

Frederick Stickney Northam (1904-1979)

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The pages that follow constitute the transcript of an interview conducted as part of the Wilmette Public Library District's Oral History program, started in 1975 by a committee of the Friends of the Wilmette Public Library which has been chaired since its inception by Rhea Adler, a resident of the Village of Wilmette since 1932

A copy of the tape on which this transcript is based is available for circulation, and may be obtained by checking with a Reference Librarian concerning circulation procedures.

This program would not have been possible without the cooperation of the many long-time residents of the Village interested in helping to preserve particulars of a fascinating past, and the patience, energy and effort of a small but dedicated group of interviewers, transcribers and typists who share the belief that the past is too important to be forgotten.

Richard E. Thompson

Director

ABSTRACT

Interviewee: Fred Northam

Interviewer: 'Rhea Adler

Date of interview: Fall, 1977

Birth in Wilmette — Llewellyn Park - Early childhood experiences

“L” tracks run into Wilmette overnight on CMSTP right of way - Digging Sanitary Canal

Wilmette business district Central/Wilmette Avenue and West Railroad Avenue (Green Bay Road)

Account of Drury and Northam families — Grandparents — Parents locale in village

Socialized with Chicago families

Gage's Woods — Marshes “Small town” feeling

Circulation of petitions for New Trier High School by Grandfather Drury - President of Wilmette

Life at the 900 block of Linden Avenue - Father CPA for International Harvester at 606 South Michigan

Grant Park a “garbage dump” - landfill

T. Slater Gillette - Photographer; Drs. Byron and Rufus Stolp

Moved to Glencoe brief - Return to Wilmette to 1614 Elmwood - Back of Grandma Bell's farm house, later remodeled (ca. 1936 by Matots) on 1600 block of Greenwood Avenue

Death of Mr. Northam, Sr. - Left wife and five children

Mrs. Northam — Wilmette's first welfare employee

Description of surrounding area to Kenilworth

Episodes of childhood

Move to 423 10th Street after death of father

Reichmann, Gibson, Leary, Wilson neighbors

Wilson Bakery - Delivery wagon

Description of first movie at Ridge/Lake; Mueck grocery store — Licorice balls (“penny candy”)

Started school at (“Logan School”) now called McKenzie

Glassblower lived and worked near Park Ave./Wilmette Ave.

People of area — “Nigger” Smith's store

Home gardens — Vegetable — Household activities early twentieth century

Description of Grandpa (Horace) Drury's house

Wilrnette elementary schools; New Trier High School

Teachers he remembered at New Trier High School

Reading — First movies seen - Presbyterians

Old Carnegie Library — Anna Law — Importance in lives of children of that era

Portius Gage Stanley Steamer Breaker Beach Club -

Gage Piers — Henry Gage - Stanley Gage

Andreas - History of Chicago 3 Vol.

Andreas – History of Cook County 1 Vol.

Discussion of source material

Fred Northam

RA: When did you first come to Wilmette?

FN: I was born in 1904 in July and it was on - ah - Fifth Street in what is called Llewellyn Park, and it was a region of small houses, and most of which still exist. About the only name of any person in the neighborhood that I can recall at this time, that I could remember, would be the Weedon family which lived — we were off here on the west side of the street about — I should say about the 200 block starting from Isabella Street, and the Weedons were kitty—corner across the-corner, and I think I was born in the second house on the west side of the street from that corner. And I don't remember very much about those years except we did have horse—drawn cabs.-- And one time we were coming home from grandma's or someplace, and they let little Freddy stand up with his hand on the door looking out, and I couldn't have been more than about two, if that, just big enough to hang on — and the door opened and I fell out onto the Street and that is my earliest memory. And that was quite something. I can remember the whole details, you see. You know, I was a very tiny baby (laugh), but nothing happened.

RA: Do you remember —

FN: The horse didn't step on me or anything. The wheels

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FN: didn't go over me, I just bumped my head, I guess.

RA: My sister did that from a car.

FN: They had a little step, like a footscrapers, that you stepped up into the cab - this taxi, I guess you'd call it. (laugh)

RA: Yes, ah, where did the cabs come from, where were they —

FN: I have no idea. But I know they didn't have anything but horse-drawn vehicles way back then. That was the Victorian Age, really.

RA: Were there people around you who had their own horses, do you remember?

FN: Oh, lots of people. I don't recall that early because the only horses that I ever saw were drawing delivery wagons or pulling an ice vehicle or something like that on the street. Those are the only things that I really recall.

RA: They delivered the groceries with the cart?

FN: Oh yeah, sure. The fact is that one of the places I lived in Wilmette, our next door neighbor — but that's getting ahead of the story a little bit.

RA: Yes. Tell me, you lived on Fifth Street. Was there any commercial area in that immediate area?

FN: No.

RA: In Llewellyn Park?

FN: These were all homes here, as it is now. It has changed very little.

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RA: But over at Fourth and Linden, for example —

FN: That was practically non-existent as an area until they extended the railroad in one night. And I can remember that when I was real young they came in the night — they sneaked in Fourth and Linden and put all the tracks in and had the thing running before the Village could run them out.

RA: Tell me about - do you know about what date this was? This I can't tell you.

FN: No, I don't recall that good.

RA: I am told it was about 1912.

FN: It must have been because I could remember then doing it because along in that same area I must have been anywhere between ten to twelve, because it was about the time they were digging the Canal.

RA: I see.

FN: And they had to make a bridge over the Canal for this extension and I recall that.

RA: In one night! In one night they made a bridge?

FN: And they did everything and went - it was something. don't know how they accomplished it.

RA: That must have been quite a feat and very well planned to have — but it was because of opposition was it not, that it was done that way?

FN: Oh yes. I'm sure it must have been. This I don't recall. See, I was very young.

RA: I have heard this story from others.

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FN: My father used to take us down and we'd look at the hole where they were digging the Canal and watch them, and it looked immense to a small boy, you know, and stuff like that.

RA: Yes. Well, what was the Village itself like?

FN: The Village of Wilmette was downtown; and downtown was Central Street, Wilmette Avenue, West Railroad, which is now, I believe, called Green Bay. (it was West Railroad in those days.): And I can remember, even as a small boy, that I took notes to go to the store and I had to go across the tracks most of the time to Frank Smith's store.

RA: And what was that?

FN: And Frank Smith's was a grocery store, and he had been a clerk at one time in a store that was even older, called Kinney's and Mr. Kinney was the original store owner of the Village way, way back in the, well, the Go's or early 70's I suppose, but

RA: We still don't have your name in full. May we have it at this point?

FN: Oh, well . . . I've been using the name Fred S. Northam. We puta hard "TH" on it, and my aunt Miss Susan Northam, who lived in Wilmette many years ago, called herself "Northam" but it doesn't make any difference just so the pay checks come in. But my name . . . I was christened Frederick Stickney Northam, and, as I say, I was born on

Fred Northam, cont. 5

FN: Fourth Street. My people, my Father's people, I suppose, lived at 731 Tenth Street because that is where my maiden aunt, Miss Susan Northam lived for many, many, years and I assume that was the family home. My grandfather died, my grandfather Northam, that is, died in 1904 and his wife died in 1906.

RA: Here in Wilmette?

