, Minnesota. That's where the Runestone was found. There it was even more Swedish than here in town, so he likes to talk a little Swedish. He always greets me in Swedish. We go to the same church, and we had breakfast with him this morning after church.

MG: That's fun.

HJ: But outside of that, that's the only Swedish he talks. [Chuckle] I never felt like I wanted to make a trip to Sweden. My dad never went back because, he said, "Things are so much better. I don't know what I'd do to make a living over in Sweden." He was so happy he got here.

MG: Right. Where were they from, Harold? What part of Sweden?

HJ: Well, give me the atlas; I'll show you.

MG: All right.

HJ: They were from a province on the west side of Sweden. See, here's Oslo, Norway, and here is the Norwegian border. They were born in the country. My dad was born between Saffle, which is in the province of Varmland, and Amal, this is Dalsland. He was born in between, here. This was the bigger town, so they did their trading here. But he was born right over the line, so he considered himself from Varmland.

MG: Tell about this. This is the picture of your mother?

HJ: This is my mother's home, where she was born, in Arvika in Varmland in Sweden. And that's my mother, standing, and my grandfather and my grandmother.

MG: You know what I love? It's the way they put the table outside and put this elaborate cloth on it.

HJ: Yes, well, that's to take the picture.
MG: And the little plant--isn't that lovely? It looks very rustic.

HJ: There were about six, seven kids brought up in that house.

MG: Isn't that hard to believe? It's really small. [Laughing]

HJ: Yes. One of the kids was the cook for the Hill family on Summit Avenue.

MG: Is that right? What a great story!

HJ: Yes.

MG: Both of your parents were born in Sweden, obviously; how old was your mother when she came?

HJ: My mother was born in 1884, and she was sixteen years old when she came in 1900.

MG: And your father?

HJ: My dad was born in 1877. He came in 1896, so he was nineteen.

My mother had an older sister here in town, so she moved to their house. Their skill would be to work in some house up on Crocus Hill. The newspapers would advertise if they wanted a Swedish girl or a Norwegian or a German, because, whatever the family, there might be four or five girls working in the house. They got $15 a month. One girl was sort of the lead, the forelady, and she had to know English and Swedish or Norwegian, whatever it might be, so she could talk to the lady of the house. Then all the others had to be all Swedes or all Norwegians or all Germans so they could all talk between themselves.

MG: Of course.

HJ: My mother spent most of her time with a family named Cathcart. There used to be a Cathcart and Maxfield real estate company that managed the Lowry Building. She worked for the Cathcart family.

MG: Is that a Swedish name? That doesn't sound Swedish.

HJ: No. They were not Swedish. But the girls were all Swedish.

MG: I see.

HJ: When I went through the Hill mansion, a couple of years ago, they had pictures of people who worked there,
and several of them were Swedish. Like the old gardener. He was Ole something (it was something very common in Swedish). My aunt worked in the kitchen; she was a cook. So they had to have people of the same nationality. But maybe in someplace as large as that, you could have one group of girls in the kitchen that had to be all Swedes, but someone upstairs doing the cleaning and stuff could be, maybe, German, because that was a big house.

MG: I'm assuming that the East Side was mostly Swedish and Italian.

HJ: Swedish and Norwegian. "Swede Hollow," down below Stroh's Brewery, was originally Swedish. In 1896, when my dad came, that was all Swedish. When the Swedes moved out of the hollow and came up this way, the Italians came. It had to be newcomers who didn't have much money. I think they were squatters, maybe, in those houses. If they did pay taxes, the taxes were low. They had no conveniences, like the biffy—that would be built out over the creek. It was primitive!

MG: [Chuckle] Yes, very.

HJ: You know, if you look at them from [the hill] up above, [you can see that] the houses down in that area, some of them, are pretty small.

MG: Describe to me your earliest memories of business on Payne Avenue—just some of the usual sights if you happened to be down there on a Saturday.

HJ: There were very few automobiles. I remember that as a kid when I went to Payne Avenue, we always had to stop and watch the blacksmith in the blacksmith shop. At the fire station, [the fire wagon] was pulled by horses. My dad, on Sunday, would go down to put on the night light in the store, and we'd walk over to the fire station at a certain time. The alarm would ring, and the horses would come running out, and they'd hitch them all up. That was part of the drill; they did that every day. Then he'd take me to the ice cream parlor and we'd have a soda. Everything was horses. The street was paved. There was a little guy with a barn broom and a cart with two little wheels, and he had to sweep up after the horses. Here and there, there would be a box about that long and that high with a cover on it [about the size of a trunk], and he would dump the stuff and shovel the stuff into that, and that would get picked up. There were lots of horses around.

