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The Center For Continuing Education
The Loop College
64 East Lake Street
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Communications For Change
111 East Wacker Drive
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Chicago, Illinois 60601

DOCUMENTING SOCIAL HISTORY: CHICAGO'S ELDERLY SPEAK

VIDEO ARCHIVE CATALOGUE

Documenting Social History is an oral history archive of non-broadcast television interviews. The interaction between a young interviewer and an older adult from one of Chicago's ethnic, geographic, or special interest communities helps the personal history of that older adult stand for the cultural history of the community.

Showings of the video taped interviews are being set up to teach young people about their own heritage and to break down the isolation of the older adult segment of the community. Natural meeting places, libraries, churches, block clubs, schools, are the settings for tape showings and discussion sessions. Bringing together young and old members of the community to share the experience of watching a tape and then to react to that experience from their unique perspectives, gives all participants a chance to establish contact with other members of their community, to develop a sense of awareness of history and the importance of that community, and to understand the role of the older adult as a repository of that history.

Video tape is available for showing in 1/2inch black and white form. Other formats are available in special cases. The equipment and help needed to set up showings can be provided. The placement of copies of all or part of the archive in libraries and institutions is encouraged.

Please contact the Center for Continuing Education, Carole Collins, at 269-8137 or Communications for Change, Tedwilliam Theodore, at 565-1785 for more information.



GEOGRAPHIC COMMUNITIES

A. Uptown

Lois Michaelson

Raised in Uptown, Ms. Michaelson describes what the beaches, streets and restaurants were like in the '20's and '30's as she was growing up. Uptown gradually developed into an area of rooming houses where recent arrivals to Chicago would often first live. Handicapped as a child, but able to get around most of her life, her disability worsened soon after her mother's death and she has been forced to stop all work. She talks of the loneliness of being unable to meet new people and share her ideas, and of the need to make the city more accessible to the handicapped. She talks of the terrible conditions in nursing homes she has lived in toward the end of the interview. The tape also shows pictures of Ms. Michaelson at various times of her life.

Glenn Clark

Clark has been a life-long resident of Uptown, having always lived in hotels and rooming houses. He talks about the neighborhood in the '30's and '40's, the big hotels, the Aragon Ballroom, the Green Mill, the Rainbow Room. He describes the change in the area in the last twenty years, especially since Blacks and Latinos have moved in.

GEOGRAPHIC COMMUNITIES

B. Austin

Ragnar Benson (Also see tape under Ethnic White)

Coming to the U.S. from Sweden on the Lusitania in 1911, Mr. Benson describes his problems with immigration, his progress through school, and how he built up his contracting business on the West side of Chicago. He talks of his commitment to staying in Austin despite its changes, and of his relations to his workers.

BLACK COMMUNITY

Cleo Scott

From a black, middle class background, Mrs. Scott talks of coming to Chicago from Kansas in 1916 and working as a receptionist for a black podiatrist servicing Caucasians in the Loop area. She describes many of the landmark buildings and theatres which flourished during that time and changes in the black community, and especially changes in living in Hyde Park. A member of the Jubilee Singers following the Chataqua Circuit in Canada, she talks of the race riot of 1919 and later of living through the depression.

Dedrick Jeffries (Also see tape under Work Experience)

Born in the South, Mr. Jeffries came to Chicago in 1931 to escape the boredom and poverty of farming, and to seek a better life. He lived with relatives and only worked for short periods, since most jobs offered blacks before World War II were very wearing. In 1943, he got his first regular job at a steel mill in Cicero, where he worked until forced to retire in 1970. He talks of the discrimination against blacks which was widespread until Roosevelt banned discrimination on government contracts. During most strikes, the police were too involved for the strike to accomplish much, and the struck company often burned its own obsolete equipment to bring the police in. Most of the AFL union leadership were in the pockets of the company and achieved little for workers. He later talks of the need for ensuring that workers got genuine insurance for the money they put into pension funds, which didn't happen in his company.

Travestine Jeffries (Also see tape under Work Experience)

Coming to Chicago in the '30's, Mrs. Jeffries worked in the restaurant business and raised her family on the southside of Chicago. She hadn't wanted to be a housewife, but felt obligated once her children had come. Her second child was born at home, and she often took in laundry to do, describing the process of stretching lace curtains. She describes the many jobs she and her husband did to make more money for their six children and the problems they faced.

BLACK COMMUNITY

Prentice McCarey (Also see tape under Work Experience) *3rd on tape.*

8:45-11:35

McCarey is a black jazz piano player who has worked the Chicago nite club and hotel circuit since the thirties. He talks about wanting to go to medical school, but having to give up college during the depression. He tells anecdotes and describes the life of a pick-up musician during the thirties and after the war. He talks about the discriminatory patterns which existed and still exist and compares young musicians with the old timers he has worked with.

Dave Lockhart (Also see tape under Work Experience)

Coming to Chicago in 1956, Mr. Lockhart talks of his early years driving a cab and of discrimination against black cabbies. He talks of the difficulties in getting fares at cab stands and describes two of his more hilarious passengers, one a woman who refused to leave his cab when it developed engine trouble and how the passenger had to be arrested in order to have her removed from the cab.

