

Rhea Adler

Interviewed by Regina Fleischer
Librarian, Wilmette Public Library

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track One

RF: . . . '85. We are taping Rhea Adler at 401 3rd Street, Wilmette, IL. Rhea has been a resident of Wilmette for . . . how long?

RA: 53 years.

RF: 53 years. Okay, Rhea.

RA: Come August.

RF: Go ahead, Rhea.

RA: Well, you want . . .

RF: Let's start by you telling us where you were born and about your childhood and how you came to Wilmette.

RA: I was born in DeKalb County, Illinois, the fourth generation of my family to have lived in the town. And they came as original purchases of land. When my great-great-grandfather was—or my great-grandfather—was eleven years old, his mother later came and joined his family from the East. And she had had fourteen children and was a widow at the time she came. They had come from Massachusetts and had purchased the land at a dollar and a quarter, which was the price that most of the land, at that time, in the 1830s, was selling for. And it was shortly after . . . well, with the Indians. And the boys had been out here originally in the armed forces, as we say today “the military”, and had been with Scott's army. And that was when cholera also was brought in from the East to Illinois, and there was a great cholera epidemic at that time. And I grew up, the first five years of my life, in DeKalb County, and Mr. Robertson, Bill Robertson at the library who's a volunteer also, has just written a book about the Woodstock-Sycamore Traction Company. And I was a child at that time when they were building that railroad, and I have a piece of the rail that Bill wants me to give to the Historical Society in Genoa [?], which I will do eventually. I'm using for a door stop now.

RF: [Laughs].

RA: And the wind from the East does come in my front door, and I love it. [Laughs.] Anyway, then when I was . . . before I had started to school, my father's father had died in Pennsylvania, and he had gone back for the funeral, and he decided to return to live there. So eventually, my mother and brother and I took the Pennsylvania railroad to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where we lived for two years. And I started to school in the Pennsylvania schools. And I had to be vaccinated for a successful vaccination for smallpox before I was allowed to enter school. But I apparently was immune before they vaccinated me because I never had a successful vaccination.

RF: It never took.

RA: Never took. And so they finally gave me a special bit of paper to offer to the school for admittance. So I spent my first two . . . part of my second year there. But at that time, the War was about to break out, World War I, that is. So my mother, brother, and I returned to Illinois, where my grandparents lived, my maternal grandparents. So, my mother had a set of Haviland china that was shipped back in a barrel, and it didn't come for months and months after we returned. And when they delivered it, we could hear the shards on the inside of it.

RF: It was broken?

RA: Every piece, but one dinner plate was left, and I have that now on my buffet. I remember it was one of the first times I saw my mother really cry. And it was quite an emotional experience to me, the fact I've remembered it all these years.

RF: And there was no way to replace it?

RA: No. My grandmother had a duplicate set in orchid and green, this was in pink. So when my mother died, my sister took my grandmother's set, and that was all right with me because I had things from my husband's side of the family. So anyway, we lived in the East, and that was quite an experience for a child of that age at that time. There are people today in my small home town who've never left it, haven't even been to Chicago. So, we did visit a maternal family reunion up in Nelson, Pennsylvania, which is just below the New York border, before we returned. My grandmother came to visit us, and we all went up there. And that was an experience because it was a large Scotch-Irish family that had come in the early 1800s, right after the Revolutionary War. To those parts, and they were a very close family. And all through my childhood, my mother's family had been very close. And one of the

brothers of the previous generations had settled up in Winnebago County, Illinois, and another one had settled in DeKalb County. But several of them had come out at the same time, and so they, and all their children and the grandchildren, always got together annually. And that existed down—I remember my husband and my three children and I attended one in their very young childhood. They were still having them. And I have pictures that I had from that length of time. And they would recount stories of how they came. They would read letters that were written, and I was fascinated by the fact there were no envelopes. They were always folded. . .

RF: And sealed?

RA: And the corners were crossed and a seal was put on them, and they would be by courtesy or someone or they would have to buy a stamp, and usually they were 25 cents.

RF: Oh, that was a lot of money then.

RA: That was a lot of money, then. But those were the things that created my interest in history.

RF: Mmm hmm.

RA: And so when I eventually went to the University, American History was my major.

RF: Which school did you go to?

RA: I had one year at Lake Forest College and then the rest at University of Illinois.

RF: Champaign?

RA: Champaign. And that was an interesting period, too.

RF: When did you meet your husband Harry?

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track Two

RA: Well, his father and mother were at my father and mother's wedding, and I have their signatures in my mother's wedding book.

RF: Isn't that interesting?

