

Interview with Charles H. Richter

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Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

St. Cloud State University Archives

Interviewed by Cal Gower and James Robak

Robak: Today is August 3rd, 1977. We are interviewing Charles Richter. And he's a former attorney of St. Cloud—he just retired July 1st. This interview is being conducted for the Central Minnesota Historical Center. Cal Gower and James Robak are the interviewers. Mr. Richter...

Richter: The middle initial or middle name I have is Herman. The railroad operator in St. Cloud who is Charles Richter, doesn't have that middle name.

Robak: Ah, there's two of you, okay.

Gower: Fine.

Richter: Charles H., you know.

Robak: Charles H. Richter. Mr. Richter, why don't you begin by telling when and where you were born.

Richter: June 3rd, 1893 in Farber (?) Township up in Otter Tail County, approximately twelve miles northeast of Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

Robak: Okay, and your father's name was what?

Richter: Herman.

Robak: Herman.

Richter: Oddly enough he was baptized, I understand, Gustav Herman, but for some reason or other, he didn't want anything to do with Gustav, so he switched it a-round and took Herman.

Robak: I see.

Richter: "G" is the middle name then.

Robak: Have he lived there all his life?

Richter: He was born in Saxony over in Germany. And he came over when he was, I think, sixteen years old. And he landed down in New Jersey with five cents in his pocket. So he hired right out to a boat that was going out to get oysters, I guess it was. So that way he earned some money because they furnished him with feed on the boat, you know, paid him when he got through, so then he had a little money to start on his way. From there he traveled down along the way, got on to Virginia, found out they wanted to hire some people there. Discovered that he was the only white one amongst them. But he worked there, nevertheless, for a while among the Negroes. This was in the 1880's. And he came on gradually. I know that he stopped into Ohio for a while and worked for a farm out there. But I think there were some relatives who had arrived up around Fergus Falls before that. Anyway, he found his way up that way. Yes, I couldn't. I could tell you just what he did. I do know that he worked at a brickyard up in Moorhead for a bit, but he finally settled down right to a homestead in Otter Tail County, in Farber Township. And he was in that that township for some time and he was cutting down timber and hauling it into town. And while, at the time that I was born, why, he was on his way down to or back from Fergus Falls. But they rolled wood in the wintertime...and then—not in the wintertime. This was June the 3rd when I was born so there couldn't be any snow out there at that time, But I think nevertheless that he was still travelling in the summertime when he was

hauling in wood to make money, as far as he could. Had to scratch around to get money, as much as he could, you know.

Gower: Where was your mother born?

Richter: She was born also in the kingdom of Saxony over in Germany. It was never fully explained to me—I suspect that she came here following my father. She had clipped her eyes upon him as a desirable future husband.

Gower: Sure. But they were married here in the United States?

Richter: Yeah.

Gower: In Otter Tail County?

Richter: Yeah.

Robak: Did you have any other brothers and sisters?

Richter: I had two sisters. Lena was sixteen. She was eight years older than I, so I was eight when she was married. And she had gotten married to a farmer. He came up from Iowa and lived across the road from us. And he proposed to her and she accepted and they got married. And I had a sister named Mary. And there was a little trouble there because she had been going around nights and my father objected to it. So she left and went down to Illinois and from there up to Iowa getting married. Moved up to northern Minnesota. I wasn't home, but she contacted my father and came up to see him. And there was some trouble there because I guess what she expected was that he would take all his property that he had at that time and turn it over to her and depart so that he would have nothing and would have to start over again. Anyway, that's what I heard. But of course, my father was not of that mood. So they had a bit of a fight and I

wasn't there. I was at that time going to school away from home. And she left and went out to northern California I believe. I have no idea where she is now. I don't know if she's alive or not.

Gower: And your other sister?

Richter: My other sister, she had gotten married to a man who was operating a farm next to ours. And they left there and they moved out to Belle Fourche, South Dakota. You say that Fourche; F-0-U-R-C-H-E--that way? I studied some French, so that's the way I handle it.