FN: I don't know that, this is something that I'm researching now at the Newberry Library and other sources and I'll find that out and I have excellent genealogy on other families and I am now working up one on the Northams.

RA: You mentioned traveling by cab, and you mentioned your grandmother. Would you like to talk . . . ? Was that your Grandmother Northam or your Grandmother Drury?

FN: I say I don't remember; well, I don't remember. The only grandmother I ever knew and the only grandfather I ever knew was Horace Greeley Drury and his wife Jeanette Stickney Drury, and they lived at 622 Central Avenue and they were pioneers in the Village back in the early 70's and maybe even a little earlier than that. My grandfather was apprenticed to a builder in the City of Chicago from the time he was about 17 or 18 years old until he got married and . . . that was in 1870. My Mother was born in 1871, 20 days after the Chicago fire burned out, so the history of the family goes back a long ways, but all of my memories are of the Drury family. Because my

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own people . . . They're all gone with the exception of Aunt Sue.

RA: Do you know how Horace and Edwin Drury happened to come to Wilmette, why they chose Wilmette?

FN: Well, most of the people came out after the Chicago fire, because they were just driven out of the city with that conflagration. My grandfather was apprentice to a builder called Ballard, and Mr. Ballard had a very fine home which was in the City of Chicago at 826 or 828 South on Michigan Boulevard and he apparently took in apprentices and they lived right with him. And as far as I can find out — I haven't checked it out because I only found this information out in recent months — that's where the Hilton Hotel is sitting right now.

RA: That's very interesting because Henry H. Gage's wife was Mary Ballard when she married Henry Gage and her mother, her widowed mother, lived with the Henry Gage's, — Lucy Ballard.

FN: Isn't that strange! I never heard this now, see all of these old families were so interes.

RA: This came from a census of 1880 in research for someone else, this came out...

FN: In the 70's and 80's, now, I've heard Grandma Drury talk about people that were social. She'd go down to the village and visit people on Indiana Avenue or Michigan Boulevard — or Michigan Avenue as they called it — and

Fred Northern, cont. 7

FN: Prairie Avenue; all in big homes south of Chicago around, well, I suppose around 22nd Street, somewhere along in there.

RA: Well, I understand that the Drurys came here to build Gage houses.

FN: As I say, he was an expert builder because he was apprentice to this man for seven or eight years and he owned a set of Joiner Planes which are extremely fine planes for making woodwork and stuff like that. They didn't have

-heck, in those days they didn't have millwork people or any of these places where you could go and buy all these things already made, they had to make them. If they had a table — if they needed a table, they made it and the doors and everything. The only thing that they would buy would be hardware and most of these old homes were made with hand wrought nails which were square and hammered out and lead plumbing. They didn't have steel plumbing, stuff like that, even when they had plumbing. I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit because my grandfather Drury was being one of the pioneers here. He, uh . . . I've heard him tell stories about going over through Gage's woods and putting on hip boots and going over and going through the marshy area that existed all along the whole North Shore then and putting out special assessment notices on trees where streets didn't even exist, but were going to exist at a later date. So, and I've heard my mother talk

Fred Northam, cont. 8



Lillian Mae (nee Drury) Northam

FN: about — my mother Lillian Drury, Lillian Mae Drury — falling in the ditch on Central Avenue; skating along in the ditches during the winter and stuff like that, you know. This is old stuff. Very primitive.

RA: That's right. And the sidewalks were wood.

FN; Oh, we had the whole east side even when I was a small boy. They were starting to build up, but the whole

east side was largely still Gage's Wood, and it was a wonderful place for a boy. You could go out there, we all kicked our shoes off at the end of school and didn't put them on back until we went back to school in the fall. This was true whether you lived on the east side or the west side. There was a lot of that in this town, too.

RA: What do you think of as Gage's Woods?

FN: Uh, mostly the northern end of the town. It was pretty well filled up south of the town with other subdivisions. I suppose at one time he must have owned a great deal of it, but most of it was on the north end of the town.

RA: I believe on the plaque, the town plaque, Cage's subdivision

FN: Clear from the railroad all the way to the lake.

RA: That's right.

FN: On the North Avenue, say from about Elmwood Avenue. RA: North.

FN: . . . over north, clear over to Mahoney's farm.

RA: Is that including Mahoney's farm?

FN: I don't know whether it included Mahoney's farm or not.

Fred Northam, cont. 9

RA: Or did it just go to the . . . ?

FN: But even when I was going to high school during World War I the Mahoney house was still standing and they were still farming some of that land and there were no houses along the lake like they are now - the big homes. Bluffs and vacant lots everywhere and it was something. How primitive we were.

RA: Well, it was a small town, was it not?

FN: Well, about — when I was a youngster they said anywhere from five to seven thousand, I think, and that's not a very big town.

RA: Not by today's comparison which is 32,000 plus, I believe.

FN: Yeah, well, my grandfather was an instigator of a good many things. He circulated petitions for the establishment of New Trier High School and he . . . uh . . . when he was President of the Village they installed the first sewer and water system and paved the first streets during his administration . . . and that was in the 90's about '95 or '96, somewhere along in there.

RA: Do you know how long he was President of the Village?

FM: Well, I have it in some of these records here somewhere that we can take a look at it . . . this makes a noise doesn't it . . . but, uh, I used to love to walk in Gage's Woods.

RA: Tell me about the woods; what was it like?

FM: Oh there were so many flowers and things and then .

Fred Northam, cont. 10

RA: What kind of flowers?

FN: . . . the loam under your feet that is centuries old you know. You couldn't hurt your feet if you tried. You'd step on a stick or something, yes. Nature was just shedding down stuff all the time. There was this molding which was wonderfully soft. Well, we had buttercups, spring beauties, the red trillium which I used to call bloody butchers - we had blue, purple and yellow violets; dogtooth violets, sympaticas; oh, there were many others. They were just beautiful.

RA: Dutchman's Britches?

FN: And I had one place that I knew how to find the fringed gentian which is

RA: Oh, really?

FN: Which is a . . . this was west of the town though, above Ridge Avenue, in a kind of a swamp. They like a swampy sort of a place and it was swampy out that way.

RA: Mr. Schaeffer told of a skating pond that was over there that the Gross Point boys .

FN: Well, this particular section — not to get away from Gage's Woods — but this particular section was on Elmwood

Avenue west and out on the same road that old Sanko [Sanger] Brown's Sanitarium [Kenilworth Sanitarium] was on, which, as I say, is four blocks west of Ridge Avenue, and going towards Kenilworth, or what would be Kenilworth, the west end of Kenilworth and uh . . . you know about Sanko [Sanger] Brown's.

Fred Northern, cont. 11

RA: I never heard of Sanko [Sanger] Brown — tell me about him.

FN: Well Sanko [Sanger] Brown was a . . . I guess you'd call it a nut house (laugh)

RA: A private sanitarium for mental patients.

FN: It was a private sanitarium. I imagine it was for people that needed mental health and I guess they had to be pretty wealthy because it was quite a swanky old place.

RA: Was it custodial care only?

FN: This I have no idea. Being a small boy I was a little bit afraid to go pretty close to it. (laugh)

RA: This, uh, isn't it interesting how things of our child— hood that frightened us?

