

**George Edlund**  
**Narrator**

**Jim Baccus**  
**Interviewer**

**August 1, 1987**  
**Heritage Education Commission Oral History Project**  
**George Edlund's Summer Home**  
**Lake Pelican, Minnesota**

**GE:** He had polio.

**JB:** He what...?

**GE:** He...he was five years old and ah...it left him, you know, crippled.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** But it wasn't...he could walk and I mean...and work, you know, always like he worked. But he died...oh, about ten years ago, I think it was now. Yeah. And ah...

[Recording interruption]

**JB:** The date is 1 August, 1987, and I am going to be interviewing George Edlund, a long term resident of Moorhead. He and I are gathered on his porch of his fine summer home on Lake Pelican. And we're going to be visiting about his years in Moorhead. First of all, George, I'd like to ask you something about your parents. Your father [Ole F. Edlund], I understand, came from Sweden.

**GE:** Okay, you want me to start?

**JB:** Yeah, yeah. Sure.

**GE:** Very good. Well, my father came from Sweden when he was nineteen years old and he had a sister in Graceville, Minnesota who sent him a ticket that cost fifty dollars. And it was...it covered the whole fare from Sweden to...now we've got a whole new...a [unclear].

**JB:** Graceville?

**GE:** No. Hmmm. He landed in Morris, Minnesota.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And his sister had this farm they proved up on. And they went to get him.

**JB:** What do you mean by proved up on? Is that...?

**GE:** Hmmm...hmmm...

**JB:** ...homesteading?

**GE:** Homesteading. So that's it...

**JB:** Okay. So they satisfied their...

**GE:** Yeah. Homesteading.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** And then they went to get my dad, and he stayed probably on the farm two, three months. And then he went to Moorhead, Minnesota, and he got a job with a tailor there by the name of [Claus W.] Freeman. And then...

**JB:** Okay. Let me interrupt here, George. What year would that have been that he came from Morris then to...?

**GE:** Oh, yeah, I have to get that in there. Ah, it was 1892.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** He came in 1892. And then he got this job with Freeman and he worked for him until 1895. And Freeman decided to go into the insurance business, so it left my dad alone in the business. And then the insurance business didn't work out too well, and Freeman came back and he wanted to get back with my dad in the business. And my dad says, "No, I'm doing pretty good by myself!"

**JB:** [Chuckles] Okay.

**GE:** So from then on, he was on his own. So he had been in America three years and he had his own business. Inside of three years.

**JB:** Yes sir. Had he been a tailor in Sweden?

**GE:** Oh, he learned the trade in Sweden.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** Oh, sure.

**JB:** Do you know how? Had he worked with a tailor there?

**GE:** Oh, yes. You see...

**JB:** [Unclear].

**GE:** Yeah. In the old country, I'm sure, most of the old timers, they know this, when they had about five or six grades in school they were confirmed and then they had to go out and learn a trade.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** That was...that was the procedure in those...in the old country.

**JB:** Okay. Yeah.

**GE:** So he learned the trade and when he came over here to America, of course, he was a tailor.

**JB:** Sure.

**GE:** And ah...

**JB:** Do you have any idea what part of Sweden? Have you...?

**GE:** Yes, Värmland.

**JB:** Värmland Okay.

**GE:** He was from Värmland, Sweden. And ah...then I would say my dad was probably the leading tailor in Moorhead, Minnesota for...well, our business was until...my brother and me, we joined in with my dad, and we were in business in all from 1895 to 1969. We'd say seventy-five years we were in the tailoring business in the two cities.

**JB:** Oh. That's impressive. Yes.

**GE:** Seventy-five years.

**JB:** Yes.

**GE:** Without any interruption or anything. No...you know...

**JB:** Right. Okay.

**GE:** And hmmm...and then...

**JB:** Now your mother came from where?

**GE:** She came from Sweden. So she came from southern Sweden, called Skåne .

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** That's what they talk there, a language there [Scanian dialect].

