

Carl Haima
Narrator

Eleanor Hallin
Interviewer

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EH: My name is Eleanor Hallin and I have been in Moorhead since 1943. I taught school at Oslo before that, in Oslo, Minnesota, which is near Grand Forks. I was there for three years. Then I came to Dilworth, Minnesota and I taught in Dilworth for five years. And in the summer of 1943 I came to Moorhead. I was interested in getting part time summer employment, and I was asked to be...to work at Fairmont Creamery. It was Fairmont Creamery Company at that time. I was in the personnel department. And it became a permanent job, so I stayed on and stayed there. And it became Fairmont Foods later, and is...I was there until they closed. And Carl Haima was an employee at Fairmont Foods at the same time, so that's where I met him.

And I will ask Carl Haima now to tell us...he's here with me, and I will ask him to tell us a little about his childhood days. He was...lived and [was] born in Raymond, Minnesota, I believe. So Carl, I'd like you to tell us a little about your childhood days.

CH: Well, as Eleanor said, my name is Carl Haima and I was born in Raymond, Minnesota, Kandiyohi County. Raymond is about twelve miles west of Willmar. My father was born in Holland. He served in the Dutch Army. Following his service in the Dutch Army, he immigrated to America and settled in Wisconsin. My mother was born in Germany and came over as a small child. She barely remembered her trip across the ocean, which took weeks, I guess. But ah...they settled in Iowa, and then came from Iowa with the family in a covered wagon to settle in Chippewa County, Minnesota. They farmed there for many years, had a big family. And finally...ah...they kind of scattered around the country.

Then the father...then my grandfather quit farming and moved into Clara City. They...my father settled, I said...like I say, in Wisconsin. And he farmed for a while, and finally moved to Clara City, Minnesota, where he worked in a store. He worked in a general store for a man by the name of Bell. In those days, the country was not very well settled and Mr. Bell says, "Everything is going out and nothing is coming in," so he says, "I can't afford to keep a clerk." So my father said, "Well, what can you afford to pay?" He said, "I'll pay you three and a half a week," he says, "That's the best I can pay." So my father said, "Okay." So he settled in the store in Clara City until he met mother and they were married. And Father, he worked in the store and my mother, I think, worked in a café as a waitress.

And subsequently, Mr. Bell, who owned the store, decided to go to California. And somehow or other my father made a deal with him where he took over the store. Later, I think it must have been around...oh...before 1900, he moved to Clara City...oh, to Raymond, Minnesota, where he opened a store. This was a general store: groceries, dry goods, ladies hats and shoes, and ready-to-wear dresses and so on, and men's clothing, outdoor work clothes, and also dress clothes. He operated the store until 1936. He died in 1936.

But the boys, most of them worked at some time or other in the store while going to school. The store was a general store, like I say, and we bought eggs from the farmers and also the poultry. I remember we used to get poultry in crates and ship them to R.E. Cobb [Company] in St. Paul. The groceries, of course, were bought from the proceeds of the eggs and the poultry. Ah...as...my father passed away, and I had a brother by the name of John who was continuous...who worked continuously in the store, so naturally, he took over the store when Father left. Then...I went to school and worked in the store.

And later—this was about the time World War I broke...broke out—and I wanted, like most seventeen year old kids, I wanted to join the Army. But Father said, “No! Carl,” he says, “I’ve got two boys in the Army now and another one about to go in.” And he says, “That’s enough for one family.” So he wouldn’t sign the paper to let me join. But he did say, “Well, I’ll let you...hmmm...I’ll let you go to school, and go to a military school.” It was St. Thomas, St. Paul. So in 1918 I went to St. Thomas. I was there at St. Thomas for a year and came back home and I went to work in the bank, in the Farmer’s State Bank of Raymond. Oh, I worked there for maybe a year or two. And incidentally, I also went to school there at Raymond.

But ah...I guess maybe I...feet itched a little bit, and I wanted to get more education. So I went back to Minneapolis and I attended the University of Minnesota for a short time. I had not had a high school diploma, so I had to be an unclassified student. The following fall when I came back to school, I wanted to go some more for education. And I had a good friend whose father had died and he couldn’t go to school because he didn’t have any money. So this boy and I, his name was Chuck Burnham, decided to get some more education. So we went down to an employment office in Minneapolis and shipped out to Missoula, Montana. I think the fee was two dollars. That was the labor fee. That was 1921 when there was a railroad strike.

