

Jacob F. Kiefer
Narrator

John Jenkins
Interviewer

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Heritage Education Commission Oral History Project
Goslee Beach
Pelican Lake, Minnesota

JJ: This is an interview with Jacob F. Kiefer, Senior, or Jake, as he is commonly known. The interview was made at Goslee Beach, Pelican Lake, on July 16, 1986 by John Jenkins.

Because of his rich background in Moorhead, his [unclear] involvement in many areas, his keen memory of early events and people, and because he is no longer spending significant time in Moorhead, this interview will cover several aspects of Jake's life in Moorhead, including but not limited to: the American Legion, Rotary, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Ah, you grew up in Moorhead, Jake, and that was your original...that was where you...where you were born.

JK: That's right. I was born in Moorhead. [Coughs] October 26, 1897. The old Kiefer homestead [coughs] at Twenty-Sixth Street North. That place of...my father built the original home there in 1878. [Coughs] And my mother and my father moved in there Christmas Eve afternoon of 1878. And I still have the old kitchen table, that they had their first Christmas Eve supper on, down in my basement of my home at 429 Fifth Street South in Moorhead, which I still retain. And they lived there until they expired, both of them. And the house remained there; my sister lived there who was never married. She lived there until...about 1950...oh, the early 1950s sometime, and then she moved into the [unclear – sounds like Pells] Apartment. And then the...the homestead was destroyed in about 1954 to make room for the new Kiefer Chevrolet building, which Bud Kiefer and I built in nineteen...in the summer of 1954, moved into it in time for the announcement of the 1955 car in December of 1954.

JJ: Ah...you went to school in Moorhead also.

JK: That's right. The first of...I started out in the...in the...the old [unclear] school, there was [unclear] high school, I recall in those days, on Main Street South, for the first three grades. And then, well, they established a zoning system of some type. And due to the fact I lived on the north side of Center Avenue, [coughs] I was assigned to the Third Ward schools in Moorhead. It was the location of the...hmmm...present was now...or was until a few years ago, it was the

location of the Lincoln School. It was a very old brick building, facilities outside in a separate building. Not a very pleasant place the first few years. But they modernized it about the second year I was there, so at least we had indoor plumbing, and it was more of a comfortable place to stay.

The old janitor there was Old Man Jewell, an old gentleman, supposed to have been a very well educated man from back East, who looked after the school as a janitor, and also looked after many of the downtown buildings, including the old Kiefer Building, the Gletne Building, the Palace Clothing Building, and various buildings on Center Avenue. And he was very...a very fine, respected old gentleman. And everybody liked Mr. Jewell very much, and he died along in the 1930s or sometime.

And hmmm...so I went through school there. And before I attended schools, I met my friend Melvin E. Hearl after...through the American Legion Post that's named after [him]. And we were very close together. We would go to school each day, back and forth to school, with the various kids from what we called The Point [coughs] would join us. And we had a good time.

And hmmm...as time went on, we'd play...play football. And oh...one of our last two years we had a gentleman by the name of Mr. Ralph Booth Lloyd[sp?] who was our superintendent as it were, or principal rather, of the school. And he was a very, very fine gentleman, and would spend his time in the play yard with us, and helped us organize football teams. And during that time we had only one room assigned to us for basketball, about...a small room, maybe twenty-five by thirty or forty, where we had some pretty bad games played during the wintertime. It was the only place we had to play indoor sports.

Our main sports, of course, were skiing and the sliding down the ice hills, and which were quite dangerous. We lost...I lost two of my friends. One was a brother of Hank Peterson[sp?], Beg Peterson[sp?] was killed up on Bunker Hill. And another boy by the name of Zellar, he was killed on the old slaughterhouse hill, which was on...came down off of...oh, about Third Street in Moorhead. Came down past the slaughterhouse way across river up into Oak Grove. And he missed the turn one day, and that was the end of him one Saturday, because they were very fast. A lot of teams going up and down the hill, it was very icy.

And we did a lot of skiing in those days. We did a lot of camping. Well...before Boy Scouts came to Moorhead, we had a club that we organized called the [unclear] Club. There was Harry Clayton, his cousin Halvor Rasmussen, hmmm...hmmm...Bud [unclear], his brother Donald (Babe as we knew him), he was our mascot. And Billy Diemert and Tad [unclear]. Greg Behr[sp?], who later was an osteopath in Fargo. And we spent our Sundays...we had...we sent [unclear] in New York. How we got the name, I suppose, I don't know, a boy's magazine, where they carried surplus materials. And we got the necessary materials for camping: knapsacks, kits, and various items to carry on our camping activities. And we would...our main place...a place of camping and our activities was right below the Riverside Cemetery down in the grove there. Beautiful place. We spent most of our wintertime down there or springtime. [Unclear] come down through there. And we had a very fine time.