Gower: Yes. That's the way they say it in South Dakota. And is she living? Your sister?

Richter: No, she died. She had no children.

Gower: Okay, and did you go on to high school there in Fergus Falls? or...

Richter: No. I had finished common school out a mile north of Stockholm, Minnesota. And then my father told me that it would be necessary for me to attend a religious school in order to be confirmed. And so I went to the Missouri Synod German Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls. And I didn't try to remember the peculiar German history of the United States which the preacher was teaching there because I know better than that. But I took care of it until I could pass the examination, but after that, dumped it.

Gower: Was your father a Missouri Synod Lutheran?

Richter: Yes.

Gower: Oh. And then did you go on to high--the public high school?

Richter: No. After I had been confirmed and made a member of the German Lutheran Church up there in Fergus—that was 1908—and I had finished the one year, the one winter going to the

German Lutheran Church School. Well, I remember that my father gathered with me there, and he said, "Now, do you want to go back and live on the farm—work on the farm—or do you want to go on to school?" And then he said, "If you want to go on to school, you can either go to the high school over here or you can go to Park Region Luther College on the other side of town." Well, I had met some of the boys from the high school and unfortunately of course, I didn't have the nice ones. I had the ones that would come around and make trouble for you. So I didn't feel that I wanted to continue there. And I really was rather fortunate there because he allowed me to go to Park Region Luther College which was subsequently enlarged to include not only the academy but also the college in granting the bachelor's degree. And I continued in that college until I did receive my bachelor's degree. I finished the college--the high school division, what we call the academy, during them three years. I went to the president after I had three years in the college division and I told him I counted up my credits and I saw they were enough to justify me in receiving the Bachelor of Arts degree. And he said, "Well, I don't feel that we can let you do that. Of course," he said, "if you would agree to hold to the college for clergy down at Luther, Iowa," he said, "then I will see to it that you receive the degree and you will become a clergyman in our church." And I told him that the good Lord hadn't called me. And I didn't feel that I wanted to be a hypocrite going into the clergy. So he said, "All right. You'll have to stay on another year." Well one of the results of that I studied Hebrew for one year.

Robak: So you did stay on?

Richter: Huh?

Robak: You did stay on and you graduated.

Richter: I stayed on.

Robak: For another year.

Richter: Did you say in January?

Robak: For that next year. The whole year.

Richter: Well, for the whole year from the end of September through the first of June.

Gower: Was that Park Region Luther College?

Richter: Park Region Luther College.

Gower: Was that a Lutheran College?

Richter: Yes.

Gower: Was it Scandinavian Lutheran?

Richter: Yes. They were Scandinavian.

Gower: It wasn't the German Lutheran?

Richter: No. It wasn't German Lutherans. It was the Norwegian Lutheran Church that took care of it. And in fact, I had been confirmed at the German Lutheran Church up there. But they had very little fine things about it. And when I got over to this college, I was told by the president that because I was a German and their evening services were in Norwegian, it wouldn't be necessary for me to attend the evening services.

Gower: Oh?

Richter: So I said nothing. But I thought to myself, "So I'm supposed to stay upstairs and steal everybody's stuff while they're down in the chapel. Because somebody's gonna steal something and then they'll blame that German upstairs."

Gower: Oh, I see.