FN: Well, yeah, uh, I was a — as you may know from listening to me talk — was a loner. I like to do . . . I never was a lonely child because I enjoyed being alone in the woods, and walking around seeing things and observing. I'm still doing it at my age now.

RA Well, this accounts for your keen awareness, perhaps.

FN: I'm a people—watcher. (laugh) I like people and I like to watch to see what they are doing, I think they're wonderful, myself. (laugh)

RA: Don't we all? There's nothing more awe inspiring than people, I believe.

FN: But to get back to Gage's Woods. When I was small we could see bent trees that had been bent by the Indians and we could see trails through the woods even then.

Fred Northam, cont. 12

RA: You could see trails?

FN: Absolutely, absolutely. I used to say to ray father — he'd like to go with us - and I'd say "Father, what is that?" I said. "It looks almost like somebody had been walking through it". He'd say "That was an Indian trail and those bent trees were pointing the way". And now since I have done research and know where some of these things are, I can see where these trees were pointing; because it's a well known fact that where Evanston Hospital was built on a very high knoll there in Evanston, at Ridge Avenue and Central, there was a chipping station for the Pottawatomie Indians and there's a plaque out in front of the hospital denoting that. And I suppose that these bent trees in Gage's Woods pointed to that area. It seems likely.

RA: Interesting because . .

FN: Either that or they were pointing to Chicago, which is possible, but since we're so close to the lake I don't know why they needed any direction anyway. They could just walk down to the lake .

RA: Well, as I understand, it was very boggy.

FN: . . . there. They did for that reason. I came across something — in researching in Evanston in the library there — where one elderly woman said when she left the railroad station, she had to take her wagon and put her feet up to keep the water from getting on her shoes, it

Fred. Northam, cont. 13

FN: was so boggy to get over to one of the churches in Evanston to go to a function there. This amazes me when you think about it.

RA: I understand Kenilworth was this way too

FN: Just boggy, really boggy.

RA: When Mr. Sears came out to establish it. They had to have their sidewalks elevated then. They were very high boardwalks.

FN: Well, of course, it's a well known fact that Chicago is raised, you know, eight or ten feet.

RA: That's right.

FN: There are still sections of Chicago where you can see houses way down low where they have not filled it in. But we had ...

RA: Yes, Well to get back to Wilmette. These are your very earliest recollections and we had started. to talk about the business area. What constituted the business area? What kinds of shops were there?

FN: Well, I say, I remember taking notes. And besides Mr. ah . . . Frank Smith's store — I think next door

at that time — probably a son of one of our original pioneers

Alex McDaniel, — one of his Sons had a bicycle shop along

in there right opposite the railroad station. And going

south when we hit Wilmette Avenue and West Railroad — as it was called then - on the corner, the northwest corner, was Rinkman & Schultz a grocery store. Then across the

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FN: street from that — across the corner was a drug store owned by a man named Wilming, and all these old drug stores could be identified because they had these water things in the window. One was full of red water and the other was full of blue water and they had a light behind them. And it was fascinating for any youngster, you know. And all the drug stores were actually meeting places because they had marvelous soda fountains and usually wrought iron glass—top tables and wrought iron chairs with the little cushions on it. It was a nice place to go.

RA: Ice cream parlor, really?

FN: Oh, yeah. A nice place to go. And we had several very successful drug stores; apparently drug stores were a focal point for a lot of the business of the town.

RA: Now did we have the, uh . . . ? Were they pharmaceutical shops in those days or were they packaged drugs? Did the pharmacist . . .

FN: They ground their own things in the pestle and the mortar and all that stuff and made their prescriptions, but it really wasn't as primitive as that. They were starting to get stuff by Abbott, Pfister and all of those old time drugs, even when I was young; but as I say, when I was born it was the Victorian age and now that I'm in my early 70's, it's the atomic age and in between there's a lifetime of living.

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RA: That's right.

FN: That's for sure.

RA: And yet it seems as though in each lifetime . . . I felt that way about a great aunt of mine who lived to be 95 and went from wagons and horses to . . . She lived into -- the atomic age, but it does. I think . . . Any life packs a great deal.

FN: Well, when you think about this now, the second place that I recall in Wilmette is on the 900 block of Linden Avenue. There was a family next to ours named Kirchberg and it was a large family — Catholic family - and they lived, uh . . . In the same block there was a house or two between them, and on the corner was what they called Francis Xavier Church. It doesn't exist now, but the school's across the way, I believe.

RA: Then the first Francis Xavier

FN: First Francis Xavier Church

RA: Was on what corner?

FN: Uh. . . it would be the southwest corner of 9th and Linden.

RA: Southwest corner, and now it's on the north.

FN: Northeast.

RA: Northwest corner. The church .

FN: I don't know where it is.

RA: The church is on the northwest corner of .

FN: Northwest? Well, then it's where the other one was then.

RA: Is it?

Fred Northam, cont. 16

FN: Yeah.

RA: Uh...this is...

FN: the other one

RA: And the school is east of it.

FN: It was a peculiar looking church because it looked like it was just flat. It had no steeple and it didn't

look like a church at all, but it served a neighborhood that was largely Catholic.

RA: Now, you went to the Presbyterian Church.

FN: Well

RA: Where was this?

FN: My father was Presbyterian, and our family were Calvinist when they came over from the old country. Most of our people came from England many, many years ago. My family history dates back to 1600, and ah . . . 1639. The Northams, and the Drurys and then the Heald family, which was my grandfather's mother's family.

RA: Was that part of the Heald family that was at the Fort Dearborn massacre?

FN: I haven't been able to check that out. I don't- I don't know. I've been trying to . . . the Captain Heald that was there and went through that terrible ordeal . . . As I say, I've been researching so many families that these things are going to have to wait a little while.

(laugh)

RA: They eventually come out.

FN: I'm almost sure it must be.

Fred Northam, cont. 17

RA: That's one thing, it always remains there for you to uncover at one time or another and eventually someone

FN: The avenues of research are marvelous. They keep your mind stimulated . . . it's a lot of fun. But at this house on Linden Avenue, we had a . . . It was a nice home — big home. And I say I remember the Kirschbergs. There were some people across the street called — the only German family that I could remember there - their name was Klangpeld. And I never had heard that name, and I just happened to think of it last week when I was thinking of all these old things. And there are other names that have since left, you know. They say so many cells die in your brain. Well, some of my memory cells have died and I've lost a few families that way that I knew a few years ago.

RA: I think you do remarkably well.

FN: I've lost some, though.

RA: Well, I grew up with people over several . . . I mean generations of our family . . . and I can't remember their

FN: I used to be able to name every house and every family in that block, but I can't do it anymore.

RA: Tell me, what did your father do?

FN: My father worked for the International Harvester Company and he was a Certified Public Accountant. And he worked

Fred Northam, cont. 18

FN: down at 606 South Michigan which was the other end of the block from the Blackstone Hotel. And I remember going down in 1911 — he took me up to the top of the Harvester Building which was one of the tallest buildings in the town — and seeing what was called and “Aviation” being done in Grant Park. And Grant Park was nothing but a garbage dump, really, in those days. These little planes looked like little box kites and so forth, and you know, it was an experience. That shows you how far I’ve come in my life — way back to ...

RA: Yes, we think of Grant Park as always being there; when yet you see old pictures, knowing that....

FN: They had this aviation meeting . .