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** It's different than the rest of them a little bit.

**JB:** Yes.

**GE:** Anyways, that's what she came from. And she landed in Osage, Iowa. She had friends there, and she was a good cook and so on. And she did that kind of work until she married my dad.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** And I don't know other than to...to say than that, but that's...and she had a job in the United States for three dollars a week is what she made. And I have [unclear]. And she saved her money and she went back to Sweden and got her sister and her mother and her dad and she had crossed the Atlantic Ocean three times before she was twenty-one.

**JB:** Isn't that something!

**GE:** She's always told me that. I'll never forget it.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah. No, that is...

**GE:** Yeah.

**JB:** ...that is very special.

**GE:** But I can't remember those things...

**JB:** No.

**GE:** I suppose it was later than my dad. But I remember my dad's dates. Now is this all going in that?

**JB:** Yeah. Yeah.

**GE:** Okay.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** And then, hmmm...

**JB:** Let's stop here a minute.

[Recording interruption]

**JB:** So both of your parents, both your mother and your father had come from Sweden. When did they meet or where? How did they happen to get together?

**GE:** Hmmm...my mother was up in Moorhead visiting friends, and the [unclear] brothers were good friends of my dad, and they introduced my mother to my dad. And they started going together, and I don't know just how long, but they eventually were married. And they went...my dad went to Osage, Iowa. That's where my mother was living with her mother. And they were married down in Osage, Iowa.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And I think the date would be about 1905.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And then my dad, he came back to Moorhead, working at this trade, and he bought a real beautiful, nice home on 122 Tenth Street North in Moorhead. Was four big bedrooms, and a living room, and a den, and a big kitchen and a pantry, all from a carpenter had built it, for twenty five hundred dollars.

**JB:** Is that...? And then did that turn out to be your home then? Before you...?

**GE:** Yes. And that was the home that all of us were born in.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And when I was born in 1911, September the 6<sup>th</sup>...and the doctor who attended the birth of my brother and myself was Dr. Humphrey, which is an old timer in Moorhead. But I was born in the home. We did not go to the hospital. He just came to the home.

**JB:** Right. Okay.

**GE:** Now...

**JB:** And you had a twin brother.

**GE:** Yes.

**JB:** The twins were born 1911.

**GE:** Yes.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And ah...let's see. How can I go off of there? Well then, of course, we...I'll always remember the streets in front of our house; was nothing but mud and the cars would get stuck. And we used to follow the ice wagon when we were kids to get little chunks of ice to chew on.

**JB:** Okay. Hmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** And our feet would be all muddy and so on. But then they put in the streetcar tracks, and the streetcar used to go by our house up to the courthouse. And also made a turn to the right, to the east, and went all the way to Dilworth. And sometimes us kids wanted to get a ride. We would get on the cowcatcher and ride all the way to Dilworth when we were kids!

**JB:** [Chuckles]

**GE:** To play basketball.

**JB:** Oh, okay. What was your school? Do you remember the name of it or...?

**GE:** Yes. I went to the Lincoln School in Moorhead through the eighth grade. And then we went to...hmmm...after that I went to the old high school on Eighth Street, which they are...they are fixing up now.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** That's where I went to high school.

**JB:** That must have been a rather new building at that time.

**GE:** It was new, yes.

**JB:** Yeah. Okay.

**GE:** And ah...I could say this. I've played basketball with the Moorhead team who won the state championship two years in a row, 1928 and 1929. And they should have won it in 1930, but something happened where they didn't at the very end of it. And all the people down in

Minneapolis, when we went to the Curtis Hotel, they all said, “Well, Moorhead should have won that three years in a row but they didn’t.”

