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Nelson De Jong

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Narrator's name: Nelson De Jong (1903-1991)
Length of narration: 1:01:45
Date of narration: January 31, 1984
Place of narration: Nelson De Jong's home
Interviewer's name: None
For: Orange City: Town History
Location: RA 1.1., Box 3, Folder 37

This is a beautiful day in January, the 31st day January of 1984. The sun is shining brightly and it promises to be a much warmer day than what we have been having throughout this past winter. Shall we go down memory lane this morning? More than 75 years to the early 1900s, and try and get a glimpse as to what life was like in those early years of the early 1900s. My earliest memory really goes back to the very first time that I went to school. I was but a boy, a little bit more than four years of age, and in the late November, I was told by my father I had better go to the school which was less than 300 feet from our farm home, which in turn was only three miles west of Northwestern College and three miles south. The country schools, there were nearly 174 of them in Sioux County. Every township had 36 square miles. If there were no town in that Township, there could be as many as nine country schools. One for every four square miles. And that was located right where the four square miles came together at the corner, so that no boy or girl would have to walk more than two miles to get to the country school.

The country school was not built for warmth. It was not built for heat either. It had no storm windows. It had no screens. It had no storm door. It could be very cold in there. It, some were bigger than others. The country school that I attended could have at least as many as 30 pupils in it. The school yard generally was one acre in size. It had a few trees on it. But most of them had no well to get the drinking water from. The school had no lights. The school had no indoor plumbing. [Clears throat.] Ah, the school teacher generally was not very old. Sometimes she was only a bit more than 16 years of age. I had an uncle and an aunt who were teaching

school at that age. When they would get through high school all they had to do was to attend a few weeks of summer school. And there was no year of internship like there is now, so to speak, practically this teaching, you just simply went to school to teach and therefore, the teacher being so young, it happened more than once that the boys, who were sometimes the same in age, would marry, later in life, would marry their teacher. The boys sometimes were a big problem because for often they had to stay on the farm and work until after the corn was husked and then they would attend school maybe for three to four months until about the end of March when fieldwork would start again.

And so the teacher had quite a problem. She had no principal to send the wayward boys or girls to for punishment. She had to do it all herself. When the children got sick, she had to be the school nurse. There was no telephone service. If one did get ill, we being, only, our home being only about 300 feet from the school as I have said. She would send one of the pupils down there to have my mother call to the father and mother of the child that was sick, to come and get the child. Sometimes that was impossible because some of the parents did not have telephones. I recall one lady who passed away only about two years ago, she was up in the 90s, and she was telling me how that more than 80, almost 85 or more years ago, she had attended that same school. And she would get as a little girl severe headaches. And so the teacher would send her over to the home of my grandparents who at that time lived in the home where I was born and raised in. And she would lie down there until the school would close and then her brothers, she would go along with them back to her home.

The teacher was faced with a problem of activities during recess and the noon hour. So she had to do that part too. Most of us children learned to entertain ourselves without outside help. Sometimes we would take a rubber ball along and throw that over the schoolhouse and try to

catch it on the other side. Then we would play tag and try to catch the ones that were ones the other side. Sometimes we had games in the snow. Every boy had a jackknife and in the springtime when the willow trees were nice and green, we would go to the willow trees and cut some branches and make ourselves some bows. We would pick some long weeds that were dried and use them as arrows. That we could find to do, to pass the time away. And on the average the recesses and the noon hour were much too short!

In the wintertime, the noon hour was generally only one-half hour, so that it would give the teacher more time to get back to her home. The first teacher that I had walked seven miles one



De Jong volunteered at the country schoolhouse owned by the Dutch American Heritage Museum.

way, of course, twice a day. And believe me, that was not easy. With muddy roads, and they did not have slacks in those days, and so it was not an easy job. In the wintertime, they quite frequently stayed at the home of one of the patrons. But, even then they would have to walk to the school never less than a quarter to a half mile.

And so the teacher had a problem. She not only had 30 children in school, but she had eight grades to teach. Her main thing in children's lives were to teach them to read, and write, and know their mathematics. Very rarely was it that a child who graduated from the country school did not

know those three things. But she also taught some music, she taught us how to sing without the use of musical instruments. She taught us many things.