I can remember a story [that happened] at Griggs-Cooper. They had horses, and they had a couple stubborn ones. (I didn't see this, but a friend of mine saw it.) The horses wouldn't move, and the guy got
desperate. He got some stuff and started a fire under the horses. The horses pulled up about ten feet, so the fire was under the wagon. [Both laughing] Then they wouldn't move, so then he had to put the fire out under the wagon. You would see things like that. It wasn't automobiles; the big thing was horses. There were two blacksmith shops; there was that much business.

I remember that the favorite window on the street was in a store that had hardware and furniture. They had a beautiful window, full of wagons, scooters, bicycles. We always stopped and drooled and looked at that.

MG: I bet. So people did ride bicycles.

HJ: There were two bicycle shops, down on lower Payne. You could buy secondhand bikes or new ones down there, and they repaired bicycles. There were two of them; they were practically right next door to each other. There were a lot of bicycles. I never had a bicycle. My dad would buy me all the skis I wanted. If I broke skis, I'd have a new pair right away, or skates. But I had a brother two years younger. He died when he was only two years old, in 1916. Two years later, in the flu epidemic, they had me written off one night that I wasn't going to pull through. So I think my parents were a little protective of me. My dad didn't want me to have a bike. Once in a while, he made remarks like, "These kids on bicycles. They kind of get in the way." So that was the one thing I couldn't have--a bike.

MG: How was the grocery store's character influenced by all of the Swedes? Did the store stock particular kinds of things that the Swedes liked?

HJ: Yes. At Christmas, they had barrels and barrels of lutefisk, which only the Swedes and Norwegians would eat. Second generation Swedes, a lot of us won't eat it. And they would have dry lutefisk, which is--I don't know if you've ever seen pictures in Norway. They build racks like this and then they're across. So the guys are up there and they cut the fish down in half and they hang them. Then they dry; they won't rot up there. They send it here dry, so it's soaked again here. They use lye, you know, in lutefisk.

MG: I know. Yes. It's hard to believe that the lye actually doesn't hurt you.

HJ: Someone who knew what they were doing would bring the lutefisk home a good week before. During the week before Christmas when we were going to have lutefisk on Christmas Eve, my mother changed the water frequently. Eleanor's mother, no doubt, did the same. But there were some people who didn't know any better. They'd come and
buy it Christmas Eve on the way home and eat the stuff with all the lye. And you know, an aluminum kettle gets black, just as black as it can be, if you boil lutefisk in it.

MG: It doesn't sound very healthy.

HJ: Salt herring came in huge, huge barrels. And there were lingonberries. [The berry] is smaller than a cranberry. Hardtack is a Swedish thing. RyKrisp and Company, originally, was a Minneapolis company. The man who started it was a Swede. He was a salesman. He made Payne Avenue; my dad knew him. He sold it out to Ralston-Purina years ago, and it was moved to St. Louis. That was called "knackebrod" in Swedish.

MG: I know "brod" means bread.

HJ: There are a lot of things in Swedish that are similar to German. You could see a connection.

MG: It's got to be bread; it's so close to English. These don't sound like sweets. Were there any particular [Swedish] cookies?

HJ: They liked to have many kinds of cookies. It's still a tradition among my wife's generation, from years back. They had cookies of every kind. These Spritz, you know, that was one. My mother used to make one with oatmeal, just the plain cookies. Then, before she served them, she had dates all ground up, and it would be a sandwich cookie. You couldn't put it on ahead of time because it would soak in and the cookie would be [soggy]. But it would be crisp, and that was one of my favorites.

MG: That sounds wonderful.

HJ: They'd have cookies of all descriptions. And, of course, they liked rye bread, Swedish rye bread. My wife used to make a lot of it. My mother made coffee bread; that was, of course, white. She would braid it, with sugar and cinnamon on it. Now, I'm not sure about some of these things. She might have picked them up working for Cathcart. That I can't tell. Coming out of that little, bitty place in Sweden, she couldn't have learned much about housekeeping.

MG: [Chuckle] I don't know.

HJ: She was very, very fussy; everything had it's place. They built their own home in 1914, where she stayed until she died in '71.

MG: That's a long life.
HJ: We lived next door. I cut the grass from the time I was old enough to push a lawn mower until she died. And I shoveled. Well, when there were big snow storms, we had a kid across the street shovel our snow. But she lived there that long.

MG: Your father died when?

HJ: In '49.

MG: Did he have a heart attack?

HJ: No. He started ailing back about four years before.

MG: He sort of gave out.

HJ: He just died. Yes. He worked hard. He was a very generous person. For my grandma, they always knocked off on the grocery bill. My dad was good to other people all the way around. He was a generous person. This building he had was two, three stories high. To show you what it was like, where is that picture? Here. Well, it doesn't show the top. There's a five room apartment up there. That goes up and a flat roof.

MG: Yes. This is the last store, at 973 Payne?

