

Interview with Ella Aulwurm 10/6/75

9529 MINNICK
tel. 422-0014

Interviewed by Carol Adams

Int: I understand you are a descendent of one of Oak Lawn's founding trustees?

Ella: Yes. It was my father William Aulwurm.

Int: How long have the Aulwurms lived in the area?

Ella: Here in Oak Lawn since 1893. But my mother May Sahs lived on a farm near 87th and Central before that. My ^{grandfather} ~~father~~ originally had a farm at 111th St. between Central and Ridgeland. After my mother and father were married they lived in Chicago for about six years which is where my older brother and I were born. And we came here when I was about three and a half. Of course, I was baptized here at Trinity Lutheran Church so I have been a member of the church for longer than I actually lived here. I went to school at 95th and Cicero.

(Miss Aulwurm's written reminiscences of her days in the school are as follows:)

"The elementary public school I attended was located at 95th and Cicero, we called it 48th St. It was a large frame building with wide aisles; a one room school and one teacher taught all the grades, There were 30 and later 45 pupils. There was a nice yard to play in surrounded by trees. There was also a well with a pump and we drank water with our lunch. There were no thermos bottles in those days. I don't think it was even invented then.

"I remember very well my ~~first~~ first day at school. I had turned six in April and in September I started school. There was no kindergarten or pre-school and I could not read or write but I finished 8th grade at 13 and so did my three brothers.

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The youngest of my brothers started at 5 and finished at 12. No reading problems then. School opened at 9 o'clock every morning except Saturday and Sunday and some holidays. The school was located about 3/4 of a mile from my home and we walked in the morning and in the afternoon. We left at 8:30 a.m. and school lasted until 3:30 p.m. with two recesses of 15 minutes each one in the afternoon and one in the forenoon with an hour for lunch. We either sang songs or the teacher would read to us. I remember one of the books was an adventure story "Around the World in 80 Days." Sometimes we played ring-toss in the morning before going to our studies. If school was not open for any days for some reason like a teachers meeting, that day was made up at the end of the term. School was held on Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays and on those days we sang patriotic songs, waved our little flags and had recitations about our country, One year the teacher thought we did so well while rehearsing he told us to invite our parents. My mother, Mrs. Hopkins, Mrs. Schultz and Mrs. Gaddis attended and Mrs. Toole, the teacher's wife and one of the school directors Mr. Fred Behrens and we did our little stunt. That was the only time we had visitors except now and then the school superintendent Mr. Bright and his assitant Mr. Downey showed up.

"There were no cement sidewalks then, the boys walked in the street, a gravel road and the girls on a path on the north side of the street. There were wide ditches on both sides of the street and in the spring they were filled with water. In the winter the boys could not resist the temptations^{of} throwing a few snowballs at the girls. The girls did not let this pass and told the teacher next morning who done it. The poor boy had to

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"The public did not pay for so many things in taxes-- if you attended high school somewhere your parents paid, if you attended Business College your parents paid or you got a job and worked and went to night school in Chicago and if you did not live in the city you paid for that.

"Sometimes I think we are putting too much on the public taxpayers and maybe that is why I hear over the radio that Illinois is going broke."

Int: When was this house built?

Ella: It was in 1906 that we moved here. My father was a carpenter and when he had the money he would buy up land around here to build on. My brothers were all carpenters and they went into business with him so he'd buy up the land to keep them all busy. Alfred Aulwurm, my ~~father's~~ brother was also a village trustee..

Int: Where did you go to high school?

Ella: I didn't, I went to business college. It was located at 63rd ^{Yale (Englewood)} and ~~Crawford~~ but it's gone now.

Int: Is the Sahs school in Stickney named after one of your relatives?

Ella: Yes, it's named after my uncle Charles Sahs, my mother's brother. He continued to live on the farm at 87th and Central after his brothers and sisters were grown, ~~and eventually his brother bought the farm next door.~~ The teachers used to take liberties with the names of the students/

My mother was Mary Sahs but the teacher named her May and she told a story that one teacher thought her last name should be "Sash" ^{instead} of Sahs. Her sister was ~~Elizabeth~~ ^{Louise} but the teachers called her ~~Elizabeth~~ ^{Libby} ^(Louise also) and both names stuck. They both went to school at 79th and State Road.

I don't know why the teachers did it maybe because they were the first Germans to come into the area.

Int: Do remember the year the Lutheran church was torn down on 95th St.

Ella: It was right after the present one was built. (The old church property was sold to Smith Cleaners in 1940 and following Trinity Lutheran's dedication of it's new church at 9701 S. Brandt Ave. the old church was torn down.)

Ella: (Looking at a picture of her class at grammar school.) Most of them are gone--Albert Schultz, Margaret Jorn she married a Krueger.

Elsie Evers she's still around. There were four Hopkins boys, Herbert, ~~Patrick~~^{Walter}, Percy and John. Percy was the doctor and Herbert's son, Herbert, Jr. is still alive lives right around the corner as a matter of fact.

Kruegers had a grocery store on 95th St. Elsie Evers was a Hilgendorf. ~~The Kruegers were descendants of the Simpson's~~^{The Simpsons were}, supposedly the first settlers out here. Then there are Anna and Gertrude Hoffman, their father was one of Oak Lawn's first Blacksmiths. He had his shop right here at Minnick and 95th St.