There is, as I have said, no running water in the school, so at the recess in the morning, or just after the recess, one of the [pupil] would run to our home to get water from the yard water

cistern. I do not know if you have ever tried to walk a whole block with a pail of water. And especially when two of them are carrying it. I have tried it. With school, young children, who might have taken on tours to our country school, our old 100-year-old country school right here in Orange City, and I would take them about a block away from there where there was a pump just like the one we had years ago. [Unclear.] And we would get a pail, and have them carry it two-by-two by turns. They had a difficult time to keep from spilling. And they were walking on pavement where it was very easy. They did not have to go through mud. They did not have to go through snow. They did not have to go where there was a lot of wind, and so forth, and so forth. But when we come to the country school, there was the pail standing in the entry way and [unclear] in wintertime it could be very cold so that by noon hour there could be a cover of ice on it, the water. The water was used also for washing of hands so that if a child took a drink of water they would put it in the wash basin and all the children would wash their hands in that wash basin. It was not emptied until evening. Um. The cup, there was only one cup and every child would drink out of that single cup. In today's language that would seem almost impossible, very, very unhealthy, wouldn't it?

Another problem the teacher would have to contend with was that many times families from the Netherlands would come, sometimes there would be four to five children in that family coming to school at the same time. None of them could speak one word of English. And yet it was strange, in a matter of a few months, those children had mastered the English language. And because their education was far ahead of ours in this country, because if you graduate from high school in the Netherlands, you had almost the equivalent of two years of college here.

But for some reason or another, these young teachers were able to cope with those problems. And these young people, being young were able to cope with the problem of

mastering a new language. My grandparents came from the Netherlands when my grandmother was only 12 and my grandfather was younger than that. But to tell you the honest truth, he never did master the English language as he could have. It was still much, much easier for them to speak in the Dutch language. Even my father who was born and raised in this country found it much easier to read the Dutch Bible than ever to read the English one. He just preferred it.

And so the teacher had a big problem, but they really stepped over those big hurdles in very good shape. I have one teacher living yet who taught me in the country school. She is now nearly 90 years-old. Another one passed away two years ago. And how well I recall her coming to our country school with the horse and the buggy and then later on with what they called the cutter. It was a fancy sled drawn by one horse. It had a shaft in front where the horse was placed between. And she had lots of blankets and heavy overcoats and everything on, but there were times when she was quite cold. Those cutters just had single runners just like, almost like a pair of skis, and reasonably tipped because they were top heavy and more than once she would tip. She had her horse in our stable, in our barn, in the daytime. And how I just enjoyed helping her to hitch that horse to the sled when she was ready to go home in the evening. And sometimes she would turn a wee bit too short and tip over and out would come blankets and goodness what not! And then in cold weather, that was in itself was no joke. And so she would use that kind of a cutter. They were fancy, but they were not the way they should be.

There were other kinds of methods of traveling. One was that they would place a buggy, take the wheels off, and had runners under that. They would have four runners, one for each wheel. And so they could turn very short and would not tip quite as easily. Then of course the buggy had a top. Then there were the open sleds, some family sleds they called them. Some with two seats, some with even three. They were handmade here in Orange City by my grandfather.

He was a wagon maker and a maker of sleds too. And they were very neat. Some of them, the bigger ones, always had two horses in front of them. We also had one that he had made that was one horse drawn. And those were used quite frequently by the children. They would put a pony in front of that little sled and then put their little coaster sleds, one would drive the pony or two, and then the other children in the neighborhood would get together on Saturday afternoons and have their sleds behind the bigger one. And that is the way we would go around the countryside. More fun than you could wish for and it was just all self-made fun.

And then there were the bobsleds. A wagon box was placed on a bobsled. It too had four runners. The bobsleds were used quite often when whole families would have to go to [church]. And now we are going to talk about the church. Um, my early recollection of attending church was uh, special memories of that were the Christmas programs. How we enjoyed going there. Sometimes it being winter, the automobiles, of course, in those early years could not be used very often, in fact, very rarely could the automobile be used. And because they were placed on jacks in the fall, the late fall, and then in the early spring they would be removed from the jacks. And even then they were not used too often. My father got his first automobile in 1911. It had no front doors. It had no electric headlight. It had no electric horn. It had no anything. The horns were, um, sort of a rubber ball which was attached with two funnel shaped gadget that would produce a lot of noise. I still have the little outfit that produced the noise from the Maxwell Automobile which was owned by my father-in-law many, many years ago. And that was in the Maxwell Car, and they would squeeze that horn. And this is what it would sound like, of course this is not amplified because it is not attached to that horn. This is what it would sound like. Beep, Beep! Beep, Beep! Beep, Beep! [Horn honking.] And um, that is what they would blow.

The car had no electric lights, it had carbide lights. And believe me, when the wind would be blowing strong it was not easy to travel at night because it was so difficult to get them lit. And in the summertime, if there were a cloud in the sky, that big, almost as a man's hand, the car was left in the shed because it was next to impossible with those automobiles to travel in the mud. They just could scarcely make some of the steeper hills. Later on, when we got the Model T Ford which was around 1915 to 1917, but in 1911 they did not, were not too powerful as yet. So the one that my father had only was in our place only for about four years and then we did get an automobile that was battery operated. And my, we thought that was really something to have that. We really thought that was something!