In about nineteen...I would hate to say, but about 1909 or 1910, I would say, we all met one evening up at the office of Gar [Garfield] Rustad, and formed the first Boy Scout Club in Moorhead.

JJ: Mmmm.

JK: And Gar was very...a very pleasant man, very nice to the kids. We got along fine.

JJ: Rustad?

JK: And scouting went on from there quite a bit, a long ways, in Moorhead. And we had a very fine time; we had some good scout groups lined up. But the thing I always remember most was [unclear] Club because that was very close to my heart and we had a great time.

JJ: [Unclear]?

JK: And then at school...we'd come by what's now the American Legion Post, it was the old Holes...Holes estate, Andrew Holes' estate. Beautiful place. It must have been...well, it's a park area now, must be at least eighteen or twenty acres in there. And old Andrew Holes, he was a very personal friend of Jim Hills[sp?]. And a bit of Jim [unclear – Hills or Holes?], a surveyor, he was also, I think, a so-called attorney as...as such those days. And...acquired a lot of land those days from the Holes family or the...whatever. And a very nice old man, I remember him. But he died...not a young man, he was an old man. But Mrs....Mrs....old Conie Holes lived there then for many years. And the old Hills...or the old Holes home, and there are some pictures around Moorhead of the old Holes home. I'm sure the Historical Society must have them, because I've seen them recently. They had a cyclone center, I remember it very well. I remember going down their basement. [Coughs] Great girl, an eastern girl, very small person, and hmmm...always made fruitcakes. And they would exchange fruitcakes, my mother and Mrs. Holes. And she was great and very fond of...of my sister, Katy Kiefer[sp?]. And oh...

One...about where the old Fairmont Creamery has to be, or just back of the Fairmont Creamery, just east...used to be a great, huge gully come through there from the east. And...we'd call it a ravine, and maybe it was fifty feet across the top and about thirty feet deep, where it entertained us in the wintertime, through some sliding down the side of the hill there, a little skating down a little stream that came through there.

Springtime, of course, was marble time. And some great marble games down there. And my friend Babe Hearl, I knew him, Melvin E. Hearl, I think if had there been competitive marble shooting in those days nationally, I'm sure he'd have been one of the top leaders. Those days there were various types of marbles. You had the commie, which was made out of a clay. The next was the grabbies made out of glass. And then you got into the shooters, more or less, where you had the...the flints, and then the steelies, which were the steels. And then the...the hmmm...the flints were very interesting, because if you examined very close, you'd find them that sometimes have a little moon on them, like a quarter moon, like a new moon. Sometimes it'd have two or three of them. And everything that happened on one of these marbles...they all had

their value. If they were playing for marbles, for instance, if a man would put in a small flint, why, if somebody else wanted to get in the game, he'd maybe have to put in fifteen commies or maybe twenty commies. And another man would have to put in maybe ten of these grabbie in there, in order to get in the game.

JJ: Hmmm.

JK: And so the games would be quite interesting. And some of these boys could stand back like maybe ten feet, they'd plonk, and sometimes they would lose their marbles. And they would finally put their shooters in there, and then that was...got to be rather interesting games. I remember Babe in those days with [unclear] boxes. [Coughs] About twenty inches long, fourteen inches wide, and maybe fourteen inches high. And ah...I remember Babe had, I think, at least five, six boxes, all sorted out of various types of marbles that he had won doing so. He had quite a collection of marbles.

But that's the way we entertained ourselves. We played tough football, used to play the boys from over...we called shantytown. Shanty [unclear], I remember it was...one of the main leaders over there, a good friend of mine, nice...pretty nice boy. And they'd come over Saturday afternoons, and we'd have some pretty wicked football games, and hockey games. So that's where we spent our time at the Lincoln School time. Or not Lincoln School at that time, Third North School. Yeah. We had...Arne Melby was there, the old Melby family. And I can't remember all the rest of them. Some boys from Sabin used to come in, quite a few farm people.

We also, during our grade school there, we'd have a lot of newcomers. Boys and girls of...age of...oh, sixteen to twenty-two, twenty-three years old. Really have full classrooms, but they would accommodate these people, so they could learn to speak English. And they would set up ordinary kitchen chairs as they were along the aisles. We'd maybe have eight, ten, twelve of them in our classroom. And I remember them later on in life, when you'd see these people. One or two of them had a big place, I remember in the 1930s and 1940s, hmmm, the old Gletne Building in Moorhead had a pool hall and what have you. I forget his name, but he was a very nice man. He had been one of the newcomers, sat alongside of me for a couple winters there.