Int: You said you went to Business college. Were you a secretary?

Ella: No, I did bookkeeping for a number of different firms. Always in the city. I took the train in. The stops coming out were Clarksdale (now Ashburn) Pleasant Hill, Oak Lawn, Chicago Ridge, Worth, Palos Park and Orland Park.

Int: What kind of social activities did you have when you were growing up out here?

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Ella: Most of them were connected with the church. But there were others. We would have ice cream socials in Larsen's Hall and Christmas Bazaars. Sometimes we used the hall next to Brandt's for dances but there was a connecting door into the saloon and our parents used to worry about strangers wandering into the dance from the tavern. We once had a penny social and we held that at the Congregational church. I belonged to the Luther League at church.

Int: Who were some of the other families that lived around here?

Ella: There was August Roepke and Mrs. Roepke was a Krueger. ^{Fred}~~George~~ Schultz had a store part of it was tavern and of course Brandt's had the tavern.

Int: Is the present Homestead Bar at the corner of 93rd St. and Central Ave. the original Simpson farm house?

Ella: No. The Homestead place was built by Charles Simpson but the original farm house was moved to the corner of 54th and ~~BE~~ Simpson lived in there. That would be 95th and 54th Ave. That whole block was originally Simpson's property and the Congregational church was on that property facing 54th just north of 95th St. My mother said that one of the Simpson ^{sisters} daughters was a school teacher and taught my mother at the school at 79th St. and State Road. In fact that area was once known as East Lyons (Stickney and now Burbank) because I have my mother and father's wedding certificate and it says that he came from Worth and she came from East Lyons. Now it's Chicago Ridge and Burbank.

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Ella: It's still Stickney township. Uncle Charlie had all kinds of jobs there--road commissioner , highway department. My father used to say that some of those jobs were foolish until he volunteered to fix up our school house one August before we returned to school. Each year he had to start on it earlier to get it done. He changed his mind about janitors and building maintenance men after that. He also did carpentry work at the ~~Cook~~ ^{State Road} School where my cousins went to school. The cousins lived on the farm and they'd invite us over. We really got around then. My father used to take us to circuses and plays, we went on the train to those. We had a surrey that we used for around town and to go out to the farm. My Dad would takes us for rides out through Palos and Orland Park. There were a lot of big hills there and I always wondered if the horse would make it up the hills. But he always did. My father knew people out that way and we'd stop and visit. He was real familiar with the area around here. They used to use Archer Avenue to take the produce from the farm into the South Water Street market. Up around my Uncle Charlie's farm there was a big hay barn and when we were kids we loved to play in it. Lot of people still remember the haybarn. Uncle Charlie's house is still there but I can't see my mother's house. There used to be orchards along the front and they are all gone now.

After my grandfather died the one that had the farm on 111th Street, my grandmother fixed up rooms upstairs for ~~my uncle~~ ^{himself (uncle lived downstairs)} and she said that from those windows you could see the horses racing across the street where the cemetery is now. I can remember the race track myself when I was a girl that would be about 1904 and when I made my Confirmation the race trains would go by the church on Sundays and the Pastor would comment about all those fools spending their money at the races.

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They used to exercise the horses up and down 111th Street so they gave passes to the track to all the people that lived along their since the horses were going along their front yards. My Grand^{mother}~~father~~ had a pass and used to pass it around. My Father used it one day to take me and my Mother to the track. It was the first and last time I was ever at a horse race.

Int: Do you remember what year that was?

Ella: Let's see, I was about 14 years old, it would have to be 1904.

Int: Your father was a carpenter and built this house, Hoffman's next ~~store~~^{door} and the one across the street? What was their name then?

Ella: It was Roepke's then. The the daughter Ida Reek moved in after her father's death. She had a daughter Vera and she married a Cosentino. A son of hers Larry Cosentino lives there now. There was some talk of trying to sell it but Larry says his grandmother thought the house should always stay in the family. And I can see why she thought that. Through all the years and the problems the grandmother always thought that they would have a roof over their head. So she was right. His grandmother was a Roepke, and she married a a Reek that could be Reich, yes I think that was the way it was spelled.

Int: Were there always houses here or was it originally farmland?

Ella: It was farmland originally and it was subdivided by a man by the name of Minnick. I think the Simpson's owned it originally but they didn't pay the taxes on it or something. The area just west of 54th Ave. was subdivided by a Mr. Campbell and he was the one that dug the lake. It was only a creek when I moved out here and we used to skate where the creek widened just north of 95th st. between Cook Avenue and 53rd Ave. They also used to skate at what they called the Slough where Oak Meadows is now. My brother skated there but I didn't very much.

Ella: In the summer the lake was just called a swimming hole and my brother and his friends would go swimming there naked. So he'd tell me I couldn't go. I went once and I don't think my mother ever knew. We just called it the Creek and it ran back towards Evergreen Park. In later years when they started talking about Stony Creek I asked , "Where's that?" I never knew it had a name. We also used to sleigh and slide around there when it snowed enough. The Roepke kids lived next door to us at one time they rented before their house was built across the street. They would come and call us after dinner and my brother Art and I would get the sled out and we'd go over there and have a grand time.

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