

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk

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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: Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk

Interviewer: Rhea Adler

Date of interview:

Previous residences of Hoffman family · first 1843 · boyhood of Hoffman brothers · farming and raising produce for the Chicago Market, %South Water St.+

First retail store (general merchandise) at Ridge/Wilmette Ave. - burned Dec. 8 · well stocked for Christmas trade

Ice house at Twin Lakes, Wisconsin

Grandparents' journey from Germany described

Childhood of John and %Phil+Hoffman - father's death when

John was 12 years old and Phil was 14 - boys ran farm

Drove produce to %South Water St. Market+- \$.05 beer and a free lunch

Decision that there were easier ways to make money than farming

Hoffman Brothers first store on southeast corner Ridge and Wilmette Ave. · business prospered · fire in 1909 · lumber yard fire - Ice House at Twin Lakes burned

Wholesale houses who replenished merchandise

Commerce to and from Wilmette by ships · Gage piers · Drury builders

Stores built on N.E. corner Ridge/Wilmette Ave.

Witt's Dairy · livery stable · first fire house

Purchased Coal and Lumber Co. and called it Hoffman Bros. Coal and Lumber Co. · John ran it and Phil ran the merchandise · no accounting from 1888 until 1945 when Philip Hoffman died

Gross Point from Central St., Evanston to Lake Ave., Wilmette had 13 or 14 saloons · drinkers as well as %riff raff+came · Lauermann's at Elmwood and Ridge (N.B. N.W. corner)

Lauermann/ Vollmann family account

Towns in Germany from whence they came

Hoffman's trip to Denn, Germany in 1950

Elizabeth Hoffman manages merchandise store for 25 years · Girl Scout leadership · people involved

Father Netstraeter and St. Joseph parish

Father Vattmann · Spanish American War chaplain · father · typhoid fever 1908- 09

St. Joseph's - parish in Chicago Diocese · old school and church in one building

Discussion of higher education in latter 19th century in Illinois · originally post office was %Wynetka+in census of 1860

ABSTRACT (cont.)

Hoffman family great travelers · travel much more prevalent than we realize ·  
Uncle Phil and Grandmother Hoffman\$ two European trips · an uncle and John  
Hoffman to Europe - Mrs. John Hoffman and three daughters and a niece went in  
1950 for almost three months.

John Hoffman, Jr. · library board member %for years+· Police/ Fire  
Commission · on first board of First Federal and Loan - Director of Wilmette  
Bank 1945 to 75 - brother Phil also served in various capacities in village ·  
brother Joe served in World War II with the %Seabees+for 4 years- managed the  
hardware store (now Spitzer\$)

Mary Hoffman an attorney · younger sister Ann an artist and teacher ·  
American Academy of Art · died suddenly very young  
Ridge Ave. - a %family street+· settled by a group who came together  
Treaties · Chicago · 1833

Gypsies at 17th Lawndale for weeks every year - Willows and willow whistles  
Visits to Lincoln Park · open Cadillac · Leghorn hats · popcorn balls ·  
cotton candy · organ grinder/monkey man

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk

RA: What is your name and where do you live?

EHK: At the present time? Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk and I live at 54 Wagner Road in Northfield.

RA: And where did you live prior to that time?

EHK: I lived at 1922 Wilmette Avenue in Wilmette. In fact, I was born there as were all but one of my brothers and sisters. The - my father and mother were both from Wilmette. My father lived at, I guess, the southernmost part of Ridge Avenue and my mother came from the northernmost part of Ridge Avenue. They were about a mile and a half apart.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: And when my mother and father were first married, they lived with Grandmother Hoffman in the Hoffman homestead, which is at about two hundred and four something Ridge is the address. It's right at Isabella.

RA: And where, near Hubert Humphrey or Hoffmans?

EHK: Yes. Right - Yes, the home that is next to the Hubert Hoffman Florist is the remodeled homestead.

RA: I see. It still stands then?

EHK: Yes, it was - well, it was gutted and completely remodeled in about, oh maybe, 1930 or '32.

RA: I see. Do you know when it was first built? Would your grandfather have built that house?

EHK: I would guess that he did.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont. 2

RA: It would be well over a hundred years old then?

EHK: The - the - yes, because if - well, my father was born there and he was born in 1865.

RA: Well, there you are.

EHK: Yes. And he was one of the younger ones.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: So that - that house would - I imagine it was built maybe around in ~~45~~ or ~~50~~.

RA: This is most interesting.

EHK: See the Hoffman family came to this country in 1843.

RA: I see. -

EHK: Now I'm not exactly sure when my grandparents were married, but they were married here.

RA: Here in Wilmette or in Gross Point?

EHK: Urn hum.

RA: There were two brothers who came together?

EHK: No - aah...

RA: There was another Hoffman family living adjoining your grandmother in the 1880 census. That's why I asked. A Mary Hoffman, who was also a widow.

EHK: A widow? well, maybe I can tell you - I think Aunt Tillie - that's Mrs. Blazer - was there a fire? And she was sent over to the other place and they asked her to stay for supper. ~~No~~, she didn't think she could stay for supper, +and they went on talking and she said,

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont<sup>d</sup>. 3

%Well, she thought she had to go home+and they said, %Well, why?+

RA: Oh.

EHK: They said there was a fire. (Laughter)

RA: Yes. This is so true. Now we've established that the other Hoffman family were no relations, but you have identified them.

EHK: Well, I said that they - I didn't think that there was - shall I mention this?

RA: Yes.

EHK: Are we talking at all?

RA: Yes.

EHK: Yes, the other Hoffman family is - I remember my father speaking that there was - and I believe his name was - no, his name was (indistinct) , but they were next door neighbors, but there was no relationship.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: No, when grandfather came - he and his wife and sister with six or seven children - I think that -

RA: All those children had been born in Germany?

EHK: In Germany because we have their, excuse me, baptismal records.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: That we brought along.

RA: I see.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 4

EHK: Along with · it's always · that's listed in last.

RA: Oh, yes. Of course.

EHK: The record and then who they were baptized with.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: But, of course, if they came and wanted to be married, or even for their citizenship, I imagine they would have to have some record of the birth.