HJ: That's the last one. My aunt and her second husband had been living in the apartment there. After he died, my aunt married a guy who didn't want to live there, so she moved. A customer came in whose husband had been hurt in an accident. He was getting around $75 a month on workmen's compensation of some type. She didn't know what they were going to do because they had $35 a month rent, and they had one daughter. My dad said, "Let's go up and look at the top floor and see what you think of it. You can have it for what my sister paid, $10." He never raised it. This guy worked until the war, and then he went to work in the Cargill shipyard down along the Minnesota River. He had a miraculous recovery, but my mother and my dad never raised the rent.

MG: Very generous people.

HJ: The second floor, that was about $15 a month. My father felt sorry for people. He couldn't help himself. I remember one time, he had a woman there. She was there about two and a half years, and when she left, he had to spend all that money and more to put it back in condition. That's the way my dad was. So I suppose you'd say he was a poor businessman, in a way, but he was a guy with a heart. We have lived very good, my mother and I, so I won't accuse him of that.
MG: You won't complain.

HJ: He was a good guy. 
Now, he did not have a monopoly on that. You take other stores, they were the same way. I've had iritis, infection of the iris. I started having it in '48. Then in '55, they came along with cortisone. A little, stinkin' bottle like that cost $35. Well, there were times I couldn't pay my bill, but they carried you. And this was true of anybody. That's the way the world was on Payne Avenue.

MG: A community feeling?

HJ: Yes. Something non-existent today.

MG: I agree! It does not exist anymore. I'm very interested in this community feeling.

HJ: The community had many churches. The Salvation Army was Swedish. The original one was way down by Hamm's brewery [now Stroh's], where the [Stroh's] office is, on Edgerton and Payne; then they moved up on Payne. But now they've gotten high-class: now they're out by Maplewood Mall.

MG: [Laugh]

HJ: Then there was the church we go to, Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran. Gustavus Adolphus was in the Thirty Years' War, remember? where the Swedish army was down roaming around in Poland. Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran was a Swedish church. The Methodist church was Swedish, entirely. In the back of this book here, is the hundredth anniversary of this Methodist church. In here it will show you who the charter members were. There's a list somewhere. They're all Swedish people because the service was in Swedish.

MG: They certainly do look Swedish. My goodness.

HJ: East Immanuel Lutheran was a Norwegian church. Up on the bluff, there's St. John's Lutheran; it was German. That was up until the early thirties that they would, maybe, have a Swedish service in these churches. On Payne Avenue, there was a Woodmen hall, that was Modern Woodmen of America. There was an Odd Fellows.

MG: What is "Woodmen of America"? I've never heard of that.

HJ: Modern Woodmen of America is a fraternal organization where they had insurance. They had a hall where they had
all their doings, and the guys could go there at night and
play cards and socialize.

MG: What kind of cards did they play? Do you know any of
the games?

HJ: I have no idea. But I had an uncle that lived around
the corner and went there every night. These were people
who weren't real churchy. They didn't consider themselves
heathens. They didn't want to go to a saloon and hang
around every night. You had the Odd Fellows; you had the
Moose. Let's see, what else was there? Oh, there was a
Swedish organization that still exists, but I don't know
what their membership is. It has a Swedish name; I can't
recall it. The V.F.W. started after World War I. There
were a lot of organizations that were social.

MG: Right up and down the Avenue.

HJ: Then, of course, there were plenty of saloons. Like
my dad said... My parents met at the church we used to go
to. That was down on Edgerton and Minnehaha, and that
church would hold, maybe, twelve hundred people.

MG: That's a huge church.

HJ: It was a big church. It was packed to the rafters.
My dad said, "You had your choice if you were going to go
out looking for a girl on Sunday. You could go to a
saloon on Payne Avenue; they were open. Or you could go
to a church." And he said, "If you had an ounce of sense
in your head, you went to the church to find your wife." That's where my folks met, and that's where a lot of them
met.

MG: That was a Swedish church?

HJ: That church is on Arcade Street now, and it's called
the "First Covenant Church." At that time, it was called
(by the name of) the building. This church is about a
hundred and fifteen years old. All of its charter members
were Lutheran. They came out of the First Lutheran Church
up on Maria Avenue, near Seventh, but these people were a
little more missionary-minded. I don't know why they
wanted to leave the Lutheran church, but they did. The
official name of the church was the Swedish Evangelical
Lutheran Mission Church of St. Paul. That's what it was
called. But then, when they built this church building,
on the outside, it just said "The Tabernacle"; so the
church wound up with the name the "Swedish Tabernacle."
That's what people called it. When I was a little kid and
all the church league athletic teams played in the
downtown Y, we had a lot of good athletes in that church.
The church and the team were called S.E.L., "Swedish Evangelical Lutheran."