But hmmm...and the kids were average, not too much fighting, it wasn't supposed to be in those days. They all got along in pretty good shape. And we had a pretty good life. I was never a very good student. I liked to monkey around [unclear] I put...I always had a good time, got along pretty well with my teachers. Yeah. Had some very lovely teachers. I had Lucy Sheffield. They had a ruling in Moorhead that the girls after they finished State Teacher's...I think you only had to go two years in those days to get a teaching certificate. Gee, I remember very well, Lucy lived...was a neighbor to us there, so I knew Lucy all my lifetime...and also went to our church. And ah...well, she went to Alexandria and taught for one or two years. I think you had to go two years outside, and then they'd come back and make application for Moorhead. And Lucy was accepted, so then she came back to Moorhead, and she was assigned to the Third Ward School. I think I was in about fourth or fifth grade when Lucy showed up there. I remember very well because the great penmanship...what'd they call it? Palmer method?

JJ: Palmer method, right. Yeah.

JK: Palmer method, right, about that time.

JJ: Right.

JK: And...so we were taught the push and pull method, and this and that. Never helped my method...my writing a damn bit, but nevertheless, that's what we were taught to do.

JJ: [Chuckles]

JK: And our instruction was about average, I suppose, in those days and age. When we got up to seventh and eighth grade, then we'd have to go up to the [unclear] school or [unclear] high school to take manual training every Thursday or Friday afternoons. And ladies manual training instructor, Mrs. King, she was quite a girl. She used to...good instructor though and taught us how to...used to make [unclear] footstools and lamps and what have you to take home to the proud parents. So that's about the end of that, I think. Is that about all that should be discussed? Anything you can think of that you'd like to talk about?

JJ: Well, that's very good. Ah, now, why don't you go on to the...to your high school. You...you graduated from high school in...?

JK: 1916.

JJ: 1916. I understand you're about to celebrate your seventieth...

JK: Seventieth.

JJ: ...anniversary for...

JK: Well, we're celebrating it now, but there's nothing happening.

JJ: Nothing happening.

JK: Nobody around! [Chuckles]

JJ: Nobody around. Well, I understand there are some of the...there's still...

JK: Well, that's true. There's Lucille Smith around and Grace Louden.

JJ: Mmmm-hmmm.

JK: She's in the nursing home. And ah, one boy up at Duluth, Ragnar Eckman, his father was a pastor at the Bethesda Lutheran...Swedish church. And ah...did I mention Anna Gletne?

JJ: No.

JK: From the old Gletne family. She's in Detroit, Michigan.

JJ: Mmmm-hmmm.

JK: And that's about all I know of...who is remaining.

JJ: But that's...that's not bad. Was it a large class?

JK: What?

JJ: How large a class was it?

JK: I think it was thirty-five.

JJ: Thirty-five. Well, that's...for that time, that's a pretty good size class.

JK: Yeah. It was a lot. So there's six, seven left.

JJ: Six, seven left. That's not bad at all.

JK: Not bad, no.

JJ: Not bad.

JK: No. So high school was...do you want to continue that?

JJ: Well, go ahead.

JK: Well, high school I started in 1912. And hmmm...two things happened around Moorhead. I think the big thing, I'm...I'm quite sure it happened in 1912, and that's the year they completed the Comstock Hotel. And there was a family by the name of Billy Hunt. I think he'd been sheriff of Fargo at one time. And Mrs. Hunt, his wife, was quite a person. Later on sold Guardian Life Insurance in Fargo. One girl was a Smith girl, a graduate from...from those, our English instructor in...I believe in junior...junior high school. I mean junior...remember I was a junior in my high school, she taught us English. Then she went back east to teach somewhere.

And we had a very interesting principal for four years. Her name was Kezzie Porter. She was from...Nebraska girl, older girl, and a math teacher, and very fine person. Everybody got along fine with her. She was very strict, but got along good with everybody, and no particular problems with [unclear] or discipline. When Miss Kezzie spoke, why, that was it.

And...we had a good time in high school, excellent time. Hmmm...we had a good bunch of kids in our grade. We had...hmmm...the boys, particularly, so it was Bill [unclear] who later

was...taught in the Fargo schools for many years. And hmmm...Bill [unclear] later was a doctor in Arlington, New Jersey, had a clinic there; was a very successful man. He used to come right along to visit when he was practicing. And ah...Andy Kowalski[sp?], a great boy, who lived over near the waterworks. And...Henry Wright, one of the Wright boys, and there was a Bergquist boy, and the Sandie[sp?] boy, and Seibert[sp?] was a good friend of mine, never heard of him after...after...graduation time. Roy Amils[sp?] was a nephew, I believe, of Doc Humphrey. He came here about the...junior year, I think. I don't think he was there the full time. Anyway, he graduated with us. Roy was a pretty good guy, a very fine looking boy. And....

[End of interview]