Richter: So I decided without saying anything about it that, no, I would go to the chapel in the evening. So I attended those evening services and found myself singing Norwegian songs with the Norwegians. And I kept on going on it well enough so that I was singing later on with the men's chorus and we would go on tour in the summertime around northwestern Minnesota. And I remember that fellow Hagen who had come over from Norlining, Norway the year before...and wasn't very good in English yet. And he was with me. And as we were going out from the concert, we had given in a church up there in northern Minnesota, I was sitting in the front with this farmer. And Hagen was sitting in the back seat with the farmer's wife. But the conversation only went on between Hagen and between the farmer and myself. And we're talking Norwegian all the time. So when we got out to his place and sat down there and after he asked the blessing after his wife put the food on the table, he said to me, " _____," (Norwegian)... "What part of Norway do you come from?" And Hagen, he started to laugh—it was funny to him. 'Cause he'd just been over from Norway for a year. You know, he understood all that. He was the guy who had really hooked this fellow, you know. That's how he looked at it. And I hadn't thought about it at all. Then he said, " _____"(Norwegian) "No, this guy is a German." So this fellow felt somewhat insulted because he thought that I'd taken advantage of him. And if you know anything about the Norwegians from Norway, you'd realize that that's true, because you're very frank in disclosing yourself when you open up without holding back. And I had...I hadn't thought about it. Actually, I wasn't trying to hide anything but we got along after a bit.

Robak: Were you interested in music right from your childhood all the way through your life? I know later you played in bands. Is that correct? And you were in the men's choir?

Richter: Well, I didn't get involved in music. Of course I sang in church, but that was singing common melodies. But I had joined up at the college—I had joined up with the men's chorus. They called it the glee club. There were five in each of the four sections and I was one of the basses. And half the songs we sang were Norwegian. And it--because I got along with those fellows so much, and because they would talk Norwegian and--well, I'd go in with them on it. So some of these people had the idea that I really was Norwegian. And of course I had to disclose my... failure to disclose was just taking advantage of and I didn't want to do that either. But some of them were somewhat insulted--felt pretty badly about five guys going along and talking Norwegian so well that the Norwegians would think that he was a Norwegian. Here I go around talking Norwegian." _____ (Norwegian)"—what part of Norway do you come from?

Robak: Okay, what did you do after you graduated?

Richter: After I graduated from college and had my Bachelor of Arts degree. I was entitled to sufficient credits at the end of the third year in college, but Dr. Ristad, who was the president of the school when I approached him for my Bachelor of Arts degree, he said, well then he would agree to go along to the school down at, near Decorah, Iowa, where the clergy of our church are educated. "I will let you have your bachelor's degree." And I said to him, "Well, I have not been called by the Lord. And you don't want a hypocrite preacher, do you?" So I said, "I'm not going." "Well," he said, "All right, you stay for another year." So he didn't receive my disclosure exactly favorably--somewhat insulted over the fact. And I guess he thought it was a good idea to keep me around there and continue to collect the money from me for the study.

Gower: Sure. Okay, you graduated in what year then?

Richter: 1915.

Gower: Then what did you do after that?

Richter: I signed up for the Minnesota Law School.

Gower: The University of Minnesota?

Richter: University of Minnesota Law College.

Robak: You attended that right away then?

Richter: Yes. Right next fall I went there and I signed up in there. That was the only place in my entire schooling where I had conditional writing. That was on one of these first tests in the subject of contracts and our teacher in contracts was really a very able guy. And he gave me a conditional. And I wasted no time after that. I really put my nose down to studying. And I never had anything like that.

Gower: What--Had you been interested in going into the law before? When did you decide to go to law school? Just shortly before you went there?

Richter: I would say so.

Gower: Oh.

Richter: Yes. Yes, there was a question - "What will I do?" Of course, my father said "You can go on out there and run the farm. Or if you want to go to agricultural school, go ahead." So--I don't know whether had any open discussions about it but I had in contemplation, medics,

dentistry and law. Well I rather decided on law because I had been plowing around on various law provisions for my father in connection with his farms that he owned up there. And I thought I had a little extra training in advance. So I also handled the medicine for the animals.

Gower: I see. So you had a little bit of--

Richter: But I decided to go to law.

Gower: And you graduated in 1918 from law school?