- RA: My father had worked for his father when he first came to town. He had come out for the Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago, and he had spent all his money. And he told me this story of going to the old Union Station in Chicago, which was down, approximately near, somewhere in the vicinity of where the later Union Stations were. But, it was an old, old building. And I later used to take the train to Chicago to visit my uncle and aunt, alone, from the time I was about ten.
- RF: It was safer to do that then.
- RA: Well, the conductor was known to my family, and they always took me to the station and spoke to him and told him to look after me 'til my aunt took me by the hand at the Union Station. So that . . . I remember my father's telling . . . He looked up at the board, and he had enough money in . . . there to buy a ticket to the town of Genoa, and he remembered there was one family from Pennsylvania that lived there, that he knew, and he knew if he got there, he could . . .
- RF: Have them take care of him?
- RA: Bread and board, today, but he knew he'd have shelter and food. And he found himself a job, and that was how come he landed in my mother's hometown, where she'd been, where, well, let's see, her grandfather was there and his mother, at that time.
- RF: So, Harry's father lived there also?
- RA: His father was superintendent of a shoe factory, and he had come out from the city of Chicago where his family lived. So, from both sides of our family we've always had very close ties to Chicago.
- RF: When you went away to college though, did you keep in touch?
- RA: He went to Beloit, and I went to Lake Forest. And yes, we were high school . . . Well, he used to sit, when I had to stay after school because I went on a political campaign once for sheriff of the county when I was in high school. So, the superintendent and our family were friends, and I was called into his office, and he asked what kind of punishment he thought I deserved. And I said well, I had gone without permission, and I supposed making up the time was an important factor. So I was kept after school that time, I remember.

- RF: But Harry was You were his sweetheart, then, more or less in high school?
- RA: Well, he sat . . . the story was, that he was sitting on the front steps to walk me home.
- RF: Ohhh.
- RA: So, [laughs], and he was. Our families lived on the same lot on two contiguous streets, and we walked through one lot to get to each other's front porch or back porch, either way. So that, all through high school, he'd . . .
- RF: And then you went to college, and he went to a different school than you did.
- RA: That's right.
- RF: So, when did you meet up again and get married?
- RA: Well, he decided that he wanted to be an engineer in the beginning, and Beloit didn't have any engineering courses. And so, after he worked one summer on building a concrete road for the state of Illinois between Marengo and Genoa, he decided he was not cut out to be an engineer, and he wanted a business course. And so, I had been one year at the University of Illinois, and he had gone to Wisconsin, but he didn't like being that far away. So he transferred in February from Wisconsin to the University of Illinois. . .

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track 3

- RA: . . . and got his Bachelor's degree in general business, and then he went to night school while he worked, after we were married, to get his CPA.
- RF: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. So what year did you get married?
- RA: In 1927. So, then we went back to our home town. In the meantime, his father was ill with cancer and passed away. We lived for a brief time in Genoa, but then we moved to Rockford. And by that time, let's see, our third . . . we had three children in four years. And nobody was getting married then because that was the midst of the Depression.
- RF: Yes, because the '29 crash.

RA: Yes. He had—while we were still in Genoa—while his father was ill, he had served as the acting superintendant of the Selz-Schwab [?] and Company Shoe Factory. And his uncle Dankmar was married to a Selz daughter, so this is the way the Adler family and the Selz family had connections. And several of the boys had worked in the different factories for the Selz Company. They had a factory, at that time, at Joliet where they made work shoes for people and for the . . .

RF: Is this where Harry was working, too?

RA: No. This was Factory Number 5 in Genoa.

RF: No? Because, you know, during the Depression it was hard to get a job.

RA: Oh, it was. And this was the concern we had. Because after his father died, also, in the Selz firm, the key people had died, and it was the next generation that was inheriting. It was just like I saw the Board of Trade building destroyed.

RF: Mmm hmm.

RA: Because the people that owned the land under . . . and the 99-year leases was expired.

RF: Yeah.

RA: And the building, Board of Trade building, was on three different lots. They combined three lots and had a 99-year lease, as most of the Chicago buildings were. The early comers to Chicago had owned the land as farms. A relative of my maternal grandfather had owned all of. . . had a farm where LaSalle Street now is. George W. Snow. And he was also in the lumber business. You know, at that time, the lumber from Michigan was being brought across the lake to build the houses for Chicago.

RF: Right.

RA: So that many of the now, current wealthy Lake Forest families are the early comers who owned that land they rented out for 99 years. And this is the way that many of the fortunes were made. Because they got it at a dollar-and-a-quarter an acre, and by the time it was sold for business buildings . . .

RF: So, Harry. . . . Where was he working in Genoa? Was he working in . . . ?

RA: A superintendent in the shoe factory.

RF: And then, how did you get to Wilmette?

RA: Well, our next move was to Rockford before we came to Wilmette. But this was in the depths of the Depression. And we rented a house for \$25 a month. And it was a beautiful, big building, because houses were—the big houses—were going baggy [?]. But he was making enough to pay \$25 dollars a month, but it was tight going. And it was on Auburn Court in Rockford. 'Course, Rockford had been the center of our shopping, anyway, all through my childhood. And it was well known to us. It wasn't the size it is now, by any means, but it was a . . .

RF: Larger town than where you were.