But, we are coming back to the churches, how did we go? We went by bobsleds, we went by buggies, we went with carriages. And, but the bobsled was quite frequently used on Christmas Eve. My father had two strings, a pair of strings of bells to put on the horses. And many of the cutters, the single sleds, had them attached to the shafts of the sled. And, it was a beautiful sound on a crisp Christmas Eve as everybody was winding its way to the program that was in the church. Down the road, going down the streets, and I still have one of those strands of bells that my father had more than 85 years ago, almost 90 in fact. I still have one. A few of the bells are missing but I am going to ring them right now. And this is what it would sound like. Jingle! Jingle! Jingle! [Bells ring.] And the faster the horses went, the more noise that came. So you can imagine what a beautiful sound that was on the crisp cold air on a Christmas Eve. Those are some of my fondest memories.

And then of course, going to the program. What I looked forward to mostly was the fact that we got a bag of candy and we didn't get that very often. My father was a heavy, heavy smoker and he didn't care one bit about candy. He did not realize the desire that we had for

candy. Never in all the years that I was at home, nearly 24 of them, did I have ever know that my father bought candy at all. A few years after I was married, then he did buy candy, for the first time that I recall. But he smoked cigars too. And so he...[tape cuts out].

There was one thing we always did look forward to, but then with the candy part, when my folks would go to town to buy groceries and they would pay for the groceries, they would nearly always come back a bag of candy. There was one thing wrong with it. Sometimes there would be two chocolates in it, sometimes three, but there were five of us children. And so there was almost a family feud [chuckles], you can just about figure that one as to who was to get what!

Well, at any rate, let's go back to the church, shall we? The churches too had some problems. In the early years there were some churches in Sioux County where they took the custom of the Netherlands to the church too. The husbands did not sit with their families, that was a custom in the Netherlands. The fathers sat perhaps on a bench raised, elevated, above that, of the pew, where the families sat. So he did not sit with his family. But of course the churches here were not built for that. So the fathers, husbands, would sit in a different place in church, not with their wives and children. Some of the children would sit with the father, but not the wife, never. Isn't that a strange custom that they had?

They had problems. There was a great problem [unclear] when some people decided, thought there really should be some English in the church. Some of the, um, churches were separated because of it. There was a great problem when they decided to go from the single cup communion to the individual cup. There was a terrific problem there. And so the churches did have problems over some of the kind of problems we do not have today.

And now shall we go to as what life was like in the home. My earliest recollection of that was that of housecleaning. Really I didn't like it one bit because I knew that the rugs, we had two rugs, that had to be removed every spring, every fall. They were tacked down and the day even before [unclear] perhaps we would remove the tacks. Then we would come home from school the next day, there was a big beam that was tied to two trees and the rug would be hanging on that. And as I left the school I could see that rug hanging and I knew there was a chore for me to do, and a big one at that. The chore was to beat the dust out of there. In those days there were no such things as rugs cleaners. There were no such things as vacuum sweepers. Oh, they had sweepers alright enough, but they just took the lint and stuff off the floor. They did not get the dust of the rug. And you would be amazed what a cloud of dust would come out of those rugs. And I would beat, and I would beat, so that I almost felt that my arms were going to come out of the sockets and my shoulders. And then finally at long last, mom would come and she would check, oh, you better beat a little more, so I would beat a little more and a little more and a little more. It seemed endless, to tell you the truth! But perhaps it wasn't as long as I thought it was at that time. But, it was long. Because we were young, everything seems so big doesn't it? And now when I am much, much older than that, the things that I used to think was so big seems so minute, so small. And that's the way life is. The things that we worried about when we were young, now I almost laugh at the thought of worrying about it. But we did. And, well, that was one of the things of life.

And in the evening, after supper, came the task of putting that rug down the way it had been. And that was not an easy job. It was a job of taking that rug, tacking it down again, every tack was about two to three inches apart, stretching the rug to the other side with a couple of boards and beams, and then seeing that it got nice and smooth and everything. So it took quite a

long time to get all those bits of tacks into that rug. But it all smelled so fresh and neat after it had been done.

Generally, mom had a hired girl that came and helped with the housecleaning. Sometimes we had a hired girl all summer, all through the summer. There were many times that hired girl, perhaps was only 14 to 15 years old. One of the hired girls, I recall so well, was only 14. She had just come from the Netherlands. She was a great person to dream out loud, when she would go home to her parents and come back on Sunday evening with us from church, she would repeat practically everything of interest that had been said at home in her dream and talk out loud. And we boys, who slept across the hall, would keep our door open so we could listen to her talking. And sometimes she'd fight with her sister about a hat. And sometimes she had this, and sometimes she had that. I shall never forget how that young girl could dream.