RA: That's right.

EHK: So -

RA: Do you have any of the · uh · rights of passage or of the kinds of things they gave for permitting them to travel to another country from Germany? Have you ever seen...

EHK: I think we do. We also have their bill that they got from the steamship, the Agnes, and · the food that they put aboard to take care of them while they were coming over. Evidently, every family cooked their own food.

RA: It's probably true.

EHK: They left from Rotterdam.

RA: They left · many ships left from Rotterdam that came at that time - that came before.

EHK: That came here. And, uh · and I'm sure · we have something else that tells about, about the arrival. About · ·

RA: The reason I ask was that I had occasion, in doing some



Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont<sup>d</sup>. 5

research, to · to have translated a German right of passage or whatever we would call it · a passport. And it was granted by the Duke of Sax-Weimar at that time. And this was most interesting because it described the color of the eyes, the height and the pug nose of the individual. She was a widow with two sons coming to this country.

EHK: Seems to me something that was my grandfather's · that he had blond hair and blue eyes.

RA: They could well be that.

EHK: I · I - someday I will bring those down. I think you<sup>d</sup> find some of these old papers very, very interesting.

RA: I hope you will remember the Library · someday - eventually · uh, for their safekeeping because I do think these have great historical value. Then we<sup>d</sup> go back to your father and mother who lived with your grandmother.

EHK: Yes, in the beginning -

RA: In the beginning.

EHK: Now before that when Dad was a little boy · his father died when he was 12 and Uncle Phil was 14 - and he had been sick for two years. I think it was tuberculosis.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: And so these two little boys · their older brother, Frank, was a bachelor and wasn't home, but Frank was a painter · a house painter.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 6

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: And so he was not very much interested in the farm, and so the boys really and truly ran the farm. And they would take their produce downtown to the market. They would have to leave early in the morning - I would say 4 or 5 o'clock to ride with a horse and buggy - or horse and wagon down to what I imagine would be about South Water Street, and then they would sell their wares, at the best price, and then have to head home. And Dad always said that when he sold his produce and didn't have any change, he didn't stop, but at that time you know they could buy a stein of beer for a nickel and have a whole meal...

RA: That's right.. .free lunch with the beer.

EHK: With the beer. So, that was always something that they did even if it was early morning, but they could get a whole lunch for nothing. But if it was just dollars, he always wanted to bring as many of those home to his mother. And when he would leave the market in the morning after his sale, he would tie himself on to the seat of the wagon, and then the horse would bring him home all by himself. And he told one story that one time there was a terrible snowstorm. Evidently it had been a very snowy winter, and there were about at least five or six days when no one could get into the market, and

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 7

they happened to have had a very, very pretty supply of hay. So they loaded it when they finally could get through. They loaded a load of hay as high as they could load it and he went down to sell his hay. And they knew that there...that they would get a good price, but Dad always told the story the same way. He came up and one man came along and said, "Oh, Sonny, that's a nice load of hay. I'll give you two dollars a ton for it," And my father said, "Oh, no." And that was early, and then he kept at ~~em~~ and at ~~em~~ because very few people came in with anything, and I think they.. ..he ended up. ..finally offered him when he knew he wasn't going to get anymore, and that Sonny knew what he was doing. I think he got about eight dollars a ton - so that was a very successful day.

RA: Oh, indeed, but a whole day's labor.

EHK: A whole day's labor...

RA: And many more before to put the hay out.

EHK: But at least the boys were smart enough to know when there was a demand. That was when you drove down and you made your money. And so after they had farmed for quite a few years, they decided on a very hot day - I suppose it was July because you usually make hay in July - they were sitting under a tree resting, and they decided there must be an easier way to make money.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 8

And then they spoke to their mother who backed. . .and they opened up the first store.. .which was general merchandise. And that was at the southeast corner of Ridge and Wilmette Avenues.

RA: Tell me, then did Grandmother sell the land off as building lots eventually or did she sell most of her land in a large quantity?

EHK: Most of it was kept together. I think eventually the biggest part was bought by Hubert, who had his greenhouses and his land there.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: And then it stretched across Ridge and went west, and I know we all had lots there until not too many years ago when they were eventually sold when that area was finally developed.

RA: And probably that property your father built on in 1822, Wilmette Avenue, was part of the farm originally?

EHK: Not of the Hoffman farm, although there was some sort of relationship because in the...ah...the legal...there's something about the Pasbach.. .and who the Pasbach's are, I'm not sure, but it seems that there was....there was...there was a relationship...now maybe...

RA: I think there in the...

EHK: Maybe Mrs. Pasbach could have been my grandfather's sister that, I see, was the way the relationship was.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 9

That she was a Hoffman.

RA: I see.

EHK: That could be where - that there could be some relationship there.

RA: I see.

EHK: Of course, that the business prospered - they had two very hard working young men, and then after they were in business there...uh...I don't just know exactly when that stone building was built...at the south...at the northeast corner. Uh...That was a very lovely store, had three apartments above it, but it did.. .that burned in 1909.

RA: You never knew what cause the fire?

EHK: Well...there has been lots of speculation, and...I guess we'd just let that rest.

RA: All right.

EHK: Uh. . . this is - and fires were very common in those days. It was hard to fight them, too. There was conversation that it may have been set afire - uh - because they had found very serious fires before here.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: A lumber yard burned...and a barn full of horses burned ...and this store, and then we had a ..an ice house up at Twin Lakes...that burnt to the ground, and then there was another...

RA: Tell me about the ice house. Did they store the ice

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 10

up there and bring it down here then?

EHK: Well...I don't...i think so. They didn't have that too many years.

RA: I see.

EHK: But it was...it was...uh...the ice was cut from...

RA: The lakes.

EHK: From the lakes. And that's Lake Cathy and Lake Marie, I believe.

RA: That's right.

EHK: And then it was a...it was stored. Now, whether it was sold in that area, you know, up to McHenry...or whether it was brought all the way down here.. .we never did discuss this. This was long - this was before I was born. The most interesting thing, though, that I think about it, is that Mother said that one year they did not make one speck of - not able to cut one speck of ice until March...and they filled the ice house in March. It was...