Richter: No, I was in the army by that time. I put in two years. In my second year— a three year law school is what it was at that time—and in my second year—that's when the war that the United States joined over in Europe—joined in. A lot of the fellows were piling out of there. And I interviewed Dr. Venst, who was the president of the law college, and I talked to him about it. I said, "You know, are all the students here going in for the armed forces?" and I said, "I have a feeling that I should go there, too." And I said, "I wanted to find out from you just where I stand." "Well," he said, "you don't get credit for the full year until you've completed it. Well," he said, "you certainly must be honest and you must realize you can't do that." Well I thought about it and I decided I'd stay on. So when I got through with that second year... This is rather ridiculous. I went over to St. Paul and I went to the enlisting officer of the Marine Corps and I told him that I had thought about joining the armed forces immediately when the war broke out, but I decided to get credit for one full year in law School and I thought. "Now I better dig in," and I asked him if he could send me over to France and give me the arm and let me go after them. "Oh, no, no, no," he said, "Our camps are all full and we don't have enough training camps." He said, "I couldn't call you for four months, but sign here. I'd be glad to take you." "Well," I said, "No." I said, "You told me I'd be held up for four months." And I had asked him,

"Can you guarantee that?" "No" he said, "I can't guarantee that because," he said, "after you've signed up," he said, "you fill out the blanks" and he said, "Well, I'll call you the next day."

"Well," I said, "I can't go for the uncertainty because I can go back and help my father on the farm. He needs my work." So I said, "I'll do that. And just wait for the draft to call me in." So it was I think September 21st when I was called. And I left home. Went down to Camp Dodge.

Gower: It was September 21st, 1917?

Richter: Yeah.

Robak: And you went to Camp Dodge?

Richter: Yeah.

Robak: And you stayed there just through your basic? Or several months, or?

Richter: Well that was rather peculiar because at that particular time when I came down there, the buildings were being constructed. They were not entirely finished and we had difficulty in being really taken care of. We had hardly a place for a bed--hardly a place for food. So when I get down there they didn't know what to do with people and one of the fellows in charge there said, "Well, you take his bucket here and go out and pick up that rubbish out there." So I was marching around out there and that was after I had filled out some blanks that they had for me to fill. And of course there were a lot of questions there, including the questions if I had ever been playing in a band. And of course I was a little unusual in that respect because I had played French horn for two years in college band. And our first concert the first year, our solo man turned to me and he said, "You'll have to play the solo here." He said, "I was down at the baseball diamond and got hit in the eye," and he said, "I can't see." Well that fellow turned out to be a

preacher later on. I found out that he didn't have the backbone to take care of it, see. So he was dumping it on me.

Gower: Oh, I see.

Richter: There were five in the -- five in the alto section. But I was second chair next to the solo chair. I don't know what they call the first... the first alto but he was the solo alto. But everybody went to the concert downtown in Fergus Falls...and we had an unusual musical man directing the band. His name was Fauss Salbach and he came over from...where it was, I can't think of the name of the town now. I knew what it was.

Gower: How did he spell his last name?

Richter: S-A-L-B-A-C-H. Oh, he was only with that college for two years because he left there and went out to Montana and I don't know what happened to him. But that first year, why, when we had our first concert, I was only second chair but I had to perform first solo. And of course the next year the soloist was gone so I had the solo chair. But that particular farm...that particular band director left and in the summer I decided that I would be coronetist and I bought a coronet. So when I came to college the next year and they tested us out, I turned out to be the soloist in the solo section for two years.

Gower: With a coronet.

Richter: Two years after that I decided no, I would play trombone.

Gower: Oh.

Richter: For two years I held down solo trombone.

Gower: Oh, I see.

Richter: And the last year when I was there I had been practicing on the clarinet and I came back to college and I turned out to be the eighth solo clarinet.

Robak: So what instrument did you play in the army then?

Richter: In what?

Robak: In the army.

Richter: In the army?

Robak: Yeah.