RA: It was an active community with furniture factories and lock [?] factories and things that, really, economically supported it in a good fashion. But then, things were very tight by this time. And this was in the early '30s. And, of course, we had. . . . Financially, people didn't realize how tight money was even for several years after the banks failed. We had, still, checks outstanding that we had to cover. We got the cash for the checks, but then we had to pay the people that didn't cash them. Some of them were still being held and hadn't been cashed. So we had to pay them. It was a three-way deal. We paid for things three times, I know. Because we'd issued a check to the merchant. It was in December 13th, and I had been Christmas shopping in DeKalb, so those checks hadn't cleared. And he had had to go to Chicago on business and had cashed a large check, from our personal account—

RF: Harry.

RA: With one of the local merchants. Yeah.

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track Four

RA: . . . and the didn't [?] before they closed the bank. So, we had to dig out from under that.

RF: So, in a sense, the banking system was not as sophisticated as it is today.

- RA: Oh, indeed it wasn't. There were no consolidations or . . .
- RF: . . . computerization or whatever. So, certain transactions were done differently, and they took time.
- RA: And much more slowly and in small-town fashion, so that this was quite a problem. But then we moved, briefly, to Chicago where my family had an apartment building and had an empty apartment. On the third floor, a walk-up, on Laurel Avenue [?], and we were getting rent free. And Harry was working in a wholesale jewelry firm. And he stayed there. . . . We came to Wilmette while he was still there, in 1932 and were there through '39. Here through '39, of course. And he was ?? in wholesale jewelers, who were also family. Family connections. These big families were really. . .
- RF: There was no way to go because that was the only way to go.
- RA: Well, that was the only way in those days you were finding jobs. So, with a job from his side of the family and housing from my side of the family. And the Christmas that first year after, well, for two years after, I remember. It was very, very carefully thought out by every member of the family, for every member of the family. And I remember my mother consulting me, what was each child to get? And she was so incensed because the first Christmas, there was just a profusion of dolls given to my older child. Then I think there were only two. Maybe only . . . no, it was when she was two. That must have been it. So then there were two of them in the family. But she had, I think a total of fourteen dolls, and I put them all away and gave them to her one at a time. And my mother thought I was an ogre to have done that. But they lasted well over a year because she could get, have a new doll to take someplace when she was going on a visit or something.
- RF: Mmm hmm.
- RA: I had to sort of curtail people giving from there on, because the grandparents were wanting to lavish . . .
- RF: [Indistinct] it's still the same.
- RA: Oh yes. I'm sure it is.
- RF: The grandparents wanting [indistinct] the grandchildren. Ah, but anyway, then you were in Rockford, and then, what prompted the move to Wilmette?

- RA: Space. That's today's big That everyone should have space, and that wasn't the idea Most people . . .
- RF: It wasn't jobs? It wasn't jobs? It wasn't Harry . . .
- RA: Oh, no. He was retaining the same job at the jewelry store.
- RF: Oh, really?
- RA: But we had to have space for the children.
- RF: Oh, that's right.
- RA: Because on the third floor, and I'd take them out in the morning to play, and they had to go to a school playground to play. I think the culmination . . .
- RF: Well, the environment was not . . .
- RA: Well, actually, what really precipitated it was I took my oldest child into the kindergarten room, and, at recess time, and we stood at the door waiting to be recognized, and a woman flew in, saying "What right have you to be in here?" And I said, "Well, I asked where the kindergarten was, and we came to see where our child would be coming." "You have no right to be here, and you should leave immediately." Well, we turned around and walked out, and I thought, "over my dead body will my child go to a Chicago school".
- RF: You mean, those things haven't changed in fifty-three years. [Laughs].
- RA: That's right. That's right.

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track Five

- RA: And so, anyway, we came to Wilmette.
- RF: Did you look in other communities?
- RA: Oh yes. My husband did the looking because I was home with three infants.

- RF: What made him choose Wilmette over, for instance, Evanston or Winnetka or . . . ?
- RA: He rode to the end of the el, and Stone and, and I don't even remember the second name of the realtor that was at Fourth and Linden. And they had a vacant house at 1538 Elmwood. That doesn't sound right. 1601, that's right. 1538 Washington, we lived at. 1601 Elmwood for \$35 a month.
- RF: Well, you know what is interesting as you are saying this because, that Harry got on the el and went all the way to the end of the.
- RA: Fourth and Linden.
- RF: You came a full circle in fifty-three years because here you are, living, practically . . .
- RA: At 401 . . .
- RF: . . . at the place where he got off.
- RA: That's right. That is so true. And, of course, this little corner up here is unique in that, it isn't a through street except for one way, and so we don't have a great deal of traffic. And it's been a very neighborly neighborhood for . . . we've lived here thirty years, come August 1st. And I've seen the houses on Laurel Avenue, which is south of us, two full times, almost every single house has had three different occupancies in our term here.
- RF: Well, I would say you are the kind of people who really stick it out. You have lived in Wilmette for fifty-three years. You have been living in the same house for thirty years. And how long have you been married?
- RA: Oh [laughs]. Sixty . . . wait a minute. Fifty . . . I have to figure it. '27 to '85.
- RF: That's a long time. So, that's what I'm saying. You really stick, don't ya?
- RA: Well, after all, I came out of an environment where my family had been there for four generations. And my great-grandchild will be coming to visit me next week, and I'm advertising for a playpen.
- RF: Ohhh.