ETHNIC WHITE

Ragnar Benson (Also see tape under Geographic Communities)

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Cecil Towe (Also see tape under Labor Organizing) ^{2nd on tape -}
4:10-8:45

Cecil Towe worked in the coal mines of Harlan County, Kentucky for thirty-five years and has been a resident of Uptown, Chicago for over twenty years. He talks about the strikes in the mines from the point of view of a union sympathizer who was not actively involved, who did not fully understand the issues and actions of the period. He also talks about life in Chicago and of his dream to return to Appalachia to hunt and fish.

Rosina Leicht - 1st on tape 0:45 - 4:10

Born in Yugoslavia within a small German community, Rosina had to flee the anti-German and advancing forces of Marshall Tito during World War II. Her whole town packed up and spent a full month on the road, walking and driving wagons, far into Austria. Rosina talks of torn loyalties and of feeling and being made to feel an outsider in Yugoslavia, in Austria, and in America. She describes life during and after the war as a roomer in an Austrian farmhouse with a family that wanted them to leave.

Florence Scala (Also see tape under Social Institutions)

Growing up in the neighborhood around the Jane Addams Hull House, Ms. Scala remembers, as a child, meeting Jane Addams. She describes the many services which Hull House offered to the surrounding neighborhood. Ms. Scala was deeply involved in the struggle to save Hull House as a living institution, as well as trying to save the vital community around the settlement house, and felt betrayed by the trustees of Hull House who were content to see it transformed into a sterile monument. Ms. Scala ran for alderwoman of the First Ward in the 60's and talks of her growing consciousness of herself as a woman.

ETHNIC WHITE

Bessie Robin (Also see tape under Labor Organizing)

Beginning work at the tobacco factories of Czarist Russia at the age of 12, Mrs. Robin soon became involved in organizing workers' strikes. She describes the great poverty of her family and jail conditions when she was imprisoned for leading a strike. Because of pogroms against Jews and her one brother's desire to escape the Czarist draft, she came to the U.S. around 1910 and quickly became involved in organizing among the textile workers at Hart, Schaffner and Marx. She talks of attending meetings of the Social Democrats and falling in love with the chairman.

LATINO COMMUNITY

Nicolas Velasquez (Mexican)

Velasquez was born in Mexico in 1909 and immigrated to the United States in 1926. He talks about his early jobs in Chicago, on the railroad, in the packing houses, at a war plant during World War II, and describes how he worked to open his own barber shop in Pilsen. He talks about the tension between the Chicano and Italian communities and the development of Latin organizations to deal with the problems of the Chicanos. He stresses the need for Latino involvement in politics to gain power.

Gabino Moyet (Puerto Rican) In Spanish

Felipe Arteaga (Cuban) In Spanish

LABOR ORGANIZING

Eulalia Burke

Mrs. Burke talks of her work for the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) during and after World War I, when many people were thrown in jail for anti-war activities. She then describes her work as a correspondent for a leftist news service, the Federated Press, during the 1930's, a service that was operated for union papers.

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Boris Ross

Planning to return to Russia after bringing his parents to the U. S. in 1922, Mr. Ross was forced to stay in Chicago to support them. He worked in the stockyards during the day, trying to organize some of the workers, and attended night school. He describes some of his organizing activities, for which he was eventually fired, and some of the many jobs he held after that in the textile industry where he also tried to organize a union. He talks of attending DePaul Law School and of being arrested by the Chicago Red Squad for protesting the Japanese invasion of China in 1931.

LABOR ORGANIZING

Fred Thompson

Born in Canada, Mr. Thompson describes how he first became interested in Socialism at age 12, causing him difficulties at school. Interested in traveling to see the world, he describes riding on boxcars to different jobs and his eventual interest in the Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World). Arrested in California for selling the Wobbly newspaper, he spent four years in San Quentin and contrasts jail conditions then and now. He talks of spending six months living with relatives in Colorado and trying to live non-politically like the average citizen. The tape ends with his reflections on the importance of organizing the unemployed (as happened during the 30's) to ensure that they support striking workers and of how people should learn to enjoy the next depression without money.

Charles Velsek - IWW (Also see tape under Work Experience)

Having joined the Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World) at age 18, Mr. Velsek talks of how the IWW card became a virtual railroad ticket for migrant workers who rode the boxcars to their next job. He describes the success of the IWW in raising the wage and working conditions of agricultural workers in the western states, and of how they organized workers while travelling on the trains, since the workers were often inaccessible when on farms. Arrested twice in North Dakota for being a Wobbly, he discusses the impact of such political trials as Sacco and Vanzetti. During the 30's, he was active in organizing Unemployed Unions (branches of which were set up in Hyde Park, Pullman and Lakeview) and talks about the role organizing plays in helping society to achieve Socialism quicker.

Cecil Towe (Also see tape under Ethnic White) 2nd outtake - 4:10 - 8:14

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WORK EXPERIENCE

Charles Velsek - Hobo (Also see tape under Labor Organizing)

Mr. Velsek talks about the life of a hobo (or migratory worker), riding boxcars from job to job. He talks of the differences between a hobo, wino and bum and of how hobos used to take hot baths in Hot Springs. He describes how police harrassed and arrested hobos on the trains and of the many times he was jailed for riding boxcars. He also describes his first experience in begging and life in a hobo jungle.

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SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

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