RA: How interesting.

EHK: It was such a mild winter. In March...should have been so cold that they could actually cut the ice.

RA: This is the main thing...almost like this year, 1976. We could have done it in May. Well, then you know Phillip and John Hoffman were in many enterprises within the village.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 11

EHK: Ah, yes. They had - the original store was general merchandise. And it expanded. Also, I think you still call it general merchandise, but there was...there was dry goods, and when they started they even sold things like men's suits and, of course, they sold all sort of - uh, you know - blankets and pillows, and, and - not actual mattresses or anything like that, but all kinds of bedding. And then - uh - a complete line of groceries.

RA: So they must have had a very large merchandise on hand at the time of the fire.

EHK: Oh, of - yes, it was an extreme hardship. Well, it was just before Christmas. It was the 8th of December so that their new, their Christmas stock has - ah - was very, very large - and then that everything was burned. But the thing that was wonderful is that they had such excellent credit and such a good reputation that they called the wholesaler - now this was the - ah - grocery wholesaler. They called him on Sunday, and he got men out to work that day, and they sent a carload of groceries and merchandise that were put on the shelves on Monday, and they were back in business.

RA: Of course, I think one interesting -thing is that, at that time, there were such excellent wholesale houses.

EHK: Yes...ah.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 12

RA: Can you remember any of the names of the grocery, wholesale grocery?

EHK: A Kaspar - P. J. Kaspar I know was one of them. Wayne and Lowell - were - they had things like butter and eggs and that sort of thing. And another one that was, that were very good, J. V. Farwell had a - ah - well, wholesale, dry goods wholesale house, as did Marshall Fields & Company.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: And both of them were very quick and very anxious to restore the store and get it back going.

RA: Do you ever remember doing business with Franklin MacVeagh?

EHK: Oh, indeed, indeed. I - that was one I was trying to think about. Franklin MacVeagh was another one. And then there was another one - that - the Encyclopedia Brittanica has now remodeled, and it is in - on the river - on the north side of the river, east of Michigan Avenue. And it used to be a very famous - and it seems to me it was two names, and Warner was one of them. Can you think of the other?

RA: Sprague Warner.

EHK: Yes, indeed. We did business with Sprague Warner for years. That was, that was a wholesale grocery house.

RA: Right, um, right.



Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 13

EHK: And this - no windows, it was just this huge, big, and they used to bring them in by ship.

RA: I see.

EHK: And that was in the days when Lake Michigan was very, was commerce, all commerce. You know when - in the Hoffman letters, one of the letters, if you read it, they say we are, we are near a very large body of water, and we see the ships going by bringing coal, lumber and wheat, I think.

RA: Wheat went out and the lumber...

EHK: And the coal came in. Yes, yeah.

RA: And that was, I understand, the reason for Henry Gage having built his two piers - partly for saving the lake front, but also to bring in lumber to build the houses the Gages built in Wilmette.

EHK: That could very well be.

Because the timber through, around Chestnut Street was too hard. It was oak and elm, and not suitable for houses.

EHK: Uh, hum.

RA: And he got the Drury brothers in to build the houses, and the lumber came from Michigan, where he must have had acreage and had lumber mills.

EHK: That's interesting.

RA: Most interesting - in early Wilmette history.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd 14

That's their house.

EHK: I imagine my father would have known this - after all.

RA: Of course.

EHK: Back to 1865 and '70.

RA: Of course. These things that would have been part of his life, and he probably wouldn't have - had attention.

EHK: That's right.

RA: So, after the fire then.

EHK: Then the - they built the one story brick building, and it's still standing at the corner. And in 19 - I would say between '25 and '27 they built what is the hardware store - what today is Spitzer's Hardware was the new building that was added. The feed store had been there, and that was a vacant lot.

RA: I see. This is - I see - I didn't - and they ran the feed store, right?

EHK: Oh, yes. We...

RA: You always had...

EHK: Always had the feed store. Yes.

RA: Yes.

EHK: And in early days, uh, that was a most important part of their business.

RA: Well, even up into my days in Wilmette, I bought marsh hay to cover my flowers in the fall. And when Hoffman Brothers quit selling marsh hay, I was lost.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 15

EHK: That's right. And, of course, uh, at the time when the business was started and even up into the twenties, almost to the twenties, there were, uh, what do you call them - dairies - Witt's Dairy was here in....

RA: Mrs. Witt has done a tape for us.

EHK: How nice.

RA: And it really...

EHK: And then there were livery stables.

RA: And where were they? Do you remember where they were?

EFIK: I don't remember them - but it seems to me - there was a livery stable, from what I heard there was a livery stable in Kenilworth - on what is now Green Bay Road.

BA: There also was one where the U. S. Post Office was.

EHK: That's right. There was - what was their name? Yes, I very vaguely remember.

BA: And next to that was the first fire station in Wilmette.

EHK: That I remember. I can remember that one. It was a gray building, and it was kind of high and narrow.

I do remember that first fire station.

BA: And the Zibbles lived up over it. And Mr. Northam, Mr. Drury's grandson, Horace Drury's grandson, told

this story.. .No, it was Mr. Schwall told about - he was related to the Zibbles and when his mother went away he could stay with them at the firehouse.

EHK: Ohhh...

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 16

RA: And he used to be so excited about it.

EHK: I can imagine it was exciting.

RA: And he just loved it. But then he said he was always glad to see his mother (laughter) when she came home, and so be able to go back home. ST I had a very enjoyable time taping the Schultz sisters · that's Schultz and Nord and the one sister is married to Mr. Schwall, Carl Schwall. And I asked about the name, and he said it, that it comes from the Huguenots · and it was - they came in the French and Indian War, and they were named, oh, the name slips me, but it's a French name and after the French and Indian War they didn't want to be gathered up · all the English were · were gathering them up as prisoners, so they changed their name to Schwall because it was a German name. And that · it was · ah · ah · not German at all, which I thought was a - most interesting.

EHK: That's interesting. That's very interesting.

RA: But to get back to the dry goods business · and then I know of other businesses that Philip and John Hoffman...