One time she was with us in the wintertime too, and it was early fall and we had a snow storm. And the poultry, the young chickens, the young hens, and bullets were in the trees, and so we had to catch them because of the snowstorm. It was on a Sunday, but we had to catch them otherwise they would freeze that night. And so we worked and worked in the snow catching those chickens and they had to be carried to the chicken coop and she went out to help. She wanted to do that. So, she was given a couple of chickens to carry to the coop, maybe three or four at a time. And that evening she was sleeping and she began to dream that she was carrying chickens. So my two brothers, they took pillows from the couch and they said, "Here, Clara, here's another pillow." And she would grab that pillow. And then they would give her another pillow. And we had a Newfoundland dog. And she was very, very afraid of that dog. And um, she, my brother thought he would pull a joke on her. And he took my father's coonskin coat. The dog's name was Bellow, what a name wasn't it? But at any rate, when he barked that is exactly

the way that he sounded like too. And he threw it on her and said, “Clara, here’s Bellow!” And she began to scream and holler and suddenly she saw, she woke up and she saw who had done it, and she was really was angry. She grabbed for the stove poker they called it, a pointed steel rod, and she went after him and my goodness, my father had to interfere, because by that time my brother was a bit afraid and I don’t mean maybe. And it took quite a bit to get her, ah, settled down and I don’t blame her. It was a nasty trick for my brother to pull.

But she, sometimes, could not be awakened that easy. So she would come downstairs. She would dress herself and come downstairs when my father ordered her, still in that dream, almost as if in a trance. And she would, he would give her a pail, and tell her to go out and get a bucket of water from the pump, the yard water pump outdoors and that’s what she would do, carrying that heavy pail of water back into the house. She would be awake. It was one of the few things that could awaken her.

There was one thing about the home on the farm, there was always food, especially in the wintertime. My father would buy pounds, hundreds of pounds of flour, several hundreds of pounds of sugar, no less than twenty-five pounds of coffee and all the other things that one



This tread powered machine is on display at the Dutch American Heritage Museum, Orange City, Iowa.

would need so that we, when it was difficult to get to town, for sometimes weeks at a time, we would have always plenty of food. There is no such a thing as it is now. Will you please open the road? And because we need to have a few groceries? I have had a few in town, some of my neighbors, that they would ask, in a snowstorm, someone with a snowmobile, and please come and bring them some milk, please bring a loaf of

bread, or something like that, and almost risk their lives doing it. On the farm, that was not needful. You had to have your medical supplies as much as is possible, and you had to take care of your own illnesses if possible. And so that was the case on the farm. We always had plenty of potatoes. We had our own meats. We canned our chickens in the spring. And one of the things that happened in the winter was the butchering process. When you would put bacon and hams and so forth in the brine and then later on to be smoked after they were cured. And you would make sausages. You would butcher a beef and a hog at the same time and that was quite a chore in itself. To butcher a hog required, we had a copper boiler holding about 16 gallons of water, that was placed on the cook stove and it took several, quite a long time, for that water to boil. And when it was boiling hot and we would get a barrel wherever we were to butcher the hog, and we would put the water in that barrel and then have the hog dead before we put the water in that barrel so that it wouldn't get cool too fast and then we would dunk that hog in that water. First with the tail going down and then later on the hind legs. And then we would scrap all the bristles off of that hog. It was quite a task. Sometimes, sometimes we had it that the water was not quite hot enough because it was so cold. And that was a difficult time then too. And of course they would make sausages, and mostly the meat would be canned and fried out, whatever was necessary, and placed in lard. But whatever it was we would have no refrigeration and so everything had to be done so that you could keep it for a long, long time. So the sellers were just loaded with goods so that we never had to be concerned. We had her own milk on the farm. We had her own eggs, and so forth, and so we were never hungry.

We always had homemade bread, and my, how nice that smelled. And then in the, in the fall when there be canning to do, how nice that smell was – making, canning pickles, and the

making of catsup, and all of those things. It was just a wonderful, wonderful smell it was to all of it.