We arrived in Missoula about two or three o’clock in the morning. And when we got off the train a few boys were there to meet us. Said, “What are you boys doing here?” We said, “Well, we plan to go to work.” He said, “Let me tell you of a little...a deal that happened here the other night. A fellow went to work on a locomotive, and all of a sudden the hammer dropped on his head and he died.” You see, this was a strike and they didn’t like to have anybody else come in there and be a strikebreaker. Well, that ah...didn’t last very long.

But we did travel. Not always first class either. But we finally wound up in Spokane, Washington, one of the places, where we went to...Yakima. The Yakima Valley, that’s in apple country. And we picked apples for a living until we got enough money so we could travel again. And that went on for...ah...oh, from Seattle down to San Francisco and finally winding up in Tulare County, California. I had three aunts in Tulare County who had a restaurant. They called

it The Three Sisters Restaurant. And in Tulare County we got a job picking oranges, and olives, and so on, to make a few more dollars so we could do some more traveling. So that went on for pretty much the harvest season.

Finally, we wound up in Los Angeles before Christmas. There were no jobs available, because all the clerks and other help that the merchants had hired were already employed. So I don't know how we lived. But I know we didn't get fat on this deal.

EH: Hmm, and now you've told us a little about your young man travels. Maybe you should tell us a little bit about Fairmont Creamery Company—you went to work there—when, and how long, and what type of work, and so forth, at Fairmont Creamery Company.

CH: After the California trip—that lasted about a year—or that western trip, I came home. I got homesick, I guess. And came back to my hometown but there wasn't anything going on there. So I got a job in an elevator as a grain buyer, or at least the assistant grain buyer, and while there, a salesman was...called on the elevator where I worked. He sold honeydew pig meal. So he got me to go out and sell pig meal on the road, or rather to farmers.

And while on that job I was working up here around Moorhead and noticed the Fairmont Creamery. This was in 1929, I think. So the pig meal was a seasonal product, and the season was about all over because they use it for small pigs, and the spring pigs were already fed. And so I went up to Fairmont Creamery and asked for a job. The manager, territory manager said, "We don't have any jobs. But...if you would like to go out and buy cream, we've got a place for you to go to work." So the result was I went to Aneta, North Dakota and started a cream station.

So I didn't know anything about it, but I learned in a hurry, because I figured if I had all the cream in town I still wouldn't be very well-to-do. So I called up the office and Mr. Hugette[sp?], the territory manager, said, "Well, you find a man to operate the cream station, take your place, and you come into the plant." So that's what happened. I found a man who took my place, and I went into the plant, I think it was in the fall of 1929.

And I remember I had seventy dollars in my pocket that I put in the First Moorhead National Bank. And one day I came down to get some money out of the bank and the doors were locked, closed up. The bank went broke. So...but I stuck on this job until spring. Then my boss said, "We're going to send you out to Bismarck."

So I went out to Bismarck in 1930 where I was a field man and called on cream stations. I think I had about fifty or sixty cream stations to look after. So I was there during the dry years from 1930 to 1936. And I really liked Bismarck and that part of the country, although it was pretty dry and I'm a fisherman. But I could play golf because it was really good golfing weather, it was so dry. But I stayed there until 1936. Then I was called back into the plant and I worked there for a short time in the office. But they figured I was a much better road man than office man, so they put me back on the road, until... 1941. And then the war broke out. That was...1941, and December 7th, as I recall it. And of course I wanted to do something besides what I had been

doing for quite a few years. So I went down and I enlisted in the Navy Seabees, I was there from July 1942 until June 1945.

I went back to Fairmont because, of course, I had no other job or work. And I think I was there for about two months. Then I had a friend by the name of Jack Ballmer[sp?] who I knew very well out to Bismarck. So Jack says, "We're starting a store at Fourth Street in Moorhead." And he said, "We'd like to have you run it." So I didn't have much money, but I had a little equity in it anyway. But there was Martin Bearson, who was an automobile man in Fargo, and Jack Ballmer who was the Dodge dealer in Moorhead: they had the money. So we opened up the store.

Almost went broke before we got started, because I was eligible to buy war surplus because I had [been] a service man. But we didn't get anything; the war was still going on with Japan. But ah...everything went out, and nothing came in. So finally, I remember Mr. Bearson says, "My, Carl, this isn't much of a deal, is it?" I says, "No." He says, "Why don't you buy me out?" So I went to the bank. I had seventeen hundred dollars invested. And he wanted his money back, although it...their value really wasn't there because most of it was lost. But I made the loan from the First National Bank in Moorhead and I paid off Martin. So I had two thirds of it and Mr. Ballmer still had one third.