- RA: And I can't seem, I tried Sunday to find if anybody had an unused playpen, and there was one there, but it was definitely being used. Somebody with a two year-old, so that I can understand. . .
- RF: So anyway, you came to Wilmette, and you had three young children. You were a young woman, not married terribly long at the time. What year was it that you came here?
- RA: In '32.
- RF: '32. So you only were married five years at that point.
- RA: Yeah.
- RF: And you had three children and a husband, and you arrived in a completely new community where you really didn't know anyone.
- RA: That's right. And I used to walk down the street and think, "Oh, if somebody'd just say 'hello' or smile, even. But people were still depressed. But the interesting thing about going through the Depression also was that everybody was so solicitous of everybody else, and everybody was in the same boat, more or less. Because no matter how much you had or how little you had, it still. . . . Bacon was 13 cents a pound, I remember.
- RF: Even the people who had jobs and who might have still not been touched by it were threatened.
- RA: That's right. Everybody was threatened. And so, it was But everybody was also helping everybody. Cause they knew. . . . And anybody who could do anything. . . . And so the family attachments were very strong. And as I said, anyway, I had come from a Scotch-Irish family that, well, if you were a forty-eleventh cousin we used to say you were still a cousin and a relative.
- RF: Kissing cousin. Kissing cousin.
- RA: Kissing cousin. So, this was true through my entire lifetime.
- RF: Well, then you were in a position where your children started going to school in Wilmette, and you had integrate yourself into the community and find . . .

[May be some content missing]

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track Six

RA: My second community contact was Helen Rye of the League of Women Voters who had asked me if I would participate in an election. And that was an election for Cook County Supervisor from Wilmette. A man had had the job for many, many years, and, as I recall, they were running another person. And she was supporting the incumbent and asked me to help. And I had worked on previous local elections in De Kalb County, and so I became interested in and that way joined the League of Women Voters. Those two organizations really became the ones that I remained active in for the rest of my life. Not always in an official capacity, but I'm still interested in the work that they do. I was later asked to participate in the Girl Scouts as a leader of the Brownies, the under-grouping in the Girl Scouts. And so for about seven years, I was . . .

RF: You had your daughters in that.

RA: I had my own daughters. That was the reason I could participate, and they were short of leaders, as mostly they are. So, while they were active, I did take the responsibility for a troupe. And during that time, I went to New York for a training program with the Girl Scouts. At that time, they didn't have local training groups. They had just one spot up on the Hudson River in a small community near Sing Sing, as a matter of fact. I assume they still have it. I did enjoy the contact. My girls later told me they thought I leaned over backwards to be fair to the other kids and discriminated against them. So, somebody's always feeling they're being discriminated against, I guess. So, anyway, they went on and did other things, and so did I, from that point on. But while I was doing that, my real source was the Wilmette Library. And I don't know that this community has always realized how fortunate it has been because the history of the Wilmette Library is a unique one. It was started by the Women's Club in the beginning and was in one room at the center of Central and Wilmette Avenues.

RF: It's probably one of the oldest ones around here with maybe the exception of Evanston.

RA: Well, that I didn't know, but it's true, Wilmette and Evanston have always been

RF: Continuous. Have a continuous library, whatever it . . .

RA: Yes, and culturally, generally. Many Chicago businessmen lived either in Evanston or Wilmette. And those were the beginnings of

both the Village and the Library. Then Mr. Carnegie, they were successful in getting a library when he was building, providing the money to build libraries in various communities. But Wilmette already had a well-established library, and I suppose that's why they were one of the fortunate ones.

RF: To get the money for the building.

RA: Yes.

RF: They had their collection already.

RA: That's right. And so today it is still considered one of the top libraries in the state of Illinois and in the country, I think, because Illinois and its library usage is far . . .

RF: Yeah. Illinois has a very good library system, system of libraries.

RA: That is right. And who would know better than you, who works for the Wilmette Library.

RF: Was there any specific reason why they picked that specific site? Do you remember anything about that?

RA: That I don't know, other than it might have been vacant. And it was still a part of the original Village plotting. It ran from the Lake to Fifteenth Street, were the boundaries of the Reservation. And from Elmwood Avenue to Central Street, Evanston. Now, there are two or three blocks, this side of Central Street that were in the Reservation, that later Wilmette ceded to Evanston.

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track Seven

RA: They became part of . . .

RF: Well, when you came here in '3 . . .

RA: '32.

RF: What was there? What was there? At the library?

RA: The Carnegie Library.

RF: Was origi. . . .