RA: The lake came right up to it at one time. And the “I.C.” came in over stilts.

FN: That’s right . . . I can recall going on the “I.C.” when it ran right along the beach and the water was right up to the tracks. But this was so many years ago.

RA: Yes.

FN: But to get back to Wilmette. (Laugh)

RA: Yes. (laugh) Wilmette is really our chief interest.

FM: These are so many memories now that I recall.

RA: I was interested in your saying your father was a Certified Public Accountant. How early was that that they were certified?

FN: Well, my father was born in 1864. He’d be well, well over

Fred Northam, cont. 19

FN: 110 now.

RA: Well, let's say in his late 20's. That wouldn't be still in the 19th century that they would have had certification for accountants.

FN: Oh yeah, I'm sure, I'm sure he was.

RA: This is interesting.

FN: He ah . . . he was a whiz with figures. I didn't take after him. I can't add two and two hardly so

RA: I let my husband do that. (laugh)

FN: (laugh) We had a garden there at that place and it drew a prize one year. This was when I was about four or five years old. This is one of my early memories too. They took a picture of the garden and my sister Dorothy and my brother Canton when we were out there holding on to different flowers and I was dragged out and sat by a tree and my little lower lip was hanging out. I was pouting because I didn't want my picture taken because I didn't like that man. Well it seems the man was Thomas

S. Gillette, a very famous photographer in our town, and he always called himself T. Slater Gillette. Well, now it sounded like an affectation but apparently it did it. That was some man, I tell you, for a small child to remember. He was very imposing. He looked like Mark Twain, white hair, a very distinguished looking man, and he wore a big black hat. And he wore a very large cape that was adjunct to his business because when he had to look

Fred Northam, cont. 20

FN: through the camera, he would flip the cape over so that he would be in the dark and of course that scared the heck out of this little squirt and (laugh) not only that, he had this little pan in which he put some white powder and then he'd slam down the hammer onto it and it would make a flash of light when he took the picture. And I do remember that man because he was certainly an imposing part of my early life.

RA: Was he a resident of Wilmette?

FN: Oh, yes.

RA: Because there is a very famous Gillette that ...

FN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They mention that. If you'll go through those papers that I have brought to you, Mrs. Adler, you'll find that . .

RA: All right. We're in the midst of studying types of photography now at Newberry on that

FN: It mentions — it mentions in some of these things that I've brought - this scrapbook of Miss Northam's that I've brought — it mentions that Dr. Byron Stolp was very interested in taking pictures.

RA: Oh, was he?

FN: Yes, I didn't know this too.

RA: I hadn't heard that about him — about his delivering babies in the home .

FN: Oh, yeah. Sure, he delivered half of the town.

RA: . . . and nurses who were engaged .

Fred Northam, cont. 21

FN: Most of us were either delivered by Byron or Rufus, his son, and most of them by Byron.

RA: And his house is still standing at

FN: Doctor Byron's — as far as I know it's still standing now

RA: At Forest, I believe.

FN: It's on . . . at 13th Street.

RA: 13th. . . and he had his office

FM: I don't recall where he had his office. If he had it where Rufus had it, it was in the Brown Building.

RA: It's on the southwest corner of Elmwood and 13th.

FM: Uh huh, Oh, he had his office in his home? I didn't know, I didn't know that.

RA: Jim Reichmann lives in the 1200 block in sight of Doctor Stoip's house.

FM: Was that the Reichmann family that lived on 10th Street at one time?

RA: Yes.

FM: Oh, is that right?

RA: Yes, when they first came here they belonged to St. Francis.

FM: Well, I'll tell you a story about that a little later.

RA: He is a past board member of the Wilmette Library.

FN: I think he's a younger man than I.

RA: Well he's .

FM: Not much but .

RA: . . . an old friend of mine and is preparing a history of

Fred Northam, cont. 22

RA: St. Francis Parish.

FN: Yes, they were German Catholics.

RA: They came in 1905.

FM: If it's the same one

RA: It's James.

FM: If it's the same one, his father looked like the Kaiser. He affected the same moustache. He was very military in his bearing in everything - and very Prussian.

RA: Oh, this is very interesting.

FM: It's R—E--I-C-H--M-double N.

RA: That's right.

FM: That's the same thing. This is a . . . you see, most of my memories are very brief in Wilmette because they're all early memories.

RA: Now you lived here to what age?

FN: I lived in this house on Linden Avenue. Then my father decided that they were going to raise the rent \$5 a month and this was impossible because that was too much. So he moved to Glencoe and I spent two or three years up in Glencoe. And then we moved back to Wilmette on Elmwood Avenue and 16th Street in a brand new home which was built by a Swedish carpenter named Yon . . . Yon, and his wife's name was Emma Anderson. Oh, they were wonderful people and they looked kinda old to me, but they really weren't. They were probably in their middle 30's.

RA: Do you remember the number on Elmwood Avenue?

Fred Northam, cont. 23

FM: Our house?

RA: Uh huh.

FN: Oh yes. Sure, sixteen fourteen.

RA: Sixteen fourteen [1614 Elmwood]

FN: Sixteen fourteen. And it was a clapboard type of house. It was nice. It was built up rather high and it was, of course, built by a Swedish carpenter and he knew his job and he incorporated in electric lights in the dining room and in the kitchen — maybe one outlet, that's all, and one outlet in the laundry room downstairs. The rest of the house had gas, and I can remember gas lights because on Saturday, even when I was a small boy, I had to take the old mantle off which was a kind of a cloth

RA: White gauze, was it?

FN: White gauze, yes. You had to put the new mantle on. Then you had to touch a match to it and let it burn and this ash that was left was fragile so you didn't touch it. And when you turned the gas on and lit it, this would glow and give a white light. And it was, as I say, the Victorian Age, the Gaslight Era and, but a . . . that was a wonderful place to grow up. Right behind our house was nothing between us and Kenilworth. The Thorson's field and what was left of Grandma Bell's farm...

Grandma Bell, well, she went back . . . she went back to the very beginning: about, I should say when Mr. Westerfield and Mr. McDaniel must have come because she was so old

Fred Northam, cont. 24

FN: when I was a kid, very old lady

RA: And that house

FN: That house

RA: Is still

FN: . . . is still standing out in the prairie there.

RA: And it is still standing today.

FN: Is it really?

RA: It has been remodeled.

FN: Grandma Bell's old home?

RA: Yes indeed. And it is now on Greenwood Avenue — what is called Greenwood Avenue.

FN: Isn't that something?

RA: West of

FN: Oh, that house must be 150 years old.

RA: . . . 16th, right, and the Matots bought it years ago and had the architect - and I've forgotten his name — up on Ridge Road, who was very good at remodeling, took it and has made a beautiful modern residence of it.

FN: Well, some of these old homes you don't recognize any more.

RA: It is combined with lannon stone and white clapboard and it was originally white clapboard, when I came to the Village.

FN: It was old gray and worn out clapboard when I knew it. (Lugh)

RA: Yes.

FN: It looked like they were just letting it go to pot. (laugh)

Fred Northam, cont. 25

RA: It stood there through the depression. It was long after . . . shortly after the depression that the Matots — the younger Matot - bought it.