But then we got some breaks because we began to get merchandise. And I handled Philco line refrigerators, ranges, and I also had sewing machines, the new home sewing machines, and American Kitchens, and a number of other lines that were, I think, pretty good lines, mostly due to the efforts of Mr. Ballmer, because he was the man who had the credit. If I had to rely on my credit, I wouldn't have got anyplace. But at any rate, that went along for a couple years and I needed a new car, so I went to Mr. Ballmer and I picked out a new car. So he says, "Why don't you buy my share of the store out, too?" So I made arrangements with the bank and I bought out Mr. Ballmer. That went along.

We also handled gas, Skelgas. We had a man who delivered the Skelgas and installed heaters, that is water heaters, and space heaters and also regular heaters, that is, gas stoves. That went along for...oh, until 1955 or 1956, along in there. And I had a man, a man by the name of Harry Brady who was my service man. So Harry was interested in buying me out. So the result was I sold my store, the appliance store to Harry Brady.

Then I was out of business again, and I started a sewing machine store. I still had the new home sewing machines, and we also had the Necchi sewing machines. We had a store at 610 Center Avenue. Mrs. [Wilma] Blow ran my store for, oh, I don't remember how long, a couple years anyway. And she decided to go in business for herself over in Fargo with dry goods, piece goods, and sewing machines. So I thought I'd better sell out because sewing machines, and piece goods, dry goods is really not my line. So I sold my store to Charlie Steever[sp?]. Charlie ran it for, oh, a couple years, and he sold out to a fellow by the name of Kreps[sp?]. And then again I was out of business.

So I went to work for J.W. Nye. J.W. Nye was a real estate man. I worked for him for a couple years. I had to work in order to qualify for a broker's license. As I remember, it was two years. So Fred Baling[sp?] one time went to my place. Fred was very active in Republican politics and I'm a Republican. So he got me to go down to St. Paul. I worked for the Capitol. I worked for the Secretary of the Senate. And the reason for that was so I would learn a little bit about the business. And he had some other plans for me. But I didn't go through with those plans.

I came back and I started my own real estate business. I was pretty much alone, and the real estate business, it worked out okay. I didn't really do much selling or so on. But I did happen to pick up some property that I...I still have some of it today. And I think that was pretty much the end of that deal, because I was way behind on my walleye fishing and...golfing! And I had reached the age of retirement, seventy years old, so I caught up a little bit on some fishing and golfing.

And the property that I...where I fished was Strawberry Lake up in northern Becker County. I bought some property and sold some property there, too, but then I had enough to have a lot to build a cabin on. So that was one of the places where I devoted some of my time fishing. And winter fishing, and summer fishing, and so on. And also I built a cabin and I kind of cleaned up the place. It was pretty rough, because this was in nineteen...oh, let me see. Nineteen...up in the 1950s somewhere. And I still have that cabin. We've had a lot of good times. I mentioned J.W. Nye; he had put a motorhome up to my place. He had a condominium in Florida where he would go in the wintertime, and come up to Strawberry Lake in the summertime and live in his motorhome. And we had a lot of fun up there. I think you'd call it fun.

And then one occasion I remember wasn't really so much fun. I invited Jim Keller and Ted Skauge[sp?] and Gaylord Saetre who was an attorney at that time, now he's a judge. And we went partridge hunting late in the afternoon of the season. So Gaylord and I took one route up north of my place, and Jim and Ted went east. Oh, I told them what road to take, it was really a tote road, it wasn't a road, it was a kind of a logging road. So I says, "Well, you boys, when you walk up there a mile and a half, you'll see a slough. Now when you reach that, turn around and come back on the same road. You'll find just as many partridges going back as you did going out." [Chuckles]

They didn't find any partridges, and they didn't take my advice, they didn't stay on the road. They went off the road a little bit. And Gaylord and I came back. It's suppertime and dark, because they'd started late in the afternoon. So the boys didn't show up. But the result was that they didn't show up until the next *noon* when a farmer, a dairy farmer...they ran into a dairy farm. And this farmer took them and brought them back to the cabin. So it was a little bit scary although the weather wasn't cold. But nevertheless, spending the night in the woods and they were not woodsmen. Ted had been a boy scout, and so he thought he knew directions by the moss on the tree! So he looked at the moss on the trees, and instead of being on the north side like he thought, moss was all around. So...ah...that ended that job. But we had a lot of trips like that, hunting, and fishing, and so on.