EHK: Yes, then after they had started their · their original store · I think they were only in business about three years at Ridge and Wilrnette Avenue when the Wilmette t3umber Company · it was called · or Coal and Lumber

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 17

Company - ah - was bought. And it was a tiny little place - right at the same spot that the lumber yard was until the lumber yard was forced to close, and that was on Central, just east of the railroad tracks. And the original business after Dad and Uncle Phil started it...Then Dad ran the - my father, who was John - ran the coal and lumber business, and Uncle Phil ran the general merchandise. And that's the way it always was. It might be an interesting thing to you, if - I think it's a most unusual thing - is that both families lived out of the business until 1945, and neither John nor Phil - Phillip - ever accounted to each other for what...

RA: How interesting.

EHK: It was a very (laughter) , very unusual arrangement, but, that they both trusted each other so fully that no accounting was ever made, and that they lived out of the business. And when uncle Phil died in 1945, there were minor errors and things, and then, naturally, there had to be accountants to take care of all this, and it was changed. But, from the day it opened from 1888, that's the way it worked.

RA: How interesting. Now I believe they both had served physically on the Board.

EHK: Yes, I'm trying to think what - Dad had some sort of a job - he was on Gross Point's Board and so was Uncle

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 18

Phil. Both Dad and Uncle Phil were in when the Wilmette Bank was opened and they were stockholders and. Uncle Phil was the Board of Directors · on the Board of Directors until he died in 1945 and so he was on for nearly 40 years.

RA: Yes · ah...

EHK: So he was on for, for nearly forty years, and · uh · I know Dad did something in the Village of Gross Point, and I'm trying to think what it was.

RA: I believe his name is on the Village Hall, and there's a plaque with all the names of the people who served.

EHK: Now that...

RA: When that was built, tell about that, about the Village, the Gross Point Village Hall because there is presently quite a bit of discussion about it.

EHK: Well, the Gross Point Village Hall · uh · because this area- uh · down · uh · anything I would say east of Green Bay Road was considered very swampy and very, very damp. The area along Ridge and west was - uh · grew faster and grew, grew up. And Gross Point was a village before Wilmette was. Now it was a very flourishing village, but it also had a rather unsavory reputation because of its schools · and, uh, they had · it was the only...

RA: It depended on who was talking, didn't it, as to whether it was unsavory or not?

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd, 19

EHK: Well, but the village had · uh - I think from · was it · uh · well, what would be Central Street, Evanston, up to take Avenue. There was just one · there must have been 13 or 14 saloons and because there was no other place from Howard Street to Highwood, Gross Point did get not only all the people who wanted to drink, but they did also get a lot of riff-raff.

RA: Oh, that seems true, then I never heard that before...

EHK: Well, people came, and because of, of the fact, I know my mother said that - uh · when my grand · now this · uh - I'm speaking of Grandmother and Grandfather Lauermann, when they had their store.

RA: Yes.

EHK: Above it as a hall, and they used to have dances on Saturday night. And my grandmother told me this · that very frequently an undesirable element would come. And my grandmother was a very tall person, and she did not fear anyone, and she would tell them to please leave in no uncertain terms, and they listened to her. (laughter)

RA: Great.

EHK: And, uh, when they started their business · now this was Grandmother Lauermann · when they started their business, it was at the corner of Elmwood and Ridge, and that was where my mother was born.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 20

RA: Which corner?

EHK: That would be the Southwest. Yes, it would be west of Ridge. And they, at that time, to get money paid ten per cent interest.

RA: You know this amazed me. I have seen some abstract books in the 170s, when Wilmette began, and the interest was seven per cent.

EHK: Well, now I don't know what the reason for it, but I know that my grandmother said they paid ten per cent interest, and as a result - ah - or I mean because of that, they did have a little saloon with their store. And she asked my grandfather, please, as soon as their debt was paid, would they please get rid of the saloon because she didn't like this. And I think a kind of interesting story is that they owed this money and - at ten per cent, and one day she was in the store by herself, and at that time there was no inside plumbing so she had to go into the back. So rather than let the store alone, she put a chair in front of the door and went in the back. And a couple hours later, the man to whom they owed the money was up to find out whether the store was (laughter) closed. He was coming for his money.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: And...



Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 21

RA: It was due quarterly...

EHK: Well, it was...

RA: According to the abstracts always say...

EHK: Well, whether it was due or not, but he was so worried that the building that the store was closed, so he was coming to see him when he came and found my grandmother back behind the counter and everything fine. (Much laughter). Well, someone had seen this and had told...

RA: Oh, yes.

ENK: But to get on with the family...ah - oh...

RA: The Lauermann family was a very interesting family, and I believe that was the farthest south place that sold beer, was it not - in the - in naming the saloon?

EHK: Well, I think it might have been the farthest north.

RA: Farthest north. I'm sorry. I meant that.

EHK: The Lauermanns came in about the same time as the Hoffmans - in the 40s, but I know that my Grandfather Lauermann was born in Chicago. Now my Grandmother Lauermann was born in Germany. Her maiden name was Volmann. And they lived here - when they came to this country they settled out near Techny on what...

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: But my grandma...

RA: Volmann?

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 22

EHK: Yes, but my grandfather brought his family of either eight or ten children and then two of his brother's Sons.

RA: I see.

EHK: And in Germany they had had a guest house, and he was a baker.

RA: I see.

EHK: They were considered very well-to-do; in fact, when he came to this country, he sold a hundred linen shirts. He had two hundred.

RA: They bought things. This was rather common at that time, I think. They bought up, they used their money and bought up things that would be saleable in this country purposely to get cash when they got over here.

EHK: But - ah - he, this was kind of normal; he had this many shirts, and my...

RA: Of his own?

EHK: Of his own. And my grandmother said that the pride of every housewife was her linen closet. And he said, she said her mother's was in the living room. She was just a little girl when she came, but she said it was piled high with linens. And they used to have a laundress come about two or three times a year, and then they would work for two weeks.

And would they also make their linens in the home?

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 23

EHK: I wouldn't be surprised. Now that I am not sure.

RA: Because of the cottage industry that existed throughout.

EHK: But my mother said that - uh - all her baby clothes were made out of the backs of my grandfather's worn out linen shirts. And you know, she was dressed in linens.