- Ra: And the steps were, I don't know how many there were, but it was . . . even for a young matron. And for little legs. Because they had to go up before they went down, the children's library was in the basement at that time. And it was a very active children's group. Mrs. Moore [?], I believe, was it, who was there?
- RF: I would have to check on that.
- RA: As I remember, her name was a Mrs. Moore.
- RF: As Children's Librarian.
- RA: As Children's Librarian. And Anne Woodmark was the Adult Librarian for the whole library. And she was here for many years and did very good yeoman service, but then she was loyal to her home community, and they wanted her to come back to start a county library system in the state of Idaho, I believe. And she went back. So that was when the community really started looking for librarians, and Helen Siniff came to us at that time. And she . . .
- RF: She was, at that time, a young woman.
- RA: That's right.
- RF: Single. And. . .
- RA: Very, very community minded. And she knew her community well and built. . . At that time, the library grew in stature and content and library books. But she wasn't just a book person. She knew her individual users as well as her . . . But it was small. I think she may have had a staff of full-time people. . . maybe there were three others beside herself in '32. Later, it grew. Today, do we have an up-to-date number?
- RF: Well. Yeah, we have . . . course we have, now on the list, we have about seventy people, but they are not full-time.
- RA: Yes, I know.
- RF: We do have a lot of part-time. I would say about thirty-five full-time.
- RA: Thirty-five full-time people. And so, you can see how . . .
- RF: Were the hours, were the hours the same? I mean, were they open as much? Because we are open twelve hours a day and seven days a week.

- RA: I . . .
- RF: I know they weren't open seven days a week.
- RA: They didn't, they weren't . . .
- RFs: They were not open on Sundays.
- RA: Oh, no. No. Saturday, they may have closed at noon, although I doubt it. I think they were open six days a week. And not every evening. There were certain evenings you could go, because I remember my husband and I walking later to the library in the evening.
- RF: Now, you also, then, aside from your interest in the library, which you have definitely been an avid supporter of the library.
- RA: Well, user, too.
- RF: Well, user, too, but a supporter in many, many ways with your volunteer activities later on.
- RA: Well, the library has been the crux, but the community was a very . . . Now, I know you may take exception to this, but there was a time when there was a very strong community feeling. It wasn't me, me, me, it was we. I served on a number of joint committees in the Village, one on recreation. I remember, at one time, we contacted the National Recreational Association and had their advice in evaluating the Village program. At that time, everything was free. I was sitting in the park one day, in Vatmann Park, where we lived very close to at that time. So every morning I'd take my children over. And a woman coming up to me and saying, "Those are the three happiest children I ever saw." And I said "Well, thank you very much. That I will accept gratefully." Because you couldn't say anything that I had more a part in than to create an atmosphere for them.

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track Eight

- RA: And so, but every day they were at Vatmann Park in the summertime to play. And every program at that time was supported by tax dollars and could be because there were so few people in the community. I think at the time we came here, it was not above 10,000. Somewhere in that vicinity.

- RF: [Indistinct]. 29,000. It has doubled. Tripled. Tripled.
- RA: Tripled, right, practically, in the time I've been here. And the community has. We would go to the Ridge, and then from there on out, almost, except for Indian Hill Estates had been developed before the Depression, but then we felt we had country. And we drove back and forth, of course, because our parents lived there. So that, now, we drive well across the Fox River before we feel that we've hit rural area. Many, many people who work out of O'Hare have their own planes and fly back and forth. Many of the pilots live out on acreage in DeKalb County and McHenry County. And, uh, so this . . .
- RF: I know, we passed somewhere, and they had not only a garage but they also had a hangar for planes.
- RA: Oh, many of the farmers in my hometown, even when I was . . . Well, mostly seeing it from the time I left there, about is the time when they started stretching out. But during WWII, we had blackouts in Wilmette. And, a blackout meant that you couldn't, if you had lights on in a house when the men came around for inspection, and they could see from the outside, even a sliver of light coming between the blinds and the wall, you'd be scored for it and penalized. I don't know what the penalty was because I never got a citation. And we had many coupon books for sugar, for meat.
- RF: There was rationing.
- RA: Rationing during that time. And we had to . . . That was a community service. Most of the service came through the League of Women Voters. On the Joint Committee for Recreation, I believe I represented the League because I had been active in, what was then, the Social Welfare Department. So, all of these things fell within my category, so that I helped to issue ration books for sugar and for meat.
- RF: Most of these things were staffed by volunteers, then. This was a . . .
- RA: Community people. They were never paid. They were always community volunteers. And this was a time when everybody seemed to want to be helpful to the community, and the community was aware of its individual supporters, both volunteers and tax-payers. And there was an intimacy about it. I know, my butcher came to be enrolled for the draft. And I had been buying meat from him for quite some time, and I was signing him up. And I hadn't

realized he was that young. I thought he was thirty-five or more, because thirty-five, I think, was the cut-off point. And my husband had wanted to join the Navy because he was in the dispensable [?]. That was at the time when he start . . . he had, by that time, gotten his CPA in night school and so he had been doing CPA work, or accounting work, previous to that time, anyway. But he tried to join the Navy in an area where he felt he had some competency. They refused him, though, because he was, by that time, thirty-five. But they did tell him that he had to get out, he must not have been thirty-five, as yet, because they told him if he stayed in the jewelry business that he would be called. And so he started looking around, and . . . I forget what his first . . .