Then there came to washing. That was a job in itself. At first we had no power. The only power that we had was man-made. We had what they called a tread power in our home. And it was sort of an endless apron and it was used so that a dog or a goat was supposed to walk in there and then a wheel would turn and the faster that goat would walk, it would never get anywhere of course, it just kept on a walking like an escalator at an airport, and ah, that would turn a wheel and that wheel was attached by a belt to a washing machine. And how well I remember that that dog and that goat, there were times when it was smarter than we were, and it seemed to have an understanding that Monday morning would come and wash day, and so they would disappear. The dog would crawl under some building that was on a foundation of stones but not solid foundation. Impossible to get him out of there! And the goat would wander over hill, but we never knew which hill it would be. And so we had to do it ourselves. First my older brothers, and later on I was called upon when my brothers had to go to the field to work. There was quite a difference in our ages. And I had to walk in that tread power and you just cannot begin to believe as to how long it seemed to take for each batch to be washed. All the clothes had to be rung out by hand wringer and I remember, I have a scar to this day on my first finger of my right hand, when I was inquisitive and my aunt was turning that ringer. She was going to be married in a few weeks and I guess her thoughts were not on what her nephew was doing. And I stuck my finger in one of the gears. Well, the thoughts came back to me very sudden, because there was a big scream! And so you can imagine that finger was a sore finger for a long, long time if that scar shows to this day. It was pretty badly crushed and cracked wide open.

And then there was the job of getting those clothes dry especially in the wintertime. It was no joke. The sheets, if there were sheets to be washed, they were not washed very often I will guarantee you that, because if they had to hang on the line outside, when you have to take them off they would be frozen. It was not a good idea to double them up when they were that frozen. And so you had to get in the house. [Chuckle.] You had to get somebody else to open the door and then you'd walk in sideways. You would get them in the house and let them thaw a little bit. There were lines strung throughout the kitchen and dining area, and they were strung on those lines. You did not have to buy humidifiers to get enough humidity in the houses in those days. In the first place the houses were not airtight, ah, lots of breezes would come in. It took a lot of fuel. We had a cook stove and in the dining room area we had what they called um, hard coal burner, self-heater. You would throw in a bucket of coal, hard coal, those were little bits of chunks of coal, but the chunks were hard as a brick. You had very little, um, small stuff around and they were not too dirty, and you would throw a bucketful in the top. It took a little while to get the coal started at the beginning of the self, the self-burner. And, but, it was a beautiful sight. The stove was, a lot, um, of nickel plated stuff around it and every fall the hired girl would come and polish that stove with stove polish. And then polished the nickel. And then there were doors in that stove on each side and they had mica glass in them and it was a beautiful picture to see that blue flame as it would be burning throughout day and night without too much care. Naturally, every evening my father would, ah, tip the ashes, dump the ashes you know and a shake it, and then the ashes would come in a pan and every morning that was one of the chores in the house was to empty those ash pans from the stove in the kitchen and also that of that burner. But any rate, that was such a nice, even steady heat and there's a beautiful picture to look at in

the evenings, in the glow of the evening, with the lamp light, or if you would be reading, or something like that. The lights were out, it was something to look at.

Well, we would hang the clothes in those rooms. And so you can imagine there was no running around with those clothes, sheets, and everything hanging up. Upstairs, where I slept, and the rest of the children slept, there was no heat in the bedrooms. It was very, very cold. My sisters would sleep up there too and they would take upstairs, they would take a heated iron that they used for ironing, or perhaps they would take a soapstone that could be heated in the oven, wrap it in some material, and put that in the bed before they go to bed. And we slept in a room that was unfinished, and you could just see the shingles on the roof and so forth almost. And in fact, sometimes the roof wasn't in too good of repair and snow would even sift onto the bed. So it was very, very cold and so we had flannel sheets and I'll guarantee this, they were not washed too often. Neither was any of the other clothes that we wore washed too often in our youth. Ah, because of the task of washing first of all that great big kettle of water had to be heated and then of course the washing had to be done. And all of that was really quite a job. Later on gasoline engines came around and they were used, but oh, what a task it was to get some of those gasoline engine started. It was absolutely no joke to get those a-going in the morning. A kettle of water would have to be heated and we would put that on there. And then to try and get those things started.

And then of course it came time when the clothes were dry enough to iron them. A great deal, number of the clothes had to be ironed, and that was no easy job. In the wintertime it was fun. You could stand right near the stove because it had to be hot and each iron had to be heated individually. You had maybe four of those and you had one handle so you just simply switch the thing from one to the other and grab one off the stove and do some more ironing. But in

summertime it was a horse with a different color. I'll tell you to stand by the hot stove when the weather was already so very hot and then do the ironing! Then after all this was done and the clothes were put away, there was always something else that was really a big chore for the mothers to do. They would have quite frequently a big bag of socks that needed to be darned. and many times have I seen women come to our homes with, with bags of stockings, and they would perhaps have a tumbler with them or something piece of wood that looks a little bit like a bowling pin, and they would put that into the stocking and darn those stockings. After I got married, for some reason or another, I do not know why I started to do that, I never wore, wore socks. I never wore socks at all and as long as I was outdoors or anything like that, only if I would be dressed and would have to dress up and put on good shoes, you know, dress shoes, that I would wear socks, but not otherwise. So, Aida had very, very little to do when it came to darning socks. Of course now the socks are made of such different material that they are very, very long lasting. And so the darning of socks is not too much of a chore any more.