**JB:** Now who were your teammates on there then that you remember?

**GE:** Yeah.

**JB:** Was Carroll Malvey...?

**GE:** “Shorty” Malvey, Bush Pittler[sp?], Earl Moran, Pat Hilde, Hub Nelson[sp?], Johnny Walker...

**JB:** Okay, those are some famous names.

**GE:** Yeah.

**JB:** When you were going to school then, basketball...that would be an afterschool activity for you.

**GE:** Oh, yes. Yes.

**JB:** When you had a chance, there was a place...places outside where you could play basketball? Anybody have some backboards up in their yards?

**GE:** Yes, we had one behind the Cal Construction. He had a big backyard there, and we used to shoot baskets. And then we’d choose up sides and we used to play back there, oh, all the time. Pretty all winter.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** And we got so we, you know, could play pretty good.

**JB:** Sure. Well, you must have. State champs! Ah, when did you first start working in your father’s business?

**GE:** I started in my father’s business after the war. Because they were short of everything in those days and business was very good. You could hardly buy a suit in the readymade. And we were lucky, a fellow by the name of Ed Skarda[sp?] had a tailor shop in Fargo, and he died. And he had bolts of cloth, which you could hardly buy, I would say a hundred suits. And we went over there and we bought him out. And we just had a landslide business there for quite a few years.

**JB:** Sure. Okay.

**GE:** That’s what happened then. And then...

**JB:** Would you have started while you were in high school?

**GE:** Oh, no. No, no. I was...quite a bit later than that.

**JB:** When you started...

**GE:** My first...Frank was with...I...I started about a year after the war. I came out of the Army.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And I had been in the Army for two years, and I had a misfortune in the Army. I broke my leg running the obstacle course. And I was in the hospital at Staunton, Virginia for one year!

**JB:** Really.

**GE:** Before I got out. Then they released me and when I got out of there, out of the hospital, I was wearing a cane, and I had that for six or seven months after I got home.

**JB:** Hmm. And this for someone who was as athletic as you had been in basketball and so forth, right?

**GE:** Yeah.

**JB:** Well, when you came back a year after getting out of the Army, then you joined your father and your twin brother Frank. They were both in the business already.

**GE:** Yes. Yes. Oh, yes.

**JB:** Were there other employees or was it just the two of them?

**GE:** No, we had another employee when we [unclear] started by the name of Jimmy Johnson. And he was with us for a number of years before we discontinued the business. In 1969, the tailoring business was just phasing out, and the old timers were dying away, and the young people weren't buying tailor-made suits.

**JB:** When it was...? Okay. Where was your father's shop? Do you remember? Or did he have different locations in Moorhead?

**GE:** Oh, he had a number of different locations. The one he had the longest was behind the First National Bank of Moorhead. And then we had...we were in there about fifteen or twenty years and then we decided that...The bank was going to build a new building, so we decided to move to Fargo. And we were in the old *Fargo Forum* building for fifteen years about. And then from...that's when we discontinued the business.



**JB:** Okay. George, I'd like to ask this, now just if you could help me out. I don't understand much about the business. But say I was living in Moorhead. I came into your shop; I wanted a suit. How would you start that process for me?

**GE:** Well, ah...when a customer would come in the shop, the first thing we'd do is...he'd have to have a suit on so we could take the measurements. And then we'd show him our fashion book and he'd pick out the style he wants. And then we'd show him the material. We had bolts of cloth, and they would pick out from the bolts of cloth. And then if the man was kind of hard to fit, we always had fittings. We'd call the man up and the suit would be about one-third done. And we'd just baste it here and there, and then we'd fit the man with just one-third done, and then we'd continue on from there. And if we thought we didn't have anything right, or just right, we would call him back and have another fitting. But that was a little unusual. But there are some fellas that would be real hard to fit. And when they were buying a tailor-made suit they wanted it just so.