FN: From our house, 1614 Elmwood, east to 16th Street, there was nothing — just vacant. And my father used to ...he'd rent a lot: then he'd level it off and put a tennis court in and my sisters would play tennis — skirts down to their ankles, neck covered, puffed sleeves. Can you imagine playing tennis in that kind of stuff?

RA: Tennis is not such a modern game.

FN: Well, no. We always had a tennis court when I was little. My father would have a great big plot that he would rent from the Bells and he put in a garden and that was substantially what happened to him. He died. He'd like to take a hot bath and then in the fall near Thanksgiving he went out. He got cold, came in and in three days he was dead, because back in those days you didn't have the antibiotics and the medicine you have . . . if you got a cold or if you got pneumonia, you went through what was called a crisis. And you either got well or you died. Papa died. He left my mother with five children all under 18 years old, which was quite a chore for a frail little woman like mother.

RA: Tell me a little more about your mother.

FN: My mother was an extraordinary woman. She was very outgoing. She had three jobs at one time after Father's

Fred Northam, cont. 26

FN: death. A lot of times I think she was giving away two-thirds of her salary because, if somebody came in with a hard luck story, well, you know, she'd give them, you know, something. We never seemed to want. She always said the Lord would provide, and I know He did. And we never had . . . we never wanted for anything that I can recall.

RA: What kind of jobs did she do then?

FN: Well, she was a truant officer, probation officer, social welfare worker, I think she had something to do with she went to the movies to see whether they were all right for the Village to see, censor . . . (laugh)

RA: Censor. Was this in the township of New Trier or did she go into the Loop?

FN: Just Wilmette . . . just in the Wilmette area alone, that's all. She didn't include anything but Wilmette. And there were a lot of perennial poor in certain sections of the town — people that expected to be taken care of.

RA: Now was this part of the Townships Supervisors Office or was it . . . ?

FN: I had no idea. See, Mother was the whole thing in those days. She was it. She was the Welfare Department and she was responsible to the Welfare Board, which was several of the wealthy men, usually on the East side.

RA: So it was a Village thing.

FN: Yes, a village thing and we took care of our own, and there

Northam, cont. 27

was a lot of wealth in the town, you know, and there was no problem getting the people to support – (one side of tape ended)

FN: Thorson's field was a large area back of the Bell farm there — or farmhouse — and it extended from back of the houses on Elmwood Avenue all the way up to Kenilworth Station and clear over to the east. Mr. Thorson had a livery stable right near the station in Kenilworth. I think the street that now angles directly from the station in Kenilworth and goes southwest is right where Thorson had his livery stable.

RA: Glendenning Road, that would be.

FN: I don't know what the name of the street is.

RA: I think it is Glendenning Road.

FN: That whole area there was a golf course when I was a child.

RA: The Northshore Golf Course.

FN: Yes, and there was a family named Long living there taking care of the grounds — a keeper named Long. They had two children that I played with. Well, my younger sister played with Eunice. I used to play with George. I was too young to caddy. My mother didn't believe in it anyway, because caddies were bad boys that smoked and stuff like that there, so we weren't allowed to do that. Let's face it, my mother raised us somewhat to be snobby, I'm afraid. And it's taken me a lifetime to get over it.

RA: Well, many of us were conditioned in a very rigid ...

Fred Northam, cont. 28

FN: I don't believe in it and I think it's terrible. I've heard some of the people who lived on the west side mention how they came over and went to the church, and never went back because they were treated so badly.

RA: I know one woman has told me that and

FN: And, uh, but this whole area up there was all open. This is the point I'm getting at, I mean . . . there were only houses running up to the Ridge on Lake Avenue.

RA: How late did Northshore Country Club occupy that land before they went out west on Glenview Road?

FN: Is that the same . . . Is that the same . . .

RA: It is the same, I understand.

FN: Oh, is it? I didn't know that. They had a little wooden house back there that snuggled right up to the back end of several houses that were west of us there. And one of the families that lived along in there was named Tarkington. I've often wondered because we used to this old fellow that used to come and watch us play. And we'd bury chickens, you know, and have funerals, and things like kids do and his little girl . . . she was much too young for me but I had to have someone to play with, and my young sister and George Long, some of them that were in the neighborhood . . . and he'd watch us play and I've often wondered whether it was Booth Tarkington. (laugh) I never will know.

RA: That is interesting. Booth Tarkington was an Indiana man.

Fred Northam, cont. 29

FN: Yes, I know, but he could have come up and seen his relatives. And Marion Tarkington was Althea's age, my younger sister, and she was a very large girl, big girl and one time she was having a . . . we used to have these things called "Blackballs" that you sucked on, and she swallowed one and it caught in her throat. My mother, as frail as she was, took that big girl by her heels and shook that thing out of her, and I don't know how my mother did it because she didn't weigh more than about 110 pounds soaking wet back in those days. She had exothalamic goiter and she was very, very ill at the time. In fact, about the time that my father died in 1915 they said mother wasn't going to live six months, and she lived 25, 20 some odd years later (laugh). My father died in 1915. we moved from there to a house on 10th Street in the 400 block — 423 10th Street — and it was just around the corner from the house where I . . . just around the corner from the . . . in fact, the Reichmanns lived across the street. The Gibsons lived next door. Then across the street on the same side as the Reichmanns lived Mr. Leary and his daughter, Eileen. Mr. Leary was the Vice—President of the Wilmette State bank, as it was called back then. And next door to us on 10th were Grandpa and Grandma Wilson and they were wonderful. Grandpa Wilson was a very old man. She was very old, but Grandpa worked every day. He'd go down and he'd drive the bakery

Fred Northam, cont. 30

FN: wagon and make deliveries for his son who had a very fine bakery, the Wilson Bakery, on Wilmette Avenue, right across from the Brown block, which is near Central Avenue there on Wilmette Avenue. And I started to . . . well, I was going to grade school there, but when I was a To go back to the house on Elmwood Avenue, we used to trade up at Cross Point because it was pretty close, you know. The stores were within walking distance, and I remember going up there to buy penny candy or something.

RA: You remember what some of the stores were up there?

FN: Well, the only thing I remember . . . And it's just recently that I found out how to spell the name . . . I'd go into this old store right across from the old St. Joseph's Church. This was the one that was torn down just a number of years ago.

RA: Was that on the same side as the present church is on?

FN: Yes, but it was right on the corner of Lake, and the only thing that was in back of it was the little cemetery on that same side of the street.

RA: On the same side as the cemetery?

FN: The north. It was on the northeast corner of Lake and Ridge, and directly across the street was this this store run by the Muecks, M-U-E-C-K, as I understand it. I didn't know that until just recently. I used to go in the door and the bell would tinkle and then I would hear waaaay off in the back, I could hear this person coming. And she

Fred Northam, cont. 31

FN: was profound. She was awesome. She was so big and she was so old to a small eight or nine year old boy at the time. And she'd come out. And she either had asthma or she had emphyzema or something because she used to wheeze. You could hear her breathing all the way out from the quarters in the back and she'd come out and she'd stand behind the counter and she'd say "Vat chu vant?" And I used to say, "Well, I'll have one of those. No, wait a minute, I'll have one of those". You know. Penny candy for a child . . . Oh, that was something — the licorice whip or a gumball or something, you know. We used to have a lot of fun. Then on the other corner there was another grocery store just south of Lake Avenue. I don't remember the name of that one, but there was a vacant store there, and one of my early memories on that . . . My father took us up there - and he was still living, so this had to be before 1915 — and I saw first moving picture. On just bare folding chairs and it apparently was shown on a sheet hung up on the wall. It was extremely primitive. I can remember it must have been about the Three Musketeers because all the men looked like Frenchmen with ostrich feathered hats - all those old time costumes. And they did a lot of sword playing and stuff like that. It was . . . as I say, this was a movie. Just think how long ago that was. Of course it was all silent back in those days. Now to get back to 10th Street. I went to school

Fred Northam, cont. 32

FN: at the Central School, and after I went to Central School They had just built the Byron Stolp School (which was on 10th Street) back of the new Central School. There was the old Central School and the new Central School, and in back of that there was the Byron Stolp School. They're all gone now.