MG: I see. That did go back to the original name to some extent.

HJ: Then around 1930, the denomination became the Evangelical Covenant Church of America, and this became the First Covenant Church. There's a church over in Minneapolis, by the metrodome, right next door. That's First Covenant Church, and they have a parking lot there which must pay the church's budget, for crying out loud.

MG: [Chuckle] It's a perfect place for a parking lot. It really is.
    I have a question that goes back to the business. How did the business advertise? Did they? Maybe they didn't have to.

HJ: In later years, Fairway had an ad every Friday night in the paper. There was this little paper, and before this, there was the East Side Journal for this part of the town.

MG: This was a little neighborhood newspaper, the East St. Paul.

HJ: Yes. But all they would do was put in an ad with "East Side Grocery, Johnson Brothers Proprietors." When I was real small (it wasn't a Fairway store at that time) the ad said, "Staple and Fancy Groceries." I used to get a kick out of that.

MG: [Chuckle] That was kind of a logo for the company. So they would take an ad out in the East St. Paul Advertiser every week.

HJ: Somebody had to pay for this paper, so all the merchants would have ads. The bigger stores, like the Swenson Brothers Furniture, they would run their ads for furniture and stuff to get business from the community. But the other stores, they wouldn't bother much with advertising goods at prices. They just put their name in the paper. The goods with the prices, in later years with the Fairway stores, that ad was in the St. Paul paper Friday night.

MG: Now, this big pink sheet that you have...

HJ: That is, in the fall every year, they would have a canned goods sale.

MG: So this is Saturday, November 23 to Saturday, November 30.
HJ: They would have a bunch of these printed, and I and another kid would run from house to house and stick them in the door.

MG: "Special Fairway Canned Food Sale, 1929."

HJ: This was a canned food sale in the fall. Before that, a week before, we put this flyer in every house. Every Fairway store would have this. See, all they had to change was this little part, and they used them all over town. There was a Fairway store way out by Macalester, Bucka Brothers, and there was Grand Avenue Groceries. So these were all over town, but that came at the closest store.

MG: And the prices are all, of course, going to be the same because it's all Fairway produce.

HJ: That's right.

MG: That's interesting. What do you remember about doing that as a job? Did you get chased by dogs?

HJ: Oh, yes. I'd do it after school. I never cared much for that. That wasn't very interesting.

MG: No, it doesn't sound like a whole lot of fun.

HJ: But somebody had to do it.

MG: [Chuckle] Yes.

HJ: But as far as my work in the store now, when I was, maybe, a little shaver ten years old, I put potatoes in half-peck sacks and peck sacks. Then all the eggs were brought in from farmers out north here. We had a supply of egg cartons, and I'd put the eggs in egg cartons. That was my first job. Back in those days, there was a lot of business, so I was pretty busy.

MG: Yes, I bet.

HJ: Later on, of course, things changed in groceries. Idaho potatoes came in, and the local potatoes didn't sell much anymore. That was after I got out of the store. Then I would fill orders; and when one of these was made out, you had a spindle you put them on. When I was real small, I'd be an errand boy for one of the fellows. The shelving would go to the ceiling, you know. It wasn't like now, where you can reach it. It would go to the ceiling, and then you had a track with a movable ladder. Remember them?

MG: Oh, right. Yes.
HJ: He'd tell me to go get the big Kellogg's corn flakes or something, whatever it was. That way we would fill orders.

MG: You'd be up the ladder and down the ladder and up the ladder and down the ladder. [Chuckle]

HJ: Yes. My dad would leave word for me that when I came home from school, I should come down to the store, because Fairway delivered two times a week. He'd get up on the ladder; and then I'd hand him the stuff, and he'd put it in the way he wanted it. The label had to be out, you know. Then when I got older, I'd fill the orders myself. When I got old enough to drive, I drove the truck. I'd fill in, in the summer, for someone on vacation. I remember a few summers, I drove all summer.

MG: How did you meet your wife?

HJ: We went to the same church, but I never met her at any doings because I never got to go to them as much as she did. I was busy. But one time, there was going to be a picnic on Memorial Day, with all the churches in this denomination, out at Medicine Lake, on the other side of Minneapolis. There were about four of us out one night. We'd been down at the airport, I think. They were talking about [the picnic] the next day. I didn't intend to go. [Eleanor's brother was with us, and it was suggested that I go to the picnic with Eleanor.] Eleanor was already in bed, but her brother went up and said, "Do you want to go with Harold Johnson to the picnic? That was on Memorial Day. So that was the first time. That was about 1934.

MG: Not a great time, in times of hard money, to be starting a romance.

HJ: Well, nobody had an awful lot of money. At night, we kids would walk out to Phalen or something.

MG: Thank you, Mr. Johnson, for an interesting interview.