RA: How interesting!

EHK: Yes.

RA: They must - and they - what, from where did the Lauermanns come in Germany? (Indistinct)

EHK: Yes, I think they all came from that western section of Germany. I know that the - the - uh, Vollmanns came from Hermeskeil, about 25 miles from Trier. And the Hoffmans came from a little town called Denn. D- E- double N. Now Denn is no longer in existence. In 1950, when we were traveling through Germany he made a special point to find Denn, and Denn before, before World War II had been moved - the town had been moved out, and the, what, the area was used as a rifle range.

A rather interesting thing was that we were driving around looking for a, uh, a church with a cemetery because Mother was interested in getting some data as far as the family tree. And while we were riding around, we met two men on bicycles. And Mother spoke beautiful German, so she stopped and she asked them whether there was anything in that church. And they said no, that

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd, 24

the church had been moved completely, and that the, uh, graveyard had, too, so that we weren't able to get

in. But, in the course of conversation, we discovered that their name was Hoffman, and - they were relatives!

RA: Amazing!

EHK: But then and there we got down on our knees and we thanked, God that the Hoffman family came to the United States.

RA: Well, this is quite true that people feel that way. In so many areas people feel like that. They like to go back and see where the roots were, but they're always glad to return.

Now, tell me - you've told me about your parents and grandparents, and I had known your mother briefly, but I'd like to know more about you and what you've done because I know you did quite a few things.

EHK: Well, I, uh, I did manage the dry goods part of Hoffman Brothers for about, I guess it was about twenty-five years. It's unbelievable, really, it's unbelievable, (laughter) it was really that long. And - it, uh, came about rather unexpectedly. I, uh - it was in the heart of the depression, and I really and truly would rather have gone to school, but I went to work. And, uh, discovered that I liked it.

RA: Um, hum.

EHK: And I think I did a pretty good job. I, uh, as far as a business woman was concerned.

RA: I'm sure you did, having talked with you.

EHK: I made very, very many friends in business, and I enjoyed that, the contact with people, very much. uhhh · I will say that I learned a tremendous amount of...perhaps, retailing was in my blood a little bit, since both my father's family and my mother's family had had that kind of business. But, uh, I had many, many things to learn, and I was helped very much by the kind of salespeople that we had, who · I mean the people who sold us the merchandise...

RA: Um, hm.

EHK:...who were so honest and so helpful. And, uh, as a result, it turned out to be a profitable and a fun business.

RA: Um, hm.

EHK: There's no doubt about it. If I would tell anyone who was going into business that the most important thing is this · that they have to do (laughter) all the work there · that whoever they hire will do just the things they want to do · but the person who owns the store still has to do the dirty work and the muscle-breaking work...but it's fun · and it's rewarding.

And then along with other things, I got into Girl

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd, 26

Scouting - um - I think the reason I stayed in Girl Scouting - I got into it quite by accident. I myself had never been a scout, but someone called me and asked me whether I would like to come to a training program. And I went. And - I think then the one thing that held me in scouting and brought me there to begin with was Lillie Mae Humphries. Without a doubt!

RA: Well, she had a very important part in this community for many years, and it was she who I came in under. And, uh, the people on the Board at that time that I was associated with Cora Reynolds...

EHK: I was just going to say...Yes, I remember...

RA: Uhhh...I'm trying to think - the person over on Elmwood Avenue, who was also...

EHK: Uh - Mrs. Lyons?

RA: No, there was another one.

EHK: Sally Lyons...

RA: Yes, Sally Lyons, but she lived on Elmwood, west of the tracks. It'd be near me. That's right. I had forgotten about Sally. This one lived near the Methodist church and was very close. I think she was president of the Board at that time. Well, it - it - uh...

EHK: Cora Reynolds remains in my memory...

RA: And Mrs. Baker was on the Board here along through those years. They also were in the League of Women Voters

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 27

within the same time...

EHK: And then, of course, Zenia...

RA: Zenia...I don't remember...

EHK: Oh, yes, you do - Mrs. Dennoyer...

RA: Oh, yes! Mrs. Dennoyer - of course! Of Dennoyer and Geppert, a map company.

EHK: Yes. But she - uhh - was another one who - who - who kept me going as far as scouting was concerned. And then, of course, I don't know if you remember at all is Dorothy Taylor.

RA: Dorothy Taylor - I was very close to her.

EHK: Dorothy was my, was my first leader and she gave me a very good - well, a warm feeling about Scouts. You know...

RA: The whole Taylor family were that way - um, hm. I remember I bought my children's first school shoes at the Taylor store. -

EHK: Then, after - in fact, when I was an assistant - Dorothy organized a camp. We went to - do you remember that little camp they had near (Indistinct)? It was an old farm house, and the Wilmette Council used it. And Dorothy worked out a week's program to take her troop camping. And she had it approved by the Board, and I was the assistant, and we had the girls out there for one week of - of camping, you know like, like a

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 28

actual...and I had that one, I would say, about ten years and my last assistant... Primitive camping.. .but it was like going to a, to a Girl Scout camp. It - it - everything that we did had to be approved by the Board. And Dorothy planned it all, and we went out. (And it was funny. She didn't drive a car and I did, So we used her brother's car. It was, it was a Ford and one of the mothers drove. There were - we were seventy- nine girls. We drove the girls out, but we had his car to use to go shopping!

That was an interesting period.

RA: That must have been.

EHK: And then I had my own troop at St. Joseph's. I had that from - I would say about ten years. And - uh, my last assistant was Lois Frankenberger.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: Who was a delight! We got along so beautifully!

RA: Who is a delight still.

EHK: That's right. That's right. I saw her the other day. She's still a delight. But, now, that's enough about me. I think we ought to get back to tell you a little bit more about those points.

I had - my father was, perhaps, the greatest person on earth, He was a quiet man with a marvelous sense of humor, just a wonderful sense of humor. And - uh - he was always a good listener.



Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 29

PA: That is an art.

EHK: When he told a story he had something to say. But he could listen very, very well. Mother was the pusher. All her life she was the pusher. Dad was a very hard worker - but mother was the pusher.