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track Nine

RA: Oh, that was when we went to the Florsheim Shoe Company. No, he was somewhere else, because we discussed this the other day. Florsheim came to him to ask him to come and work for them. But he decided on something else at that time, and he went into public accounting with Ernst & Ernst. And from there he went to a client. For one year, we left Wilmette and went to Iowa. By that time, our girls were grown, and our oldest daughter had finished high school. And our oldest daughter had finished high school at New Trier and their experience, her experience at New Trier had been very good and very satisfying. We also had the experience of having all three of them in, what they called, the Kellogg summer school. The Kellogg Foundation had provided Northwestern with the funds to bring its teachers down here for summer schooling at Northwestern, and they had a demonstration school in the old [local? Lincoln?] school. And so, for several years, they had gone there and had a marvelous experience because Dorothy Ollendorf [?] headed it up, and that was before she came to the Wilmette system. And she got local teachers to demonstrate. And they also had parents involved at that time. So that, I remember once, she sent my up to New Trier High School, where a group from Sherwood, Wisconsin had come down. And Carleton Washburne was conducting the service, and, of course, I had been interested in the Winnetka technique which I had heard about at Lake Forest, at first. And then, I had taken exception in one of the discussion groups to something that he said. And we got into quite . . . because, you either didn't back down or you had to convince him that your opinion had value. And so it was quite a hassle before we got through. But I enjoyed it thoroughly because I had come from a family where you could say almost anything at the dinner table, but you had to support your point of view. And that was not one of the

things that was commonly done, and to the girls in the family. And so I've always, maybe you could say, been too opinionated, but . . .

RF: Well, but your opinions were backed up with facts.

RA: Well, this was the point, apparently, because I did get to do things that I wouldn't have otherwise. And it was true that at the League of Women Voters in 1952, I was asked, they put out a common call for people to work at the GOP convention at the Hilton. It was pre-convention time over the Fourth of July, and I thought that would be fun.

RF: Well, who was running that year?

RA: That year, well, this was pre-convention.

RF: Was this the [?] Republican convention?

RA: This was the Republican convention where Eisenhower and Taft were the two strong nomin . . . well, they were wanting to be the nominees. And it was highly contested. And Dorothy Ollendorf had come back from the National Education Convention in New York, in Atlantic City, I believe it was. Eisenhower had spoken, he was then head of Columbia University, and I asked her what she'd gotten, and this was the one thing I've retained out of it. She said, well, Mr. Eisenhower spoke to them. And I said, "Was it good?" and she said, "Well, I'll let you decide." "He put the question to us: 'When are the people in your profession willing to do your job to put the people in my profession out of business?'"

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track Ten

RA: And she said, "Now, I'll let you decide how you feel." So, when this was thrown out, my kids were grown, and I had no plans for the Fourth of July, so I agreed to go down to the Hilton to be active. So, in that way, I became head of the convention headquarters at the Hilton. And was at the desk to answer questions. And appeared one morning very, very early, and they brought in a slew of telegrams for Henry Cabot Lodge, for Mr. Eisenhower, for any number of people, and I said "But no one's here." And they said, "Well, you sign for them then." And I said, "My signature or theirs?" And they said, "Theirs." And so I forged all the VIP's signatures.

RF: [Laughs].

- RA: But, I did meet the Lodge family at that time, and Mrs. Lodge was a delightful person. And so I had really gotten a rare experience at this time. Because I went down in the elevator one night with Earl Warren [?] and he was . . .
- RF: Was he at that time. . .? No, he wasn't a Chief Justice yet.
- RA: No, Eisenhower was . . .
- RF: Was he appointed? [Difficult to interpret].
- RA: That's right.
- RF: Why did he appoint him?
- RA: I went down, and he was really jubilant. The next morning, I was there early. This was the morning of the telegram. And he was about to take an elevator up. But he had the most drawn face, and he looked like he'd been drug through a rat hole, as they say. And I thought, what has happened to that man in twelve hours? It wasn't twelve hours, really, since I'd seen him last. And then later in the day I heard there had been a great discussion over Earl Warren or Richard Nixon, and the Young Republicans had definitely made up their minds that they had to have a representation, and they [succeeded? Seceded?—can't tell—AB]. I also met at that time some very interesting young men who had been on Mr. Eisenhower's, General Eisenhower's, staff in Europe. And they had come back to America [?], beginning some families, but were bound and determined to support him as an individual for civil accomplishments. And so it was a most interesting time. I remember meeting Jim Raskin [?] who was married to a gal from my home county who had been at the University of Illinois with me. And I was talking with him, and he said, "How do they let you go home at night?" Because he knew Wilmette was very much a Taft—as a matter of fact, my own husband was a Taft supporter through all of this.
- RF: Oh, Wilmette was basically for Taft?
- RA: Yes, and I said, "Well, I sneak in after dark, Jim, and come out before daylight . . ."
- RF: However, you were always independent, so this was just another time.
- RA: This was another time, yes. It is part of . . .