RA: And is this the first . . - ? Your first time at school? You started .

FN: No, no.

RA: Where had you gone before?

FN: My first schooling in Wilmette was in the Logan School on the west side. That was at, gee, I haven't any idea what the name of the street is, Park Avenue.

RA: Right.

FN: Park . . . I have to remember so far back for some of those streets . . . Park Avenue and Central, I believe.

RA: But not the building that is there now.

FN: I have no idea, it was a fairly .

RA: There is a brand new . -

FN: It was a fairly new school back then - back then. (laugh)

RA: Yes.

FN: But I say, I saw the Byron Stolp being built and now it's gone.

RA: Yes, well, the other . .

FN: That makes me an old man. (laugh)

RA: The first Logan School is now gone, too, and they have . .

Fred Northam, cont. 33

RA: It is perhaps the newest of the Wilmette Schools built.

FN: What do they call it?

RA: Logan School.

FN: They still call it Logan.

RA: It still is Logan School, named after General Logan, I presume.

FN: I suppose.

RA: After the Civil War.

FN: Right across the street from there is an interesting shop. There was a man that used to make things out of glass. A real old glass blower and I — we'd — go over and watch him blow the glass and puff out his cheeks and so on and so forth. And I don't remember his name, but in the house that was in front of this little — like shed - lived a boy named Bubbles Mitterwaller. And he was the fattest thing. Spanky McFarland was nothing along the side of this boy. He was like the other fat boy. And he was a fat, fat boy, and we used to call him Bubbles Mitterwaller and that's the only way I know how to spell the name. That's all I can remember.

RA: And how do you spell his name?

FN: Is that how you spell it?

RA: How do you spell it?

FN: Mitterwaller, M—I—double T-E-R-W—A-double L-E—R, I suppose. But I often wondered how long he lived because he was grossly . .

Fred Northam, cont. 34

RA: Overweight young man.

FN: . . . Obese for a very young boy and a

RA: Was the glass that was blown for ornamental purposes or

FN: Well, I think he was making bottles and things like that, if I remember

RA: Practical things then

FN: Yes, practical things.

RA: . . . that were to be used in commerce and still being done by hand.

FN: Isn't that something?

RA: Very interesting.

FN: Of course, it's all being done mechanically now.

RA: Molded glass now, yes.

FN: But we had . . . has anybody mentioned Nigger Smith's store . . . ? Did you ever hear of that?

RA: No. I never have, was that... .

FN: Well, this is something we don't like to talk about.

RA: . . . by any chance on Wilmette Avenue?

F: This is on Wilmette Avenue. I assume that it would still be Park Avenue. It's the same as Logan School.

RA: I think I misspoke myself.

FN: Well, I think . .

RA: One is Prairie and one is Park and . . . but Prairie Avenue is the right street.

FN: There's . . . there's one street there where Wilmette starts turning a little bit. . .

Fred Northam, cont. 35

RA: That's right — where Moore's Plumbing is.

FN: You go up there, and in the middle of the block on the right is the store. And as long as history has been here a colored family, a colored family, has been living here. They probably are still living there.

RA: I think that she has just recently sold and gone elsewhere. There was a woman who used to have a nursery school in that store.

FN: Well.

RA: Tell us about it.

FN: People used to come from all over to come to . . . they called it Nigger Smith, which was the thing to do back in those days. Of course, it's a dirty word now, and ah well, Nigger Smith's was the place to go for quality vegetables and fruits; and people came from Highland Park and all over to shop at his store. It was a very nice place. My family didn't go there because we raised all of our stuff. My father had a big garden and my mother used to can 180 quarts of tomatoes in a year and stuff like that. A lot of people had gardens back in those days. They don't do that now.

RA: Oh, yes.

FN: They used to can, pickle .

RA: That was a summer's activity for the women of the household.

FN: That's right. They worked like the devil. (laugh)

Fred Northam, cont. 36

RA: For sure.

FM: I can remember when Mother, even the wealthy, went and had to get down and use the old scrub board to wash clothes — boil them on the stove. Did you ever boil clothes?

RA: Oh, yes. You had copper boilers.

FM: You'd have a big tub and boil the clothes.

RA: Those are very choice antiques today.

FM: Take them out and hang them out; take them down; bring them in; roll 'em up. Next day would be ironing day. Besides this

RA: And they ironed . . . what kind of iron?

FM: Well, they ironed with the old iron which you had to pick up off the top of the stove.

RA: And what were the stoves like?

FM: And the stoves . . . Well, of course, I remember Grandpa Drury's house at 632 — one of the bigger houses in town . . . But it still, even when I was young, had a pump out on the back porch with a deep well. Had a pump inside where you could pump water right into the sink.

RA: That was cistern water, wasn't it?

FN: Had a wood or coal stove over in one corner as they were still using wood and coal then.

RA: In other words, each household had its own well . . .

Fred Northam, cont. 37

FN: Yes.

RA: For drinking water.

FN: Well, yes, originally, you see

RA: Artesian wells. No. They weren't artesian were they?

FN: Well, they were deep wells, they had to be.

RA: Drilled, yes.

FN: Yes, drilled. They went down to solid rock . . . My grandfather used to have it tested and the well is still in the house. It must be capped now. It's still there.

RA: And the pumps on the inside were the cistern pumps where you wash.

FN: I suppose this must have been. I don't know about that.

RA: My childhood .

FN: I don't remember that .

RA: We had an inside .

FN: . . . but Grandpa's house was a marvelous old place. It had a front hail and you'd come in and the front hail was as big as your living room here, practically; and it had a front parlor, a back parlor, and in back of the front hail was the dining room. Then there was the butler's pantry. Then there was the kitchen which was, again, as big as your living room — maybe even a little bigger. Then off of that was the pantry which was - heavens, it was as big as — half as big as this room, anyway, and it had

Fred Northam, cont. 38

FN: bins — things clear to the ceiling, because they used to have a bushel, a bag, of potatoes, and a 50 pound sack of flour in the bin; and sugar, likewise, because they didn't go to the store every day. And they baked eight or nine loaves twice a week. I don't know You can talk about the good old days, but I don't believe

RA: Well, certainly it wasn't necessarily true for women.

FN: You . . . not only that, but Mother . . . Back in 1915 my father bought her a Thor washing machine which was something. It was electric. That was something. The wringer was even electric in 1915. Just before he died. And it was sol . . . Oh, the copper in that thing must have been something because it was solid copper. But, what did you do back in those days? Of course the family was well knit. Everybody . . . Well, we could pull candy or roast chestnuts in the fireplace or something like that; or crack nuts that we went out in the forest and found.