RA: And, uh, would you say the initiator?

EHK: In many instances, yes, yes. And, uh, as far as the business was concerned - uh - Dad and Uncle Phil got along very, very well. But they always included Mother in on all the - all the plans, all the arrangements, all the changes. Mother was there - ~~%~~What do you think?+And her ideas were considered very important.

PA: In other words, that was Women's Lib way ahead.

EHK: That's right! That's right!

PA: Generations ahead. (Laughter)

EHK: She was also a - uh - uh - good churchwoman and very civic minded.

RA: Uh, I noticed that Father Netstraeter lived near your Grandmother Hoffman.

EHK: No, near by Grandmother Lauermann.

PA: Your Grandmother Lauermann...

EHK: They were next door neighbors.

PA: I see...

EHK: And, uh, in fact, when my mother and her sisters were young and anything went on at the church, and the priests

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 30

would have extra guests, the Lauermann girls always went over and helped serve.

RA: I see. Now where was the home of the priests before...

EHK: It was about the same place it is now. It was a big red brick building.

RA: I see...

EHK: And you see then the church was across the street.

RA: Yes. And...

EHK: Where the parking lot is now.

RA: Next to the cemetery.

EHK: Next to the cemetery. And the - the rectory was about where that parking lot - that a - paved lot east of the church and rectory is now. That was where the original rectory was.

RA: I see. I see...

EHK: And then, I don't know whether you know it, but the house next to that is now painted white. It was a red brick house.. .was Father Vattman's house.

RA: And those were all in the village of Wilmette, I understand, because the division was down the center of Ridge Avenue.

EHK: Oh, these houses were on Lake.

RA: Yes, but everything east of Ridge Avenue...

EHK: Oh, very definitely, oh yes, even St. Joseph's Church...

RA: Lake Avenue...

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 32

RA: Because I noticed that Father Netstraeter had been on the original Board that had opened New Trier High School.

EHK: That's right. This was interesting.

RA: He was here a long time, although he was not the first priest...

EHK: No. Uh - the records show that he was about the third or fourth one. But I think he was the first - see - St. Joseph's was a mission. And the - and the first priests that were here had this one and McHenry - uh, and someplace else...

RA: Yes...

EHK: In a sort of triangle...

RA: Glenview?

EHK: Now I don't know whether it was Glenview or not, but they would go by horseback from one to the other. And, of course, Jr. Joseph's is the second oldest parish in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

RA: Oh.

EHK: The oldest one is St. Mary, old St. Mary.

RA: Downtown? I didn't realize it.

EHK: It's a very, very old parish. And, ah, our families have been a part of it since 1843 or 1844, when we arrived here, which is a very long time, too.

RA: Indeed, indeed. And I had wanted to hear more about St. Joe. A - tell me - a - as much of the early history

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 33

as you can remember. (Very long pause). You went to school in the old school?

EHK: Yes. Yes · a · you know the original building, if you remember any pictures, the - ah · there were four classrooms on the east side of the church, and then the church was in the center. And the original old St. Joseph's was a beautiful, red brick building. And, and · they spoiled it by putting those four classrooms in the front. And when I went to school, the first four grades were in the east side, and then the last four grades were in the front. And then, of course, it got too small, and Father Netstraeter's dream was always a new church.

RA: A new church...

EHK: And he had pictured spires and steeples from all over the world · all over the United States. He never traveled anywhere that he didn't take a camera and take a picture because he wanted a church · it was his dream. He was a very, very - well, I wouldn't say, well, I would say, he was learned. Yes, he had had more than his share of education. He came to this country educated.

RA: And, was he German?

EHK: He was German. Yes. And · a · but he had such a dream, and he could see such potential, and he was so desirous

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 34

of higher education. After all, most of the people here were farmers and · let's face it, even in 1860 to ~~68~~ - ~~70~~, how much of, how many of the teachers and how much of them had come here. The East, of course, had it, but there wasn't anything...

RA: That's right.

EHK: ...here. I don't know when...

RA: Very little in Illinois, throughout Illinois.

EHK: I don't know when the University of Chicago was established or the University of Illinois. There are · were a few older women's colleges or something like that or perhaps a junior college, but even high school...

RA: There were small finishing schools...

EHK: There were finishing schools...

RA: There were small finishing schools like Monticello, at Godfrey, Illinois and places like that...

EHK: Yes. But, even high school...

RA: Uh, huh...

EHK: And he was so determined this area should have a high school. And he worked very hard, and it was kind of interesting that it was named New Trier.. .for the people.

RA: This, I think, is very interesting. Also, but when I went to look at the earlier records before 1890 in the census records one doesn't find either Gross Point or Wilmette. One finds Post Office Winnetka...Now...

it's... the township of New Trier. And pages - and the lines are numbered, but the Post Office, Winnetka, and Winnetka spelled itself, many ways, including with the, with one ~~W~~, Wynetka. And this is, is I think very interesting because this was very - in the ~~60~~s and ~~70~~s. After all, people were here and were fighting the Civil War, and there was a great deal of activity, but this particular part of the State of Illinois was very frightened that - the railroad went through the reservation, and the people who knew about the railroad were the ones who were at the Government to get their hands on the land. This really was a town purchased by speculators. Not Gross Point. Gross Point was purchased by the individual...

EHK: Yes...

RA: ...farmer who farmed. But the Village of Wilmette, prior to the time it became a village, was in the hands of Eastern land speculators.

Now that's interesting, isn't it, but the thing that still amazes me and kind of thrills me is the fact that my father was born in 1865, which is a long, long time ago, and that I heard so much from him, and so much history. It's kind of interesting to think that he did live to fly in an airplane. He did not see television. He died in ~~45~~.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 36

RA: Oh, dear.

EHK: Before television, you know...

RA: Yes, but radio was....

EHK: Oh, oh, radio - He - but - a - television - a - to think you see, it really didn't come in, into use until '49.

RA: Yes.

EHK: And he missed that. And as we said, we would have had to have three, so that he could watch the ball game, and (laughter) cowboys and Indians, and we could have had one (much laughter). He could have seen the same Western 45 times and enjoyed it.