EH: Ah, then I think you should tell us a little bit...hmmm...maybe we should go back a little to those stores. Was that Carl's Appliance, was that the name of the store, the first one? That was...?

CH: Yes.

EH: And the second one, that fabric store, what was the name of that?

CH: Carl's Sewing Center.

EH: Oh. Mmmm-hmmm. And then I think we should talk a little about...hmmm...your retirement. You...Well first, maybe we should talk about your civic associations, your business and civic associations. You belong to several things, I know, like the Lions, and you also had...did some fundraising drives. And you were vice president of the Chamber of Commerce, and you were also on the City Council. Now how long were you on the City Council?

CH: I was on the City Council two and a half terms. Norris Seaberg was an alderman in the first ward and he moved out of the ward. He had about a half a term left or a year. So when he left, I ran and was lucky—I guess you'd call it luck—enough to get elected. Then the two full terms after that I also ran and was elected. Then at the end of this last term it seemed to me my vote-age, percentage was going down a little, so I thought, well, I've served about as long as I should, I think. And I...I didn't run again. But I did...and I think I was unemployed, and Judge Gaylord Saetre called me one day and he says, "Carl, you don't do any work anyway, why don't you come up here and be a bailiff?" So I thought it was a good winter job, so I went to work in the fall and I was there all winter. Of course, there wasn't much going on in the summer, so I didn't do much work. But in the fall I think I got another call where I went back to work, back where I was a bailiff.

Subsequently, maybe after three or four years, [Donald G.] "Babe" Rusness, who was the clerk of court, passed away. And then I was given the job of deputy clerk. So I acted as deputy clerk for a long...oh my, I think I was there about twelve years altogether, until I felt that I'd been there long enough, let somebody else do it. I belonged to the Lions Club and I'm still a Lion. But I [am] what they call a pioneer member. I also was active in...oh, Chamber of Commerce and a few other deals. I had held a number of offices then like the Lions Club, I think, from the president down. The only job I didn't get, or the only office I didn't get was treasurer. It seemed I had...I belonged to a lot of...a number of organizations, and have held offices in many of them, but I never have been a treasurer. I thought I'd like to be, but then never was appointed or elected to that particular office. [Chuckles]

EH: But you did quite a bit of...about when it came to fundraising drives. You had an auction at one time, and I remember being there. Do you want to tell us anything about the auction? That was kind of interesting, I thought.

CH: Well, I always liked auctions. And I liked auctioneering because I had worked...when I worked in this bank I clerked a number of sales, and I liked these auctioneers and the way they

did business. So when I became a Lion, I think I asked for the job. I says, "I'd like to try these sales." And so I tried a number of them, like basket socials, and other events such as that. And I...that was the only auctioneering I ever did was in the Lions Club. But that was quite often and I enjoyed it.

EH: Hmmm, I guess that pretty much covers the courthouse work that you did. You are still sometimes called to be a bailiff once in a while, isn't that right?

CH: Oh, the last time I was called was two months ago. And now it's been changed. They have some new people up there, so I don't expect to go back to work in the courthouse anymore.

EH: But you worked there how long, about twelve years, is that right?

CH: I worked there twelve years, yep.

EH: Well, that's pretty good. Now and your lake cottage, you do have a nephew that likes to come to the lake cottage. You mind telling us a little bit about Wayne and about his family, his boys? What they will maybe be doing when they come to the lake? If they do fishing, or what do they do, and how old they are, and so forth?

CH: Yes, I have a nephew who lives in Glenwood, Minnesota. He has five boys. Three of them right now are in college, and one is a lieutenant in the Navy, and the other one works for the local store in Glenwood. These boys were brought up that way, I guess, they're hunters and fishermen. I know they come out to my cabin, oh, I think maybe six, seven times a year, during fishing and hunting season. They don't...don't do any ice fishing. But they're anglers, and they're pretty good, at least they tell me they catch fish. They also are hunters of duck, and geese, and so forth, partridge. Although I haven't seen much game, but they tell me about it anyway. But...and same way with fishing. I think they're typical fishermen. I think maybe...ah...I don't know how they measure them, but I know they sound like they're pretty good-sized fish. So they're typical fishermen.

EH: And that's Wayne Haima, is that right?

CH: That's Wayne, that's my nephew.

EH: And then he has five boys by the name of what? John...?

CH: There's John...

EH: In the Navy, hmmm?

CH: He's in the Navy. And there is David, he is in college. He was out for a while and went back into college now. And then there is Tommy, he just went to school, started college, St. Joe, this year. And there is Robert. Robert was a student for a year at...oh...that school in southern Minnesota.