**JB:** Right.

**GE:** And ah...

**JB:** That process would take how long? What...?

**GE:** Yeah. It takes a tailor approximately a week to make a suit. That's a three-piece suit: a vest, and the pants, and the coat.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** So you could figure on...in those days we worked all day Saturday. You can figure on...to make a suit was about forty-eight hours.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** And the prices really were starting to go up after the war. The cloth went up. And it was even hard to get material, and especially linings, and we always used nothing but silk thread. No synthetic or anything like that. And all the woolens we used to buy were all imported from either Scotland or England.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm. And how would they arrive? Did you order a number of bolts at a time, so you'd have a number of cloths?

**GE:** Well, we always had a salesman who would come through from St. Paul. We had one from St. Paul and one from Chicago. And we usually would buy twenty-five or thirty bolts of cloth, so we would always have enough on hand so they could have a good selection.

**JB:** Sure. A bolt would be enough for how many suits? Or I don't...

**GE:** A bolt of cloth is usually...it is sixty inches wide and three and a half yards long.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** But it has to be sixty inches wide. And then we would shrink the cloth in muslin, and it usually would shrink about an inch a yard.

**JB:** Oh. And this was...? These were typically all wool?

**GE:** Oh, yes. They were all wool. We didn't...

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** We had to work with all wool because when you're making a suit a tailor has to do a lot of shaping with the iron. And if you had synthetics, you can't shape that at all.

**JB:** No. Right.

**GE:** See.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And that's the reason...well...

**JB:** Was the major competition for your business then ready-to-wear, stores that sold ready-to-wear suits? Or were there other tailors in...?

**GE:** Well, in Moorhead there was two other tailors. Freeman was the other one, and [Iver] I.O. Hanson was another one.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** But ah...my dad seemed to always have the bulk of the business because I think he was the best tailor of all of the three. [Chuckles]

**JB:** Yes. Okay.

**GE:** Yeah. And I'm not [unclear] there.

**JB:** No, no. Did you get as good as he was, did you think?

**GE:** No. No, I never did, because you have to start real young. And to tell you, what was really the best after the war years was a lot of...we had a lot of alterations. And really, a tailor...we always did some alterations for the stores, like the Hub Clothing[sp?]. And then I got to do some

from the Fargo people because there was a scarcity of tailors. And really, to tell you the truth about alterations, you could really make more than you could sitting making a suit.

**JB:** Wow. Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** There was more money in it.

**JB:** Yeah. It was a simpler kind of process, I suppose, too.

**GE:** Yes. And you didn't have to have all the skill either.

**JB:** Sure. Yeah. So ah...

**GE:** And that's what I did, a lot of that, because I was the junior one of the firm.

**JB:** Yes. Okay. Now at the biggest, how many employees? I don't know if I asked that. It would be you, your brother, your father...

**GE:** And Jimmy Johnson. And then in the fall we always had another coat maker. And he would be in the shop for probably three, four months in the busy season.

**JB:** Fall was the busy season.

**GE:** Yes. Always the fall, from after Labor Day until Christmas.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm. Now suits would be a primary kind of product, but your topcoats you would make or...

**GE:** Oh, yeah. We made anything like...topcoats and overcoats. And then suits we made the most of, but we made all...all three.

**JB:** Would there be times when you'd make up garments for let's say a wedding party or something like that? Was that ever done or...?

**GE:** Well, I can tell you this, in the olden days, that's before I was in the business, my dad used to make suits for Reverend Eckman[sp?]. And in those days they didn't wear the robes that they do now. They had...a cutaway.

**JB:** Oh, okay.

**GE:** A coat with...with tails.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** And they used to preach in that.

**JB:** Okay. So that would be a special kind of suit.

**GE:** Oh, yes. That would be the special.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** And most ministers in those days, they wore that. They didn't have these robes they have today.

**JB:** Yeah. Right. Interesting. Do you remember in the operation of the business, did you have to do things like advertising? Did you have ads in the *Forum* or the *Moorhead Daily News* or...?