Well, that was one of the big jobs and of course the job of the lights. It was mostly, at first always, kerosene lamps, later on they got mantel gas lamps and they also got mantel kerosene lamps for lighting the houses. And that, when they got those things, gas, the mantel kerosene and the mantel gas lamps, they really thought they had a life. But there is always the problem of cleaning the wicks, cleaning the chimneys, filling, refueling them with gas or kerosene, or whatever, was needed. It was quite a chore to be done.

Then there was the big chore of seeing that there was a fuel in the house for the stoves, the cook stove especially, because there is where we burned wood and cobs in. One of the big jobs of the winter was to see that we would saw down trees and get enough wood prepared so that we could saw it with a circle saw in the spring, and then it would cure for the summer and be

fit to be burned in the fall. That was a job and a half and believe me when we did not have chainsaws and everything like that and everything had to be done with handsaws. It was quite a chore to saw down those huge sometimes 36 diameter, inches in diameter, cottonwoods. And get them down. What would take now only a matter of a few hours with a saw like they have now, in those days it would take a long time. We would have to wedge the logs so that they could be, that we could carry them and take him to the circle saw in the spring, and all of that was a chore and a half to be done in the wintertime.

And then in the home there was the chore of tending to the floors. There were no waxed floors. There were no, was no linoleum, to speak of, in those days. And there was wallpaper, so quite often the walls were not painted very often. So quite often in the springtime or in the fall, some people would come and put on new wallpaper, and so forth, and that always was quite a chore in itself.

And of course there was the job of sewing the clothes. And all of that and kind, the patching of the clothes was really quite a bit, because on the farm there was plenty of patching that had to be done. We didn't have a lot of clothes, don't you kid yourself, we didn't have a half a dozen pair of shoes or more. And the girls didn't either. You were fortunate if you had two pair. There was one thing in our home that we had all of us boys, three of us and my father, we all had wooden shoes and they were used quite frequently.

As I said we had no running water in the house. If we wanted hard water to drink and so forth we had to go outdoors. But, we can never had to worry about humidity in the house either, that there wasn't enough, because always there was a tea kettle on the stove and in the wintertime especially that would always be steaming because the stove would be going. So a lot of steam and moisture came into the house in that kind of a way.

And so I think I'm just going to stop now for a while and sort of, um, refresh my memory as to what I'm going to say for the rest of the time. There are so many things that I would like to tell but do you know that could be boring to you.

What did we do at home? We had no radio. We had no television. We did have telephone and the telephones would have as many as 14 patrons on a line and sometimes that was nice if there was a storm or it was stormy weather in a rainy day or so forth and you were inside most of the day. And it was so nice and easy to go to the receiver and listen in and so all of us who were doing that quite a bit were called rubber necks! Well, at any rate, sometimes it was fun to listen as one way you would get in on the news or anything that was happening that other people knew that you didn't know. But there was also sometimes a big nuisance to some of those people, some of those patrons, did not know enough to stop talking. Our earliest telephones had the wires that came from outside the ground wire and the regular wire they came through the wall and they were attached to the phone by little plugs above the phone cropper. And if you wanted to fix the lines so that it was not usable all you had to do was pick up a piece of metal like a knife or a spoon or so and lay it across those two posts where the wires were attached and the line would be about as dead as any telephone line ever possibly could be. So you would let it be there for a few moments and then you ring until you get the party that you wanted. But it was a nuisance when some of those people would use the telephone for as much as a half an hour talking about the things that were not absolutely needful. It was not intended, the telephone should be used, as a visiting place when you had a lot of patrons, 15 of them in a day, so you know at a time, 14 to 15 on one line. So it was a very difficult thing.

We used that, but of course, there were other things that we did. We did a tremendous lot of reading. Oh, we didn't have a lot of books. We couldn't go to the libraries to find books and

even in the country school there were not too many library books. And I can truthfully say that I read, and reread, and reread some more many, many books. One of the first books I found that I read was to be of great interest was the story of the sinking of that great big passenger ship the Titanic. When that book came out, my word how I did read it. I did read the story of the presidents of the United States, their lives and a lot of those books I could read and I found them to be really neat for reading. And as I have said, they were read and reread and we had to do that by the dim light of a lamp, kerosene lamp. If we had to use that kind of light today, I think our eyes wouldn't be very good. I think our eyes in those days were much, much stronger than they are today. For instance, spectacles, you, ah, know you just didn't have specialist for telling you what kind of glasses you had to have and, ah, you simply, I know that my grandparents would go to the drugstore and there was a whole series of glasses there and you would pick up one after the other and finally you would find a pair that you felt was just good for your eyes, you could read much better with that, and so you would buy them. Just imagine, you paid a quarter for that frame and all. And my grandmother used those until the day of her death and she was 86 and her vision was good yet. My grandfather could read without glasses. He did have them. He got them from the drug store, but he could read without glasses.