EH: Ah, he was at...was he at St. Olaf?

CH: No.

EH: Oh, that wasn't the one that was at St. Olaf.

CH: Another one. Yep.

EH: [Clears throat]

CH: And the other boy...let me see.

EH: You've got John and David and Robert. And...

CH: And Tom.

EH: Tom and hmmm...there's one more.

CH: Yeah, I know there's another one.

EH: [Chuckles]

CH: I can't remember his name!

EH: [Laughs]

CH: He's a big fellow. He weighs two hundred and twenty pounds!

EH: That's Steve.

CH: Steve! That's the name. He was a football player in high school at Glenwood.

EH: That is a summary. I was thinking maybe we should ask a few more questions on...I wondered what price war...and you see, this was during the war that you had your stores. Did rationing have anything to do with your...any of your problems? Or was...that didn't bother you maybe, hmmm?

CH: [Sighs] The big problem, when I was in business, was not selling merchandise, but *getting* it! Because this followed the war and there was a scarcity of commodities. It was hard to get it. So...but selling, that was easy. The competition wasn't very keen in those days because there was more dollars than goods. So it was easy to sell, but to find the goods, to buy them, that was the problem.

EH: Yes, I can remember that during the war, I was at Fairmont Foods then (it's called Fairmont Foods now) and I remember this girlfriend of mine would call me on the phone and she'd say, "DeLendrecie's have stockings! [Chuckles] Can you get away so we can go over and buy stockings?"

CH: Yeah.

EH: And we would all rush over and there would be a long line waiting to buy hose. How do you feel about running a business in Moorhead? Do you think it's a pretty good place to run a business? Or how do you feel about that?

CH: Well...[Sighs] I probably would answer that by saying I wonder how the public would feel about it, in other words, your potential customers. I think it's a good community. I know it's a good community, and it's prosperous, and people are ambitious, and intelligent, and educated. And I think it's a good place. In fact, I hear of some people who went out to California and with all it's beautiful weather and so on, but come back to Moorhead. Not a lot, there has never been a stampede or anything like that, but...I like it here. I have been in California. and I think, ah, Florida, and many other states. But I seem to wind up back here in Moorhead because I like it here.

EH: Mmmm-hmmm. And you had nothing to do with unions though, I suppose, hmmm? You had no union...?

CH: No.

EH: Well, that was...that made it a little bit easier. And most of your business, was it collection, or was it cash, or how did you handle your...?

CH: Both.

EH: Both, hmmm.

CH: We did a credit business, especially in the Skelgas gas, because we had...we'd deliver a tank of gas and it would sit there, and then when they needed another tank, we would collect for the one that was there before he'd get another one. We had that policy.

EH: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: And other credits and so forth, we had what they call floor planning, how the big ticket items like refrigerators and ranges were bought mostly on a...with a down payment. And I would buy them from the distributor on what they called a floor plan. I would pay down some money, and the bank would finance the balance, and when that particular unit was sold, I'd pay the bank off and buy some more. And most of it were...was on a, you know, installment plan, that's the way it was sold.

EH: Mmmm-hmmm.

CH: The big ticket items. Piece goods and so on, that normally didn't run up into a lot of money, and most of it was cash.

EH: Ah, what about the bookkeeping? Who did your bookkeeping and inventory and so forth? Who were they?

CH: Well, I think that probably I was the janitor, and the buyer, and seller, and bookkeeper, and so on. And...ah...that was nights and weekends and so on. But that gradually built up a little because to start with there wasn't any bookkeeping to do! [Chuckles] A little janitor work to do because that was all there was to do. There wasn't any merchandise coming in to start with. And gradually, when it did come in, it was not a big load at a time, but it...gradually we got merchandise. And it was slow to start with and when you gradually work into it, that doesn't seem like it's so much work.

EH: Well, it sounds to me like your life was pretty interesting. It covered a lot of territory and a lot of different things. So I don't know if you have any more that you'd like to add. Do you have any more that you'd like to add about your dad's store? Or anything more that you'd like to tell us about?

CH: Oh, I don't know. I think I said the things that were the highlights. And the...the other were routine like storekeeping, and cream buying, and road work, and so on. That was pretty much the same day in and day out. And ah...I don't think I have any more to add.

EH: Mmmm-hmmm. Well, I think this maybe pretty well concludes our report then. I think you did a very fine job. You covered most of everything that would be interesting to other people, I think. So thank you so very much for your...the time spent with you. We appreciate your help.

[End of Interview]