Richter: I played a very unusual instrument. There were only two that were manufactured of that size. There was a double 'B' bass and it had curves around me like this and then the...something came out of the top of my head. Oh yes, I had quite a time in winds because there I had to push a sailboat down the line. But it was rather odd and I think there were--well there was a fellow that had come over from Europe and he had been doing some directing of bands. And they brought him in to Camp Dodge. And they had selected the players up there. This fellow brought four solos—four professional soloists—with him. They were coronet, trombone, clarinet and bass. And I got down there at the theatre and they had, what was it? Thirteen or fourteen bass players down there. And this director lined us up there and tested us out. Pointed at me, "You're my soloist." But he had brought four soloists with him. They were brought in for a separate presentation, separate from the band. The man of course, from Camp Dodge, said he was conducting there but it was composed of all the bands consolidated through the entire camp...brought them all together. But in that particular band I found myself the soloist. Well, I should be able to do that.

The rest of the bass players had never played coronet and clarinet or trombone like I had. Pretty fast man, you know, when you hit the clarinet.

Gower: Sure, Well, did you play in the band then the entire time that you were in the army?

Richter: No. No, I didn't want to be in it.

Gower: Oh, oh.

Richter: And I stayed in it. Well, this was during the wintertime. You know, they'd fill us up 350 in the headquarters company. And they would fill us up and then they would kick some of the noncommissioned officers, but they kept the band. So there I was stuck in the--I couldn't get over to Europe--I had to stay in the band. And we found ourselves imported for various places to play. I remember we ran into a Labor Day bond parade down at Omaha and I remember playing in a parade over there and I was playing that big bass horn. And of course whenever I went around with that bass horny--there were only two that had ever been manufactured that size. From that time on, you couldn't get yourself a forty-two pound bass.

Robak: So you didn't want to stay in the band. You wanted to go over to Europe.

Richter: Well I wanted to help head up that war.

Robak: Okay. Did you ever get over there?

Richter: Yes.

Robak: You did.

Richter: I didn't get into the war.

Robak: You didn't. Ended I suppose, by the time you got over there.

Richter: Well, they had shipped out our division. We were sent down to Long Island. And it wasn't too long after that before the division got aboard the boats. Of course, we went across the sea with protective destroyers, looking for the submarines of the Germans. And I didn't note any presence of the German submarines until we got into Liverpool. We had quite an upset there. But I guess the Germans were scared to death because they really had these fellows going after them and they had to get out of there before they got killed. But we had come in from the north side between Ireland and Scotland, coming south down to that...what place did I say it was?

Gower: Liverpool.

Richter: Liverpool. Liverpool, yeah. Well, we were over there and get shoved aboard a train, chartered across England and landed on the port on the south boundary of England. And there we got aboard those little boats that they took for exporting the soldiers over to France. So we got over to France very shortly.

Gower: What time...when was that? What month and year?

Richter: I'm not certain about this. It seems to me it was September 3rd, but I'm not sure.

Gower: 1917?

Richter: Yeah.

Gower: Oh.

Richter: Wait a minute, 1918. Yeah, 1918.

Gower/Robak: 1918.

Gower: So you were only there for two months and then the armistice was announced.

Richter: Yeah, but of course I didn't get out of France until June--no, July. No, it was the end of June. I landed in the harbor just south of New York. Can't think of the name now. On July 3rd.

Gower: That was when you came back, you mean?

Richter: Yeah. That's when I landed in the United States. July 3rd.

Robak: July 3rd, 1919.

Gower: Did you--How did you feel about fighting other Germans?

Richter: I felt like killing them.

Gower: Oh you did, huh?

Richter: Yes. No question about that.

Gower: What about your father? How did he feel about that?

Richter: He was an American, number one.

Gower: Oh, so that was--that didn't--that was no problem there.

Richter: Oh, no. No problem whatsoever.

Gower: When you came back then you had one year left in law school, did you?

Richter: Yeah.

Gower: So then did you go right away there in the fall of 1918? I mean 1919.

Richter: Yes. That's right. And I graduated in 1920.