RF: How did you start volunteering for Newberry? You were doing work . . .?

RA: Well . . .

Rhea Adler: CD 1, Track Eleven

RA: That was so easy because I had been a user at Newberry Library for years under [???] founder. Oh, I can't think of his first name, Mr. Wolf. Who's dead now. He and Mrs. Chase had been the genealogical department. During the War, I had made a bet with somebody in the League. They were saying, "Oh, we've never had rationing before. What are we coming to? We've never had this before." And so I said to the person, "Do you want to bet?" And we made a bet, for five dollars, I remember. So I started going to Newberry to do research on the Revolutionary War to find out whether they ever had rationing or not. Well, I kept coming across family names. And I said, "Just what part did my family play in this?" And so after, I did find, I started with my family, though. And I wasn't finding anything in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, or Vermont. And I kept thinking about it and puzzling, and I thought, well, you know they must have had to curtail things. Because they were getting everything from Europe at that time.

RF: Was history your major when you were in college?

RA: American History had been my major. And that came out of my family reunions where they read letters that were written from the East and carried by hand by somebody coming this way.

RF: So then when you started doing this research . . .

RA: I had a history background for the research, and of course, the University of Illinois always had a very fine and versatile library collection. But that didn't prepare me either for the Newberry experience because at that time, they had very little help, and you were on your own. You went there, and . . .

RF: You had to know what you were doing.

RA: You had to know. Because what are now, four volumes or eight volumes called The Newberry Library Index, covered the side of two whole walls of the reading room of the library. And they were great big things with little inserts. Just the pages today, they photograph those to make the books. And I remember the day I

went into the library, and they all were gone. And I wondered, where in the world? What had happened to them? Well, they never had shelf space again after the Hall [?] Company printed the first eight volumes, they were. Well, I don't know whether it was first done in four volumes or in eight. They have both sets. I assume maybe the four preceded the eight and then they found it was more practical to have it in eight because more people could use it, twice as many people, at the same time. This is the way most libraries will have it now.

Rhea Adler: CD 2, Track One

[No data on this track?]

Rhea Adler: CD 2, Track Two

RF: You were saying that the political experience . . .

RA: . . . was really something I thoroughly enjoyed. Because I went to two conventions. Three conventions, really. I had been in the senatorial convention of '54 when Austin Wyman [?] was the Citizens for Eisenhower choice. And it was interesting because I learned so much of political machinations. I had been politically-minded all my life, from the time before I was old enough to vote and women could vote. Because . . .

RF: . . .not politically sophisticated.

RA: That's right. It was small-town experience. And I knew you made choices. And our family had always been in the thick of local politics. So when I came to Wilmette it was natural for me to still participate in the political side of the thing. So I had been active, not only locally, but at the county level, in Cook County. Joint committees that were active in getting support to the community in economical ways. Many times, we'd have joint committee meetings, and I would be representing the Cook County League of Women Voters. So that county context taught me a great deal, as well as the local context. So, I just was that kind of animal. I used to babysit so people go to the polls and vote. And I remember my mother waiting for my father to come home in 1920 to tell her how to vote. And I thought to myself, "That will never happen to me. I'm going to know myself how I want to vote." I think my husband would say I'm still that way because as a rule, we don't see eye-to-eye on people and things. But he has a great deal to offer from the business side of the thing, too. So it can give me a . . .

RF: Insight.

RA: . . . an insight and a levelness that I probably didn't always have and don't always have. But anyway, I was in Washington twice during the Eisenhower tenure, and I've read much of what has been written about him since, and I have many of his books, and I still do think he probably will be as good an administrator as we've had in the White House, as time goes on. He's recently regained more stature than he had for a long time because many people thought he was, between his illnesses and his recreational activities, that he did little. But he did it in his brain, as I've been able to figure out, rather than by throwing his weight around. And he thought his plans through as he did in the military. And that, I think, was what impressed me most about him as an individual, was the young men I met who had served under him in the conventions, who were so really dedicated to him. As a civilian they were going to support him after they'd served in battle. That coupled with his thinking to the teachers made me feel that he served us well and . . .

RF: Long.

RA: But what I gained from all of my volunteer years . . . I said, my education gave me the tools to work with but the knowledge came from experience. And this is really . . . I feel that I've had so much more from the community than I've ever given.

RF: Well, you . . .

Rhea Adler: CD 2, Track Three

RF: . . . have been active as a volunteer at Newberry, you have been active as a volunteer at the Wilmette Public Library until very recently. I think you have given a lot of yourself.

RA: Well, I've gained much more.

RF: Well, that's a two-way street.

RA: Yeah, this is the way life is. . .

RF: Right.

RA: . . . and it should be as I see it. You always get back more than you give.