**GE:** Well, I'll tell you. We advertised very, very little because we figured that of all the people who bought tailor-made clothes, they were probably only two or three percent.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** That bought a tailor-made suit.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** And they were...well, they had to be men with means because our suits were much higher prices...

**JB:** Sure.

**GE:** ...than...that you get off the rack.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm. Did you ever have business from outside of Fargo-Moorhead?

**GE:** Oh, yes. We had business from Bismarck and Minot and...

**JB:** Okay. So the firm was...was really very well known then. You remember anything that was unique about work during the Depression, the 1930s? Did the business drop off substantially then or...?

**GE:** During the 1930s it was really tough. You were lucky if you could sell a suit. It was just...not good at all. But we didn't have much competition and there was a few people who always...there's always a few people that got enough money to be able to buy a good suit.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**GE:** But it was...it was tough.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm. And that was true for different reasons during the war years then. You said that was tough doing business then...was hard to get materials, I guess.

**GE:** It was hard to get material, but there was plenty of business if we could get the material.

**JB:** Yeah. Earlier you had said a lot of your material came from Scotland or England or wherever. But was that still true during World War II, for example?

**GE:** Oh, yes. Yes, it was. It was true. That was the best goods. And they have been in the business for hundreds of years, and they knew how to weave cloth and stuff. Much better than anybody in the United States.

**JB:** Mmmm-hmmm. Now your father was in the business until when then? Did he...?

**GE:** He was in the business until 1950, he died.

**JB:** Okay. And he was active right up until his...?

**GE:** Just about.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** Within six months.

**JB:** Then you and your brother stayed on until 1969.

**GE:** Right.

**JB:** Okay. I want to ask about this now, in the part...in the way of doing business, did you feel it was important to make some associations? Did you belong to a service club or any organization in the community?

**GE:** Yes. My brother, he was a Rotarian. And I was an Elk.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And I've been in the Elk and I still am for forty-two years.

**JB:** Forty-two years.

**GE:** Yes.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And my brother was a Rotarian, I would say, for fifteen, twenty years.

**JB:** Right. And he was in the Moorhead club, I imagine.

**GE:** Yes.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** In the Moorhead club.

**JB:** Okay. Was there something like Chamber of Commerce that was important to belong to or a civic club? I don't...I don't know if there was...

**GE:** Well, we always belonged to Chamber of Commerce.

**JB:** Right.

**GE:** But outside of that, we...we didn't belong to anything else.

**JB:** Well, it sounded like you were putting in six full days a week in business.

**GE:** Yeah.

**JB:** Yeah.

[Recording interruption]

**JB:** George, I'd like to go back to talking about your mother and father who had come from Sweden. It's apparent that they brought some values with them that were important to you that you learned from them. Ah...how would you describe those values that they had? What...what was unique or special about what they'd learned in Sweden that...?

**GE:** Well, I can say this that when I was growing up with the Swedish parents, there's one thing that you learn, that you learn to behave and you learn to be frugal. And they used to tell me often that you should be in the old country so you would...you'd...you'd really learn what life is all about.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** Put it that way.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** That happened [unclear].

**JB:** Did...did they give you some examples of what life in the old country was like? That...

**GE:** Well, ah...

**JB:** Your dad tell about growing up? Or what...?

**GE:** Well, I can say this, too. My dad, he said this many times. He learned the trade in Sweden, and it took him three and a half or four years, and he never saw five cents.

**JB:** No money during all that time.

**GE:** No money. [Unclear.]

**JB:** He did it just for...for [unclear].

**GE:** There was the man there that he learned from and...and you didn't get anything.

**JB:** No.

**GE:** He said, "I never saw five cents." I remember that statement.

**JB:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. And those were hard...hard days, hard work, I'm sure.

**GE:** They were tough, yes.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** They were.

**JB:** Ah...so...to be frugal, to be...to make good use of resources. That would be a lesson that you had learned from them for sure.