I think one of the reasons that our eyes were strong in those days because we had to do so many things in the dark. We had to hitch the horses. We had to harness the horses. We had to go on the road. We had no headlights on the buggies. We had to do all of those things in the dark and I don't know if you've ever driven, out in the country, perhaps most of you who are going to listen to this have not, but if you've ever [unclear], driven with a horse in the buggy, and if you ever do, and you'd be out in the road where the thunderstorm, and a flash of lightning, and suddenly it be pitch dark, and it would be very difficult to see. And to see the lightning bolts as

they fall down from the sky, in an automobile you're very, very safe because you have your rubber tires. But in those days the buggies were not safe with their steel rims, far from being that. And you'd see sometimes, you see the lightning hit the telephone wires and go about dancing down the wires, you'd see that happen. And the crashes of thunder would be just louder than loud. And I tell you right now it was no picnic to be out in a shower like that. In many times have I been in something like that and then to be able to see through that all, and you know, so often we had to do so many things. We would go to bed quite often in the dark, but rest assured of this, we did not take off too many clothes. We took our shoes off downstairs, but we removed our socks and our trousers and we did not put on pajamas. Most of time, in the wintertime, you wouldn't dream of taking off your underwear because you would freeze right then and there. And so we just didn't do those things in those days and we survived. We got through it. Now when I talk again, I'm going to talk about life, what life was like outside on the farm. I have been talking so much about what is in the house, about the school, and about the church, and oh yes, I should mention this too, I've seen life from the buggy and the carriage come to the life of the automobile. Then come the travel by trains and then come to the travel by airplanes. When my grandfather came from the Netherlands with this parents, it took him six weeks. In 1965, we went to Holland. It took us less than 24 hours, much less than that. And so that really is something. And so what a difference in change there is in our lifestyle, in our methods of travel. I firmly believe that within the next century you will be saying to your family, let us go have a cup of coffee in The Netherlands, or in any part of the world, and it will only take an hour or two from any airport to get there. And you can do that.

And that is why one finds it so very needful that one should not forget to learn to talk some foreign languages. I am so thankful that I can talk, read, and write the Dutch language

fluently. It has been very, very helpful. When we went to the Netherlands it was very helpful and it is very helpful now when I write and talk letters. I talk in tape to Netherlands and to other places.

There is just one thing one has to be very careful full, with, that you don't make boo-boos from translating the Dutch into English directly. Because sometimes you can make some big ones. I recall my father had to have surgery in 1914, and my, I was kidded by my brothers for that expression for many, many years. I, all of a sudden, had become a man. Suddenly at the age of 11, I had to get up in the morning, at 5 o'clock on that day my father was to have surgery. A little after 6, we were in the field cultivating. I had never cultivated before and towards about 10 o'clock or 10:30 or 11, I was very concerned about the fact that my father had to have, which at that time seemed to be a terrific, big surgery. Now it's almost as worse as having a tooth pulled, an appendectomy. In those days you had to stay in bed for no less than nine to ten days and then do nothing yet for several weeks. Now you can jump out of bed almost the next morning! What a difference. But at any rate, the surgery was supposed to be big and I was very concerned about my father's condition. And so towards noon my brothers were just nearby cultivating and I said, let's turn the Dutch directly into English, I wonder if dad is coming by. And in Dutch [speaks Dutch] and it was I wonder if he is coming to, or something like that, or that's what I should have said. And how they ridiculed me when I was young upon saying that.

And another time I was attending the Academy a few years later, and I was tardy, which was something in the country school I never was because we lived so nearby. But this morning at the Academy, I was tardy and I had to go to the principal with my excuse. He said, "What's the reason?" And I said I couldn't say, but I had a feeling my parents did not stand up early enough. That's the way you would put it in Dutch! It should have been, they didn't get up early enough

that morning. But standing up. And some of those expressions that you change directly from Dutch into English are real cute! But you better be right careful you use it in the right place.