Gower: Sure. And then you came to St. Cloud in the--in June, 1920?

Richter: No. I went around looking for a place to settle; I made three different trips. And the last one included St. Cloud, among other towns I'd been into and I decided here's the town to stay in.

Gower: Why did you decide to stay in St. Cloud?

Richter: Well, I'd studied the map and I thought as far as St. Cloud is concerned it's the hub of a wheel. You looked at the map, you'll know it. You had a hub coming up from Willmar and a hub coming down from Fergus Falls and Sauk Centre. One coming down from Brainerd. One coming over this way from Duluth down through--what's the name of that town out here, 65 or 70 miles away? Can't think of it now. But then directly to the east here/is Princeton. And Paynesville down that way. So even joining down to the south there's Kimball down there and Stillwater down here and Clear Lake down there. So this town is probably the most noted center of Minnesota.

Gower: Okay. Then was St. Cloud in pretty bad shape, economically, when you arrived? Is that what you were saying?

Richter: Yes.

Gower: It was. What was the population of St. Cloud, do you think? In 1920.

Richter: I don't know. I am inclined to say 18,000, but I could go out and get ahold of a city directory and look at it and tell you.

Gower: No, that's okay. Just an idea. But it was in pretty bad shape, sort of a depressed status. Is that right?

Richter: Well, Samuel C. Pandolfo was under charge in a federal court down in Chicago. And he actually was convicted for use of the mails to defraud...later on. And we had J. E. Briar Pickling and Preserving Company and they were headed that way down. And then there was a unit which was gathering fertilizer from the swampy areas down this side of Clearwater. I didn't pay much attention to that, but at least anything I wanted to look at was trouble.

Gower: You thought despite that it would be a good place to set up a law practice.

Richter: Yes. All you have to do is to look at the map and the way the roads go out from it. We are the axle of the wheel and the spokes go out all over.

Gower: Did you know anybody in St. Cloud?

Richter: Yes. Carl Durner was a fellow who acted as the...now I lose my words. He was a sergeant for supplying the meals for the company.

Gower: Mess sergeant?

Richter: Yeah.

Robak: Had he lived in St. Cloud here then?

Richter: He was born here.

Robak: Oh, he was born here.

Gower: And you met him in the array?

Richter: Yes, but very briefly. I remember having traveled around, looking for a little relief from some of the boredom of being right in camp. And I can remember going down into the cornfield

in the fall. It was rather cold. And I remember he and I were sitting down together in the--what do you call that? Where you shock wheat and--?

Gower: Silo? Or--

Richter: --shock oats and shock corn. What do you call that?

Robak: I don't know. I am no farmer, I guess.

Gower: I'm not either.

Richter: Well, I've forgotten it.

Gower: That's where you were sitting anyway, and you met him there--

Richter: Well I had met him down there. He was acting as the food sergeant. Anyway, he was in charge of the cooks--provided food for the company.

Gower: And so you had him as a contact when you came here to St. Cloud then.

Richter: Well, it's a little hard to say--about contacts. I didn't come in here with the thought of getting in touch with him as far as contacts are concerned. You see, Ray Scheppers, when I became the first sergeant of the company, I had to have a company clerk, and that was Ray Scheppers. So he was right in the office with me, working with me. As far as Carl Durner was concerned, we weren't very close. I remember at one time they were putting on a concert for the entertainment of the enlisted people there...and the band director called me and Carl Durner out to sing a duet while the band was playing. And I suspect nobody heard us because the darned fool didn't have sense enough to keep the band down in volume. So I think we were drowned out. But we did the best we could to be heard.

Gower: Did you just start on your own in a law firm here then or did you go in with somebody else?

Richter: I didn't have anybody but me.

Gower: You just started on your own.

Richter: Just that time, there was another man who came to me and wanted to have an opportunity to start a practice in this area. And I finally allowed and he joined.