**GE:** You bet. Yes.

**JB:** And of course that's...those are traits that would stand well in business here. Can you remember at any point, any...? Or let me back up. Are there some unique business...? Ah...what I'm trying to get at is, where your typical customer would have been a man coming in for a suit or a topcoat. You mentioned earlier the special project your father had for a clergyman. Were there other kinds of tailoring jobs? Uniforms or...?

**GE:** Ah, not too much in uniforms because they were more the cheaper...you know, they didn't really have them all handmade, and they were more the cheaper variety. But what my dad would do when it came to uniforms, I remember this now. He had a house where he could take all the measurements and send it in and they were just the same as a factory-made suit. But then the thing that my dad had over anybody else who sold those uniforms was when the suit came back, lots of them don't fit.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** Well, that's where a tailor comes in.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** And he could say, "Now I can fit this suit. But another man in the store who's selling it, all he has is...is a salesmanship. And if it doesn't fit, he's stuck."

**JB:** Okay. So he did handle for special cases some ready-wear then?

**GE:** Well, yes. In a way they were ready-wear.

**JB:** Yeah.

**GE:** You know, they were called a made-to-measure.

**JB:** Right. [Unclear].

**GE:** I'm sure you've heard of that.

**JB:** Sure. Yes. It was a term that...

**GE:** Yeah, made-to-measure.

**JB:** And this would be for what, for...?

**GE:** Well, hmmm, policemen and firemen.

**JB:** Oh, yes. Okay.

**GE:** I remember when he had a whole slew and he figured that was easy money because he didn't have to make the suit.

**JB:** No. That was...

**GE:** And he got a commission on each suit just like the store does when they sell, you know.

**JB:** Okay.

**GE:** They can stand there and say, "I sold three suits today," and it...it's wonderful. But he had to sit and make that suit.

**JB:** Yes.



**GE:** That's a different color! [Chuckles]

**JB:** Sure. Now you remember if this was Moorhead Fire Department or...?

**GE:** Yes. Moorhead and Moorhead Police Department.

**JB:** Okay, both.

**GE:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**JB:** And Edlund suits are...

**GE:** No...

**JB:** They had...ready-to-wear. Made-to-measure. Made-to-measure suits.

**GE:** And I can also say this that the Sheriff of Moorhead, Pete Malvey, and Bosco Brown, and O'Laughlin, and ah...who was the other one? Jim Garrity, the city attorney. And hmmm...we had all the upper class in Moorhead, let's say, that...that wanted nice clothes.

**JB:** Okay. Pride in the Edlund suit business.

**GE:** Yeah.

**JB:** And you mentioned going to a murder trial at the courthouse. Tell us about that.

**GE:** Well, when I went to this murder trial, I could see how fine the...how finely dressed Ben Rustis[sp?], and Jim Garrity, and Judge Wilson, and...let's see...

**JB:** So you had the judge and two attorneys.

**GE:** And two attorneys and ah...Ben Rustis was a good customer. He was a clerk in court.

**JB:** Right. Okay.

**GE:** For many, many years. You've heard of him, I'm sure.

**JB:** Yes. Sure.

[Recording interruption]

**GE:** Well, after being in Fargo for fifteen years or more, in 1966 and 1967, it was harder to get woolens and there were...had so many synthetic materials out that it was just about impossible for a tailor to continue on in this business. And also, the old clientele that we used to have, they

were dying out, and the young people weren't buying suits. And a tailor never did get the amount he should have compared to other labors like electricians and bricklayers and so on. So it was just a thing that we had...we had to phase it out.

And we went to Yuma, the wife and I, and we bought a lemon ranch in Yuma, Arizona. And we like the climate there very much. So we just phased out our tailor shop. We sold the machines to the dry cleaners. You couldn't even...you couldn't sell them to any tailors because there weren't any around. So that just ends the era of the tailoring business in Fargo and Moorhead, and also all the way to the West Coast.

[End of interview]