And I think it is about time we are going outdoors. We have been talking about in the house, in the church, and in the school. Now shall we find out what as to what life was like when we would step outside. We had at our home, hundreds of trees. There were walnut trees, cottonwood trees. One time I counted them, there were 500 and some trees there. And of course, slowly and surely they dwindled away. Today that farm place is no longer there. Where there used to be many, many farm places now I would say there's at least 25 to 30% less farm places than there were years ago, and one of them is the place where I was born and raised. It was not easy to see the home where I had been born in, and the one where I lived for 24 years. My brother owned the place, and he had built a place south of there, and so he felt that the place should be destroyed. Well, the house is very little much more than a shell and the walls inside, the good things had been removed from it, the few that were good and so he decided one morning that he would burn it to the ground. I went there too and it was an awesome sight, to see the fire that slowly, but surely came up. We took pictures of it as the fire grew and grew and grew. It was quite a thing to see that fire as it spread through the whole house and broke out of the windows in the whole house and flames shooting in all directions, but it was easier for me to see that for it be gone in only a few moments time, than to see some of these homes that I see throughout the countryside now, just with no doors in them, and no windows in them, and just fading away by decay. That to me is not a very nice idea, of seeing one's home place going either, to stand there in ruins and in weeds and what have you. Yes, that place is gone, but the memories thereof remain.



Nelson De Jong donated the corn stalks to the Dutch American Heritage Museum, Orange City, Iowa.

My grandfather came there in the 1872 and he built a small barn and he did not have enough money to buy lumber to finish the hayloft and since the eaves came down almost to where the hayloft floor was, he decided to finish off under the eaves where you couldn't walk in anyway, he decided to fill that in with bundles of corn stalks. In 1914 my father tore that barn down and we saved one of those bundles that were tied with original prairie hay. There never used to be twine, of course, so they tied the bundles with hay that was brought to the field after they had cut the corn with a corn knife. But of course, naturally, they had picked the ears out first. Took a lot of work to get that done. I tell you, because he

covered quite a bit of space with those corn stalks. And then in 1914, we saved one of those bundles and now I have now it in my home here. We had a case made for it in 1965, in a case with a glass front. And those stalks, I dare say, are about the oldest corn stalks to be found anywhere in the world. I realize that it seems such a simple thing to keep, but let us remember that corn was the stable food, the staple foods and staple food, for most of the people in this country when our Pilgrim fathers came here. It was corn that kept them alive and it was corn in this state, that made Iowa what it is. We had that song, "The Corn State Too." And so, I just felt that we should keep that bundle of corn. As to where it'll go after I'm gone, I cannot be telling you. My children will have to make that decision.

When we, our earliest recollection, of farming was we picked all the corn by hand. And that was done until I was more than 50 years of age, as far as I was concerned, I learned to pick corn very, very rapidly. I saw the corn come from open-pollinated to hybrid corn and what a difference the hybrid corn would stand erect and oh, how easy it was to husk that corn. Why it wasn't much of a job to us as many as fourteen thousand years, one day.

But I am going ahead of myself a little bit. I want to start in the spring. The discing for the grain was done, some people had 7-foot discs, some had 9-foot discs. The 7-footers were drawn with three horses, the 9-footers with four horses. Some of the harrows were 15 feet wide, for three horses or two, some of the harrows were as much as 26 feet wide for four horses. When it came to the planting of the corn, it was done with the two-row corn planter nearly always in the last part of, the very last part of April and the first part of May. The corn was planted with a two-row corn planter, now they have corn planters that plant as nearly as 16 rows. Quite a difference. So the corn was harvested. Again the corn was planted and it was checked, and you had to cultivate it both ways. There was no weed control in those days save with a hoe and a cultivator. The cultivator was difficult.

Threshing was a big job, as it was haymaking and you had to pitch all the hay. At first you had to make many stacks and pitching the hay. With threshing you had thresh, to do the grain, shaft the grain, and thresh it with big machines that came, steam engines and so forth, that came and did the job for you. All in all, it was a very tedious job. Took many men to do that. To stack the straw in all that kind of a thing and then came shock threshing after the custom of stack threshing, where there were not so many machines.

And then came the big job of husking corn by hand. It was a time to get up at 6 at 5 and earlier than that in the morning. We would go to the field at 6 o'clock and we would pick a great

big load and come home at around 11 and be back in the field at 12 and go home about 4 o'clock, between 4:30 and 5. It was a tremendous day and one would be too tired almost at the end of the day to do much of anything else but go and have supper and go to sleep. All in all, it was a tiring three to four weeks out in the fall of doing that. Frosty weather made it very uncomfortable, made you wet from the top to the bottom almost.

And so I am just about coming to the end of what I must tell you as to what farming was like. And opening the roads for the snow, dragging the roads. We had to do all of that ourselves if we wanted to get to town with an automobile or with anything else. We had to help ourselves a great deal. And so I think it is just about time, I notice this tape is just about coming to an end. And there is one little more thing I would like to say. The bobsleds, those bells as I said, no wonder someone coined that beautiful little song, or wrote that beautiful little song, "Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way, oh what fun it is to ride in a one horse open sleigh." [De Jong sings.] There is more to that and then there are other songs that were written about the jingle bells.

There is much more that could be said, but I must stop now. This is Nelson De Jong talking.