

Audre M. Rusness
Narrator

Agnes Hornbacher
Interviewer

March 15, 1985
Heritage Education Commission Oral History Project
Moorhead State University Recording Studio
Moorhead, Minnesota

AH: This interview is with Audre Hougum Rusness, from 310 Fourth Street South, Moorhead. Mrs. Rusness has been asked to tell what she remembers and what she has gathered from other sources about the Hougum Furniture Company of Moorhead. Her father was involved in this company, which started about 1910. Hmmm, this interview is being held at Moorhead State University Recording Studio on March 15, 1985. The interviewer is Agnes, Mrs. Ted Hornbacher, 105 Third Street North, Moorhead, representing the business committee of the Oral History Project of the Heritage Education Commission.

How was the Hougum Furniture organized, Audre?

AR: Three brothers, Andrew, Henry, and Joseph Hougum, organized Hougum's Furniture. These three brothers of Scandinavian descent grew up in the Lake Park, Minnesota area, eventually locating in Moorhead. Joining them in the venture as stockholders included G.D. McCubrey and Arthur Fevig, both of Moorhead. Later, Sam Field, who owned the Palace Clothing on Front Street (now called Center Avenue) became a stockholder. The Palace Clothing ([now] owned by [Richard] "Bud" Johnson and located in the Moorhead Mall) was the clothing store owned and operated by Sam Field, and at one time was known as Stern and Field.

AH: Did the brothers work in this business?

AR: The youngest brother, Joseph, was bookkeeper and salesman, and acted in that capacity until July 4, 1923, when he died of a heart attack as he was driving to Detroit Lakes for the holiday. Henry was manager for a short time, but turned to traveling salesman from Miller Davis Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota. However, he did remain as a stockholder in the [unclear]. My father, Andrew, never worked there, as he was Clay County Auditor, and continued in that position until his passing away in 1931.

AH: About when was this business organized?

AR: It must have been about 1910, as the caption under the picture of the store appearing in the old *Monitor* publication indicated about the 1920s. On this picture, the aerial wires of the old

trolley cars are visible, and one can also see the tracks where they made their turn coming from Front Street, Center Avenue, and going north on Fourth Street. This makes me recall that the next turn the trolley or streetcar made was on Second Avenue North, and continuing west over the old North Bridge connecting Moorhead and Fargo.

AH: [Unclear] continued...

AR: The famous Martinson Jewelry Store was located directly south of Houglum's. And when summer celebrations such as the Fourth of July were scheduled, they would close off this paved street area, as it was a dead end street, and thus provided a perfect location for a street dance and the finale for their celebration. Of course, this dead end street was no more when Fargo-Moorhead finally agreed on the construction of the long needed Center Avenue Bridge, which now, in the summer of 1985, is scheduled for needed repair.

Also, along with the mention of celebrations or festivities, sometimes at harvest time, and prior to Thanksgiving, a type of festival was held, and as part of the prizes, live turkeys were released from the roof of Houglum's to the crowds gathered on the street below. This was considered quite a prize. As a child, I also remember we were allowed to view parades from the second floor of the building, thus, we had a perfect view as they paraded down Front Street. And of course, as curious children, we had the same privilege of viewing the opening of the street dance from the same location. However, it was difficult to leave this event when my parents would inform us that it was curfew time.

AH: Was furniture the only stock handled?

AR: No, the inventory included complete dining room sets, upholstered sets, desks, occasional tables, and solid woods, and other appointments. This was before the popularity of broadloom carpeting. However, Houglum's did carry rugs. The most popular size was nine by twelve with matching smaller sizes. I recall matching rugs in our home called American Oriental. They were lovely, and in later years, one wondered why one disposed of them? The answer, of course, is the availability of broadloom carpeting.

A very popular department in the store was the record department. The phonograph called Victrola was sold at Houglum's. Their commercial became famous as it was one of...that had the white dog with the black ears sitting and listening by the phonograph, the Victrola, and the caption under the dog's emblem on the statuette was, "His Master's Voice." We still have our old mahogany Victrola, with its gold key-like trim, and along with the Victor Seal and other records, this machine still stands in our attic. Some of the old known voices recorded on this are those of Enrico Caruso, John McCormick, and Gala [Unclear]. These stars most always recorded on the Red Seal record, which was the most expensive record. How wonderful that music was to the ears of my parents and we children, and how lucky we felt we were to own that machine. I recall, in addition to the wonderful music, I had favorite children's records. An example would be *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Cinderella*.

AH: Did the inventory change a great deal from year to year?

AR: I don't believe too much. Of course later, the invention and the availability of the radio made a great change. Houglum's carried as one of their radios the Coaster radio along with others. Hmmm, and ours happened to be a Coaster contained in a lovely walnut cabinet, consisting with doors which would be closed when not in operation, making it also an attractive piece of furniture. A far cry from the appearance of some of those you see today. What a great change occurred in the record department with the introduction of radio. Phonographs were forgotten until the introduction of the hi-fi, and stereo, then discs—45s, 33s, and the 78 records, disc jockeys, and all our present equipment.

AH: Do you recall any other type of inventory in addition to what you have mentioned?