- RF: Tell me about your children. Your children are living in . . .
- RA: Three daughters. Married.
- RF: Married.
- RA: Two on the west coast. One in Westchester County, New York. And they're all active in different activities. And that was when I decided, that when they started doing community things, in their own communities where they were living, that I could sit back and do as I pleased.
- RF: Well, it never made you sit back, but it was nice that you were able to pass it on.
- RA: Well, I could do what I wanted to. That was the thing that I felt. The things I had done previously, I didn't always do for myself. I did because I thought that it would be helpful to raising my children, and it was. As my husband said one night going from the library, "You know you study more since you've left school than you did in school."
- RF: And that's very admirable.
- RA: Well, the thing was that I knew what I was seeking, and it was what I wanted and not what somebody else was imposing on me.
- RF: How many grandchildren do you have?
- RA: Uhhh. Eight. Four boys and four girls.
- RF: Are they married?
- RA: Most of them are married.
- RF: Do you have any great-grandchildren?
- RA: I have one. And she's coming next week.
- RF: Oh, right.
- RA: So we're looking forward to that.
- RF: And Harry is still working.
- RA: Still working. He's been retired for fifteen, or is it thirty years?

- RF: [Laughs].
- RA: No, is it thirty years he's been retired?
- RF: Well, I don't know how he even retired.
- RA: Fifteen years. He's not retired. He works seven days a week.
- RF: Right. He can call that retirement.
- RA: Well, he says: "What would I do? You can't read all the time." He's an avid reader, and the library has meant a great deal to him. But his reading is for recreation because he has so much thick reading to do with his business.
- RF: So, here you both are, still, after your children are grown and after many years of marriage and everything, you are still very involved and active in doing things of interest. Because he's working and he's reading, and you're reading and you're still, not as active as you used to be, but you are still very much plugged in on what is going on through your different contacts.

Rhea Adler: CD 2, Track Four

- RA: Well, with children on both coasts, you're very much involved still with their interests and activities and thinking, and so we have visitors, and I don't care to go visiting as much. Traveling today . . . We've had some marvelous trips, and I've been reflecting on the trips we've taken. I got something out for my husband to see, a record he kept of a trip we made to the East, and the difference in prices. These are things that are fun today to get a motel or a hotel for \$10 a night for two people . . .
- RF: Impossible.
- RA: Yes. And today, and I had some very fortunate experience in that my father was in the hotel business, and my brother has been in the hotel business for his entire career. And he has managed some very fine hotels on the West Coast. He began with the Curry Company at Yellowstone. Not Yellowstone. Yes, I guess it was. But he had also . . .
- RF: This is the brother in Santa Barbara.

- RA: That's right. And he's retired now, but he was at the Santa Barbara Biltmore for fifteen years before Marriott took it over. Santa Barbara is a marvelous place to retire to. I wouldn't mind it if he weren't there. But I wouldn't go because his friends are my friends, and he was a younger brother, and I don't think that would be fair. And not only that, I am perfectly content where I am.
- RA: Plus the fact that, yes, home is the important thing to me. It's true my children are spread out, and I'd like to see my grandchildren more, but they're not even in the same communities they grew up in and their parents are in. This is a much more versatile kind of life today that we live.
- RF: Well, I think in summation, sort of, the thing that I get out of talking to you, Rhea is . . .

Rhea Adler: CD 2, Track Five

- RF: . . . you have been an extremely alert person. You have been certainly aware of everything that was going on around you. You were observing, participating, testing all kinds of things.
- RA: Experimenting, maybe.
- RF: Experimenting.
- RA: It's been a family trait.
- RF: Right. You have preserved your independence. [Laughs].
- RA: Well, I think I . . .
- RF: You've certainly passed along some of your qualities to your children, and I'm sure that they are passing it on to their children.
- RA: It's interesting to have my grandchildren bring their intended mates to meet us, [indistinct]. When they decide they are going to be their mates, they always wanted us to meet them. We have one new granddaughter that we haven't met personally, but we've talked to her on the telephone.

- RF: Also, you have come from a very close-knit family, and you have, in spite of the distances between you and your children and your grandchildren, you were able to maintain a close-knit . . .
- RA: This is true.
- RF: . . . which is very difficult to do.
- RA: Well, you know, I said, what do they mean when they talk about there being--what is the phrase they use for the difference in generations?
- RF: Generational gap.
- RA: The gap. What is a generational gap? I don't know. Because I never have felt that my grandchildren weren't close to me, and I think they feel the same way to both of us. Because when I was sick in the hospital, I immediately got from all the grandchildren, all kinds of, what I call my love basket.
- RF: I think you can be extremely proud because you have been a constant, you know, in a changing world. We live in an extremely changing world, and you are certainly a witness to that. You have been a constant. Because you have maintained a very straight. . .
- RA: Sometimes too straight for people! [Laughs].
- RF: . . . straight-arrow kind of attitude. You have been extremely loyal to your community. You have been loyal to your family. You have contributed in many ways through whatever was possible. And I think that, in conclusion we should say, that we are very happy to have a Rhea Adler.
- RA: Well, Regina, your saying so is really very touching [emotional].
- RF: Thank you. This is Regina Fleischer. I also live in Wilmette, and I am a librarian at the Wilmette Library. Thank you.