RA: I know. And you used to travel south in the winters with your mother, and your sister, Anne, didn't you?

EHK: Yes, in fact, I think my family, I think, were very, very - great travelers. My mother and father took my oldest brother, who was born in 1904, to Florida when he was two, and then they went to Cuba.

RA: How interesting! Nineteen hundred and six...

EHK: And six. And they took the boat from Miami, and Mother said she had never been on a boat before or since where it was so rough. Everybody was ordered to their beds to stay there. And she said the only one that didn't get seasick was the baby (laughter). I guess they're (Indistinct). Children have (Indistinct),

RA: That's right. They're not disturbed by

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 37

EHK: They were not disturbed. And then - ah - they went to Florida quite frequently.

RA: This is something. I think we are unaware of - how much travel that the people in the 1800s and the 1900s even - were in Chicago. I think that the Newberry family

- he was, he died aboard ship on his way to join his wife and two daughters in Paris. They had been over there for six months. The two daughters died over there.. and later - much later. But they...people traveled much more widely than we are prone to believe...

to believe.

EHK: Well, now my grandmother - ah - who was married at sixteen and really had had very little education, still wanted her boys and her family to see these places.

RA: This is your Grandmother Hoffman?

EHK: Grandmother Hoffman, And when my father was eighteen, he went to Niagara Falls. He wanted to see them. Ten in 19... I am not sure of these dates exactly, but I would say about either 1899 or 1901, Uncle Phil Hoffman went to Europe, took his mother, and - ah - his wife stayed home with the family, and he took her and they went to Europe, and I can - I can remember my mother saying that Grandmother said that in her village that she had left either fifty, at least fifty years before, there was only one new house. And then in 1902, it



must have been 19 (Indistinct) in 1902, Uncle Phil went again. And he decided he would just go alone. And he got to New York and he thought it's a shame my mother shouldn't have gone, so he wired her. Now evidently he didn't need passports because ...or at least it must have been very accessible, then she got on the train, and he waited in New York and they got passage and they went on a different ship. But he took her along the second time.

Oh, Yes.

And she died about a year or so later. She was not very old when she died - but

- a - yes, it was fortunate that they had taken this second trip.

But the fact that she had been a widow for so long and been the responsible one in the household probably contributed to her earlier demise.

I imagine. A - They say widows or single people are likely to live less long than....

Yes, I can - I can see where if you don't have the security, although I guess her later years with the two boys, John and Phillip, were very, very good to her and took very good care of her. Ah - the traveling blood remained. (Laughter)

This is wonderful. And you're still traveling, I assume.

EHK: Yes.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 39

RA: Good.

EHK: A - my father went to Europe with an uncle, my mother's brother, in 1925 - the whole year - and he was gone for three and a half months. We were all very little at the time, and Mother could just not be going away, but it was his ambition to take all of us. And, of course, when first of all there was the Great Depression and then when money was coming a little bit faster, why then there was the Great World War, so we never quite accomplished that together. But in 1950, Mother and my - a - two sisters and a niece and I....

RA: Oh, yes. I didn't realize there were that many....

EHK: Well, there were five of us and we took a car and we were gone nearly three months, and at that time we saw all that were left of the German relatives. They were rather distant, but we did discover they were very charming people, and we liked them all, which I think is most unusual.

RA: Well, it's interesting to know that the contact was able to be bridged and in the meeting after so many years - and it is....well, what is it...blood is thicker than water.+

EHK: I guess so.

RA: Well, this brings us down fairly close to recent Wilmette history. Hoffman Brothers are no longer in Wilmette.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 41

He was on there from 1945 to 1975.

RA: He was on the Board of both banks?

EHK: He was on the Board of both, but he was on - he and Lloyd Hollister were the only two that were left on

First Federal who were on the original Board.

RA: Oh, for goodness sake!

EHK: Mr. Pierson was on the original Board and so was Al Jensen, and Dr. Merrifield and so was - a - a - he was a realtor - Robert - a - Johnston.

RA: Johnston.

EHK: Yes, yes. They were on the original. And my brother, Phil, who has not been connected with the business since '52, served - oh - on a million capacities in the

Village. He was the head of the Rationing Board all during the war...

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: ...and did a tremendous amount of work there.

RA: And where is John now?

EHK: John is now in Tucson.

(Doorbell rings) Is that Mary? Yes.

RA: So now that Mary Hoffman has joined us we can have some contribution from her. Elizabeth, you were talking about John. Do you have any more to add?

EHK: No, I'm just trying to think. I had three brothers.

I talked about John and Phil. Joe - Joe was in World War II with the Seabees for a long time, for four years,

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 42

and then he came back and managed the hardware store. And he was sort of a quiet man. He was not an active joiner (laughter) · but a · he was always there · knew, he always knew what his merchandise was.

And he remembered that. And then · a · Mary has been · a · well, now let's see, she's a lawyer at her · she worked for Hoffman Brothers for a good many years, and then she worked during the war · that's World War II again · when so many young men were drafted. Mary worked for (Indistinct) insurance. And then after the war, she was asked to come to Hoffman Brothers, and she did and she managed all their bookkeeping and all the tax items and all the customers, and all the important things for (laughter) years · the miserable jobs nobody else wanted.

RA: That's right, that's right. You always have to have one who does the miserable jobs, there's no question, no doubt. Now, what was there · Frank · no, that was your father's brother, wasn't it?

EHK: I had three brothers. There was John, Joel and Joe, and Mary, and our younger sister, Ann, was an artist. I think she might have had an excellent career. She was teaching at the · a · American Academy of Art. She taught Fashion Illustration. And · a · she was studying portraiture and did a very excellent job. And she died very suddenly on the way home from a trip

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 43

to Florida. She was a victim of that flu. And so - what might have been a budding career, at least we can think it will....

RA: Oh, she was a charming person. I remember her very well.

EHK: It's kind of unbelievable...Of course, when you see her pictures and picture her as she was at 30 and think, %wonder what she'd look like today?+(Laughter)

MH: She's been gone over twenty-five years ago. Oh, it is hard to believe.

EHK: It is hard to believe; it really is.