RA: What kind of nuts?

FN: Oh, walnuts, butternuts. Grandpa had a butternut tree on his property. They were similar to walnuts.

RA: Shell barks.

FN: Oh, they're so hard you'd have to have a machine to crack

Fred Northam, cont. 39

FN: 'em. And my Aunt Florence still has that up on the shelf there. That's something. I don't know what she did

RA: Someone wanted to know what shell barks were.

FN: Is that what it is?

RA: They're hickory nuts, they

FN: Is that what you call them?

RA: That's the Pennsylvania Dutch expression for hickory nuts.

FN: Of course, we had all of those nuts, and everything. We even had hazel nuts on the bushes and

RA: Did you call them . . . ? . . . there was another big nut

FN: Ummmmmm.

RA: Nigger toes.

FN: Oh, yeah, but you had to import them . . . You only saw them at Christmas time in your stocking along with the one orange a year . . . and people talk about the good old days, I don't believe in it. I'll take this what I'm going through right now (laugh). We used to sit on the porch on a Sunday and you weren't allowed even to read the Sunday Comic Strip until you'd been to Sunday School and back.

RA: You couldn't skate or could you?

FN: You couldn't do anything. You sat with the family on the front porch and you said "Hello" to the people that

Fred Northam, cont. 40

FN: went by - and this is fun?

RA: And talk about them afterwards?

FN: I don't know. To me this isn't the good . . . and you say, "The good old days . . ." You went down to the lake. Alright, you went in swimming and two blocks north of where you went in swimming the open sewer emptied into the lake right there at Chestnut Street. I can remember the great big hole there and we used to go down and look into it. And talk about pollution. People up until the 20's were still having typhoid fever in Wilmette. And every summer, if you went to school, chances are if you walked out with some . . . One little girl had mumps in the third grade over in Miss Bigg's room over in Logan School; and she was a cute little thing, so all the little boys wanted to take her hand and walk out with her, you know. So she gave the mumps to every .kid in the neighborhood and passed it on and on, and it went through my family. My mother started with me, I brought it home and after I got through, within three weeks my brother had it and my sisters had it, you know. Poor mother was quarantined with the sign oh the house aaalll that time. And this was the good old days? Not to me.

RA: Yes, even in the early days when I came to Wilmette you were quarantined for almost everything.

Fred Northam, cont. 41

FN: Oh, sure. And they had infantile paralysis. They call it polio now. Kids were dying all over the place. They were being paralyzed - dragging a foot, you know

RA: Diptheria.

FN: . . . ending up with bulbar and dying, and uh . . . Why even our first Village Manager, Mr. Schultz, had typhoid fever. I can remember that, and that was in the late

That's the same Schultz that was Rinkling and

Schultz, the grocer.

RA: Oh, and now you speak of Rinkling.

FN: And then he was . . . Later on he had a store with another man who was called Gallis.

It was Gallis and Schultz and they were in the store in the building that still is Central Street. A very nice building. It's still there.

RA: Is that the Schultz that was in the cleaning business? Because .

FN: He was in a lot of things. He may have been in the cleaning business.

RA: Schultz and Nord for years. It's now Odhners.

FN: No, I don't know whether that's Schultz & Nord or not

. . . that's a different . . . I think that's a different man.

RA: I see. Well there was King. Do you remember King & Schultz

Fred Northam, cont. 42

RA: Drug Store on the cor... or grocery store on the corner of Central & 12th Street?

(silence) Well, I'm told that there was a grocery store there.

FN: Van Deusens had a grocery store

RA: They

FN: . . . next to Miss Kramer on Central right off of what is now where the Village Hall used to be.

RA: I remember the Van Deusens before they went out of business — it being at 12th....

FN: Van Deusens were in two or three different businesses. They had a garage on the west side of the tracks and that burned down . . . They had several spectacular fires in the town.

RA: Where was the firehouse?

FN: Uh . . . I think it was on Central Avenue just west of the tracks. Yes, it's still there, isn't it . . . ? Yeah.

RA: No, no. It is not still there but it's about where the new post office is now — the present post office.

FN: I think that was almost directly across the street from where bluster Publications are now.

RA: Yes, and then next there was a livery stable that rented horses to go.

FM: My father used to come around and talk about that. My

Fred Northam, cont. 43

FN: father used to come down on a Sunday — being a farm boy in Indiana around the farm . . . He'd come down and he'd get a surrey with the fringe on the top, put the whole family in, and we'd drive out to Dam #1 on the Des Plaines River out in Wheeling and make a day of it. He'd take the horse and he'd wiiippe it dooowwnn. He was so good. He was reliving his boyhood actually. And he'd wipe the horse down and play with the horse all day and we'd go down and play in the river; and the river was clean back in those days. We'd spend the whole day there and have a picnic lunch and come back. We were practically a tee-totaler family, but on the way out my father would stop at one of those saloons and get one bottle of beer and take that along. I never saw him drink it. My father never drank at home. We didn't believe in it and

RA: Good Scotch Presbyterian.

FN: While I . . . while I sip a few now; this is a different age, you know. But we knew of it. Never grew up with it. It was not part of our life when we were young. It just wasn't done and uh . . . that's neither here nor there. (laugh)

RA: Well, that's very good. And now you're at Central School. How long cUd you go there? You went all through it?

Fred Northam, cont. 44

FN: Well, I say, I went up through from Central School to Byron Stolp and then from there - I think Byron Stolp was either 7th or 8th grade. Then I went into high school, New Trier High School. And it was just at the time of World War I coming along. And we had a woman principal, Miss Packer.

RA: Oh.

FN: Do you remember Miss Packer?

RA: Oh yes. Indeed I do. My girls had her. She was there many . . .

FN: She was kind of an imperious person. But I . . . somewhere . . . I wish I had brought that. I still have it. I'll bring it to you later, I have my graduation .

RA: From New Trier?

FN: . . . New Trier. I have .

RA: That would be most interesting. Tell me. .

FN: It tells me all the teachers and stuff like that. I've got it somewhere, as I say.

RA: Was she in the history department? Miss Packer? I've forgotten what she . .

FN: She taught . . . she taught Latin.

RA: Was Dr. Small there during your time?

FN: He taught Latin, too.

RA: He came as a young man.

Fred Northam, cont. 45

FM: And Mr. Breezerneyer and Miss

RA: Mr. Piefer, was he there then?

FN: Uh . . . my aunt has a friend. Her nephew is a teacher up there now . . . Kaehler.

RA: Oh, yes. Fred Kaehler.

FN: Well, I remember Fred Kaehler, he was a . . . He taught Mathematics, if I remember him..

RA: Right. And his father, he

FM: And Fred Kaehler, is this a . . . is this a Fred Kaehler

RA: This is a Fred Kaehler, Jr.

FM: Oh, well.

RA: And his father, I believe, was

FM: As I say, I knew Fred Kaehler, Sr.

RA: Uh, he was Dean of Men.

FM: And Fred Kaehler, Sr., had a brother that was the fellow who wrote the Tarzan books, if I'm not sure.

RA: Oh.

FN: Do you remember the Tarzan books?