AR: Oh, other items would be window shades or blinds. And in that era it seemed that they were considered a must, due to not having the convenience of traverse rods for the glass curtains and drapes. And there were lamps, mirrors, pictures, picture framing, mattresses, and pillows, linoleum, and stoves, also a department for porch furniture, consisting of wicker sets, which again have gained in popularity. Oh yes, baby carriages. These were practically a must in those days. When my brother was born in 1918, the first boy after four girls, a new buggy was purchased. It was made by Lloyd Company of fine wicker in navy blue and very deluxe.

AH: In those early days, how was Houglum's stocked and the business handled?

AR: Well, the trucking, of course, was not the thing at this time. The furniture was crated and arrived by freight. There were many types of ways of crating. A very special type crate was that of Victrola's. Ah, theirs...these were exceptional. They appeared more like a huge wooden chest. In fact, two of these old crates are in the attic, and are still used for storage. I recall a name of Levine Brothers, which was a wholesaler house in Minneapolis, and much of Houglum's stock was ordered from there and was lovely furniture. Sometimes customers would travel to Minneapolis and special order their furniture through the name of Houglum's. An example of special orders was additional furnishings for the new home my father had had built in 1914. The dining room buffet of solid oak with hardware of antique copper was custom made to fit under a set of three glass...cut glass windows.

AH: Are any of these pieces still in existence?

AR: Yes. The buffet and matching dining room table is stored in my brother's home. It is not used as part of their furnishings. My brother recently checked the old buffet for me, and attached to the back was the following ticket: "Houglum Furniture Company, Incorporated, Moorhead, Minnesota. From the Luce Furniture Company, manufacturers of bedroom and dining room furniture, Grand Rapids, Michigan."

And then the...our...the davenport is still being used, and was made to fit under the set of windows in the living room, which are identical to those of the windows in the dining room. This davenport was unique at the time, as it had pillow arms, and under the construction of the arms was a drawer. At one end, the drawer was a humidior, and the other end had a sliding-type tray to

divide it for the use of pencils, and playing cards, and such. This davenport I had restyled by the original Ingberg's Reupholstery Shop years ago, and then had it reupholstered again since that first time. It's original upholstery was the old type mohair, which was so popular at one time. Due to the fact [that] I still maintain the old Hougum home, this davenport still attires that same spot under that same set of three windows.

AH: Do you recall any of the business aspects of the firm?

AR: No. As to the business part, I cannot relate anything regarding that part of its operation. I know they offered credit, and also would special order items. They advertised in the old *Moorhead Daily News*, and another type of advertising was the giving of yardsticks with the following quotations. On one side, "Quality merchandise. You'll do best at Hougum's. Fair Prices." On the other side, "Hougum's Furniture, Moorhead, Minnesota. Your credit is good."

AH: How much competition was there?

AR: Well, as to competition, there was always Fargo, North Dakota business, and at that time Hougum's was organized, there was Levitz, Luger's, and Bergstrom and Crowe. Then, in later years, Leo Johnson opened his store in Moorhead.

AH: Do you recall any of the former employees?

AR: Some of the former managers were Carl A. Peterson. He eventually accepted a position in Minneapolis. Leo Johnson, father of Curtis, and the owner of Leo Johnson's, was a former manager, and left Hougum's to start his own furniture store. Other former managers were Jake Janson[sp?], whose wife still resides...lives in Moorhead, and also Elmer Nelson, who resides in Moorhead.

The late Myrtle Dargen[sp?], who later became the wife of William "Bill" [Unclear - Curran or Kern?], was in charge of the record department. Her husband later was Clay County Sheriff. Also, there was an employee and an assistant for any repairs, picture framing, installation of linoleum, and it also included the delivery service. Clarence Olson, an employee, eventually purchased the business, changing the name to Hougum and Olson's Furniture. Mr. Janson and Mr. Nelson in the meantime had been employed by Leo Johnson. Clarence continued the operation of Hougum's and Olson's until the store...hmmm...the two-story building and all its stock was completely demolished by fire November 19, 1940.

AH: Did anything replace the loss of this building?

AR: The late B.T. Bottolfson, husband of Jeanette, had a two-story building constructed on this site. A portion of the second floor was occupied by Dr. Bottolfson, where he continued his practice of medicine. The additional space, I believe, was occupied by a dentist, and the main floor was S & H Drugstore. Hmmm. [Coughs] However, with Moorhead's [urban] renewal project, all the buildings on Fourth Street from NP Railway Track continuing north were all

demolished. This area was replaced by parking, new streets, landscaping, and the final approach to First Avenue North, and our new, long awaited North Bridge.

Then as to my father, Agnes, he was Andrew Houglum. He married Sophia Ebeltoft, also of Lake Park. They were parents of five children: [Lois] Celeste, deceased in 1910; Muriel, Mrs. Ralph Hollands; Virginia; Audre, Mrs. Donald "Babe" Rusness; Andre, the only son; and Jacqueline, Mrs. Ward Thorne. All five continue to reside in Moorhead. And I still maintain the family residence at 310 South Fourth [Street], which was constructed in 1913-14.

AR: That's very interesting, Audre, that all your family is still here, and that you have lived in the family home. I don't think there are too many in Moorhead that we can account for like that. Thank you, Audre.

AH: It's been fun. Thank you, Agnes.

[End of interview]