RA: I taped J. J. Snyder and he told me a bit about the businesses, up and down from Lauermann's store down to (Indistinct) your store, and he named them in order. He had all the saloons and where the church is now. He told about the store and he told something very interesting about the grove on the southwest corner and the picnics that everybody used to have there. That was Roebucks Grove.

That was what - now he called it something else.

EHK: Are you sure? It began with an %a+We have a hat check at home, number 46, a hat check from Roebucks Grove, in fact, (laughter) that we found.

RA: How interesting

EHK: ...with some coins. But - a oh, Ridge Avenue was...when

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 44

you stop to think about it, if you read about it in a story, you'd think · you'd think it was · it was a terribly exciting street. And · and, of course, I think it probably was.

RA: And a family street...

EHK: Yes, it had exciting businesses, much more than Wilmette, because it was older.

RA: This is, I'm sure, very true. And this is one of the things that I'm very interested in · why Gross Point was settled, even though it was never incorporated.

EHK: Well, I think it was because of the good farmland.

RA: Yes.

EHK: And because it was high and dry. And · and · this area that Dad always said was swamp.

RA: This was very true, and they had to dig two ditches, I understand. There was a ditch that went through Wilmette to the river and came out about Chestnut Street. And then there is the ditch through Kenilworth, which is still there.

EHK: Still there and that started on Ridge. You know, I · a . .

RA: They both did.

EHK: I never knew this. But · ah · I can remember Rob, who was that much older than I, saying it's beyond the big ditch. And do you know, it's about the 1300 block or

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, contd. 45

1400 block of Ridge. Kenilworth would be on this side and Wilmette would be on that. In fact, almost at Indian Hill Country Club is where the big ditch...

EHK: ...and I do believe that that was one of the reasons why the west side was settled more.

RA: Good farmland.

EHK: Good farmland....

RA: And the group of people came as I understand. They weren't individuals.

EHK: Well, now as far as our records show - these - our family came individually, our families came individually.

RA: Individually? Now did they stop in New York and buy the land from in the East, or did they buy it from land sales in Chico? Do you know that?

MH: That I don't know. I think they bought it after they came here. -

RA: I would assume that. I would assume because...

EHK: Didn't they come on the Erie Canal? Somebody...

RA: Probably 1825, the Erie Canal...

EHK: Some part of them came...

MH: I believe in a letter somewhere - it could be - they landed in New York...

EHK: And I know in one of the letters it says that they shouldn't stop in New York, and that they should - act like poor people - do not show any display of money

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont. 47

and 17th street; 16th I think was, too, but Lawndale and 17th was heavy woods, and in the spring and summertime, we would see wash lines, and then we knew the gypsies had arrived. And, of course, we had read (laugh) many stories about how they would capture children, and caves of dark. And we always went down to the woods to pick violets and the wildflowers, but when we saw gypsies, we were scared to death because we knew we were going to be captured (laughter). If we didn't know it, my mother sure knew it. Oh, but she was a woman. And they'd be there for - oh - several weeks. There would be wagons. I don't remember seeing them on the street, you know that they'd peddled, or that they did much else but just sort of camped. Now maybe they, this was out of the way and was country enough for them, and then they would pursue (laughter) their wares and that sort of thing in Chicago. I have no idea.

RA: Or the small villages. In my childhood they used to come through our village, and camp outside of it, and I think they made the rounds.

EHK: Were they mostly tinkers, is that, or did they...

RA: No, they, they were not reliable people. They were not to be, your mother was right, I think, they were not to be depended upon. They were sly. I'm not so



Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 48

sure that they still aren't today when I hear those stories about modern gypsies

· ah · that · ah ·

EHK: There's reason for it.

RA: Yes.

EHK: But it was always fascinating for us to see the wagons and to see the wash hanging.

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: It was so colorful! But we did watch them from a distance.

RA: Oh, yes. Oh, this was very exciting, but you always sort of ran for shelter.

EHK: This same woods was very interesting because when we were little, like five and six, Uncle Phil used to take us down there, and there were willows and he would make willow whistles for us (laughter).

RA: Oh, yes.

EHK: And that was, that was a delightful thing.

RA: Now I believe this was one of the last areas of Wilmette to be incorporated within the village of Wilmette.

There was a vast space between Green Bay Road and Ridge Avenue that was not settled except for Lake Avenue and Wilmette Avenue.

EHK: Well, then I bet that this area was, was a · oh, I have to tell you something else we used to do when we were children. I don't suppose there are many kids who

Elizabeth HGffman Kirk, contd. 49

remember things like this, but on Sundays we would go to Lincoln Park, my father and uncle. Neither one of them drove a car so one of the boys would have to drive the car. And we would drive to Lincoln Park, and at that time we had a big, old seven- passenger open Cadillac, and we all wore white Leghorn hats.

RA: No linen dusters?

EHK: No linen dusters. We girls, after all, you didn't go anyplace unless you were dressed up, and I don't think we ever had a trip to Lincoln Park or to the circus, or anyplace else that one of the hats didn't fall off before we got home. And then the car would have to be stopped and one of the men would have to walk back about half a block or a block to pick up the hat, and the instructions were always the same, "Please tell your mother to put a tighter elastic around your chin."

(Giggles) Another thing about Lincoln Park, we never came home without a great big popcorn ball. Ooooooh, they were beautiful.

RA: And so good. And chewy.

EHK: And chewy, definitely.

RA: How about the frothy....

EHK: Cotton candy? I was never very fond of cotton candy. It was pretty to look at, but I don't think I ever had it more than once or twice.

Elizabeth Hoffman Kirk, cont'd. 50

RA: I remember once at Riverview Park that I begged for some from my uncle, and he didn't want to buy it, and finally he bought it for me and said, "Now I'm going to stand here until you eat every drop of that." I hated the stuff. I just despised it and I can't to this day consume it.

EHK: I can believe that. The organ grinder, an old man. And, of course, the balloon man was at Lincoln Park and at Brookfield.

RA: Very interesting. Well, Elizabeth, I thank you very much for the time you've spent. You were a very good interviewee, and I guess I have to put my name on this. This is Rhea Adler signing off.

(End of tape)

I