RA: Well, I didn't . . . I wasn't reading Tarzan books at that time (Laugh)

FN: You read Girl Guide books, I suppose. (Laugh)

RA: That's right. And there was another very fanciful series of juvenile books that were written for the adolescent

Fred Northam, cont. 46

RA: girl about that time, and I'm trying to . . . I can't think.

FN: Well, I can think of Tom Swift.

RA: Oh, yes. My husband was a Tom Swift fan.

FN: As a boy, oh, yeah. We used to read all those Tom Swift books one after another.

RA: Tom Swift and the Diamond Makers. Tom Swift this and that . . . Oh yes, he had many adventures and all kinds of things.

FN: I was an avid reader. I loved to read. I used to haunt the old west side library. Miss Anna Law was the librarian there.

RA: Now tell me about the . . . Where was the first library that you remember?

FN: Well, it was the old Carnegie Library. Every town had one. If you saw one in one town, you saw one in every town in the United States — (Laugh) - big old red brick ugly thing.

(Laugh)

RA: . . . that you had to climb.

FN: Yes. Massive porch.

RA: Steps.

FN: They still exist in some towns.

RA: Oh, yes. I know where there's one not . .

Fred Northam, cont. 47

FN: And it was Carnegie's gift to the world.

RA: . . . very far from here.

FM: Miss Anna Law was there. She was a very wonderful woman, I have nice memories of her.

RA: And she had a great impact on the community, I understand.

FN: She was . . . she was elderly even when I was a little boy.

RA: She had a sister.

FM: She had a brother named Prentiss

RA: Law.

FN: . . . but I don't remember about the sister. This you'll have to ask my aunt.

RA: I see.

FM: She was very - I don't know

RA: She not only established - initiated and established - the Wilmette Library, but I believe she also initiated the Woman's Club.

FM: That I don't know either, but she was a force in the love of books that I had all my life. I used to haunt that place when I was a kid. See, life was very primitive; you didn't have many outlets back in those days.

RA: That's very true. I believe that the library began . .

FN: There weren't any cars on the street. No. Automobiles were...

Fred Northam, cont. 48

RA: Cars were rare, were they not, in the early . . . ?

FN: As I say, I can remember Portius Gage — who was a cousin — coming up to see my grandfather and Portius would come up in what was called a Stanley Steamer, which was something. To have a car at all . . . but to have a Stanley Steamer is like saying Mercedes Benz of this day. You know what I mean?

RA: Yes.

FN: It was a car of the wealthy. Of course the Gage family have always had quite a little of that. (laugh)

RA: That goes back a number of .

FN: As a matter of fact, I think . . . as a matter of fact, I think that some of that property is still under lease from the Gage estate.

RA: Is it really?

FN: I don't know, but it is my understanding that all of that — what used to be called “No—Man's—Land” up there — was.

RA: Belongs to the Gage Family? I . . . that

FN: . . . leased for 99 or 199 years or something like that.

RA: . . . to that club that was built there. Was that on Gage property?

FN: The Breakers Beach. You're talking about the Breakers Beach Club.

RA: Yes, can you tell me about that?

Fred Northam, cont. 49

FN: Well, there were two clubs there. One went out of business during the Depression and never did get off the ground. They just built a foundation and then zip — they were gone. The other one — I don't remember what happened to the other one — but they had sort of a yacht club there up until just a few years ago.

RA: Oh. But they never had a harbor?

FN: No, they never had one. No.

RA: It was just called

FN: They used to

RA: . . . The Yacht Club.

FN: Yeah, they used to put their little boats from there. They used to have a little club house there because when my sister just lived in the building there, 1440, before she moved East. She lived on the top floor and we could look down on all of this area, you know. And they were coming there and putting out their little boats and having dinner and stuff like that.

RA: Can you recall the Gage Beach or the Gage Piers?

FN: The Gage Pier was — I only know of one.

RA: There were two.

FN: I only know of one. And that was at . . . just about . . . it would be about at the end of Chestnut right opposite

Fred Northam, cont. 50

FN: of what would be the Henry Gage house - or Stanley Gage - I don't know which One it is; the one that was right on the corner.

RA: I believe that your grandfather built it

FM: Yes, he did.

RA: . . . for Henry Gage.

FM: Was it

RA: H.H. Gage. And he was the one who established the piers and he brought the wood.

FN: Yes, he was. I didn't know but one, and it was a wreck when I was a child.

RA: And as I understand it, he brought the wood because of the hardwood.

FM: You could still go out on it. It went clear out. It went clear out in the lake.

RA: Well, because big ships on Lake Michigan brought the lumber for the houses that the Gage's built - and the Drurys built — from Michigan. It was softer lumber.

FM: Oh, is that why they put it out?

RA: That was the beginning of the piers, as I understand it. And why it was done.

FN: I know grandpa was quite instrumental in the formation of this town. He was deep into it.

RA: Well.

Fred Northam, cont. 51

FN: One of his pet things was this new park out there - that they named after he died. - They named it for Mr. Gillson. And my grandfather was practically the founder of the park system here and, well . .

RA: Well, they were in many — he and his brother were in many — businesses as I understand it.

FN: Well, you have a record of the entire family history and I've given it to you.

RA: Yes, and he was in the tax

FN: It was a very extensive thing. And I have other things that I've researched in the book that is called "The Chicagoans, Who's Who in Chicago".

RA: Oh, yes.

FN: Which is the same as "The Book of the Chicagoans" in 1906.

RA: Are they in Andreas' history of Chicago too?

FN: And then Uncle . . . No, I don't think they're in Andreas', That's where I got that xeroxing that I did for you.

RA: Oh, that was out of Cook County.

FN: Yes — Andreas history - yes, which is the most famous and very well researched book.

RA: Well, Andreas wrote that, I believe, at the time that many of the people he was writing about were still alive. I think that is the value of the Andreas book because . .

FN: He's extensive, I go over there and read them now at the

Fred Northam, cont. 52

FN: Library. See, the library is only a block from me from where I live now in tit

RA: Well, yes, and we have them here in Wilmette. They have they were a gift to the Wilmette Library years ago, but they are very, very hard to come by, even for a rare bookman to acquire, so that anyone that has a set of it. Newberry has recently had them re . . . uh.

FM: Oh, do they have them?

RA: They have it.

FM: In the North Room?

RA: They have it. But they have also, I saw a new copy that came from the Fort Wayne Reproducing Center down there. They're .

FN: They're doing an awful lot down there, aren't they?

RA: Yes, they have taken thou . . . literally thousands of these . . . you spoke of crumbling books

FM: I see we have a whole new set of Savage.

RA:, Yes.

FM: Brand new.

RA: And that is probably xeroxed, and they are doing a very good job.

FN: . . . Because the old set of Savage - the old set of Savage down there had .

RA: Had deteriorated very badly.

Fred Northam, cont. 53

RA: Well, you see the paper is wood pulp and wood pulp paper is highly acid content, and it deteriorates very rapidly so that many things that are crumbling — many of these things - it would be worthwhile, I think, to xerox them because

FN: These are pictures in there . . . in that stuff there of old homes with names under it.

RA: Good.

FN: And this is what you need and I don't care what you do with them. I don't ever want to see them again. (Laugh)

RA: Oh, really, well I thank you very much.

FN: Except that one group that I have in the envelope . . .

(END OF TAPE)