Gower: Was this quite a few years later, though, after you got started on that?

Richter: Oh, yes. Yes, I was--

Gower: You were by yourself for many many years.

Richter: Oh, yes.

Gower: Sure.

Robak: Who was your associate?

Richter: He's over...he's living up on Cemetery Hill over here and he practices with a lawyer over in Sauk Rapids, who had brought him out of my office with thoughts of what he might get.

Gower: Is that Joe Grodie? Is that his name?

Richter: Harold Roct was the fellow who was with me, yeah.

Gower: Roct, yeah.

Richter: Oh yes. He came up and his father came up and they begged and begged and I didn't have any idea of having an associate, but I finally agreed to take him in.

Robak: What year was this? Do you recall? Was it a long time after--?

Richter: Yeah. A long time after I'd been here, yes. Ten years.

Robak: Okay, in these early years, were there a lot of attorneys practicing in town or were you one of the first?

Richter: In the first years?

Robak: Yeah. The first Thirties or Forties.

Richter: Oh, I wouldn't be first, for heaven's sakes. They started lawyers in here in the year 1860.

Robak: So there were a number of others.

Richter: Oh, yes. There were. There must've been about twelve lawyers when I came into town.

Gower: Did you get established in your practice pretty quickly then? Pretty easily? Or did it take a while to build up your practice?

Richter: Well, I wouldn't say it was easy. I had to work and work hard. But I did the best I could and it seemed as though I had a success.

Gower: And then when did you get married?

Richter: The year 1921. I settled here in 1920.

Gower: Was your wife from St. Cloud, or--?

Richter: Well, she didn't feel like a local resident because she had been born down in the Twin Cities and then had lived up in northern Michigan with her folks. And--It's so hard for me to give the history of her father. Her father was in charge of the electric section of the outfit here in St. Cloud when I came in here. And that was not the Northern States Power Company but it was the St. Cloud Electric and Gas Company or something like that was the title. And at that particular time, her father was heading up the electric division of that company which A. G. Whitney owned and operated. A. G. Whitney was the father of the Whitney that's famous down in Minneapolis now.

Gower: Yeah. Wheelock Whitney. But you met your wife here in St. Cloud.

Richter: Yeah. Yeah, I had met up with Carl Durner. I don't remember how I happened to encounter him. But I was with him and he said, "Charlie, come with me. I want to introduce you to a girl." So he took me over across the street and there was a lady who was looking after the electric store, and he introduced me to the lady. That was my wife.

Robak: Were there any important events in the Twenties in St. Cloud that you recall? Anything exciting happen at that time? The Pan Motor Company was...

Richter: I had to walk across Fifth Avenue and I saw a store on the east side of Fifth Avenue, south of St. Germain. And there was a light on there and I walked kitty-corner across the street and I went in there. And they were raising the money to provide funds for Pandolfo to defend himself in the prosecution that he was suffering down in the city of Chicago. And I did subscribe for a contribution of--a little money. I didn't have much money, but I kicked in fifty bucks. And I got stuck for it, which wasn't any good.

Robak: You and a lot of others, I would imagine.

Richter: Oh, sure. Yeah, he was doing the best he could around here. But this town's a lot different now than what it was then.

Gower: Yeah.

Robak: It's grown significantly.

Richter: Oh, sure. We had streetcars here then. They started down at Eleventh Street, way down here, and came up on Fifth Avenue. Fifth Avenue, they turned right or turned left. If you turned to the right, you went across the bridge, which isn't there now—it was the St. Germain Street Bridge. And it went over as far as Wilson. At Wilson they turned left and drove up through Sauk Rapids until about...oh, I think it must've been about four blocks north of the business section in Sauk Rapids. In the other part where you turned to the left, it went down to Ninth Avenue, turned to the right for three blocks, turned to the left and traveled out on Third Street North clear to the railroad tracks in Waite Park.

Robak: Oh, were they busy? Were the streetcars busy a lot of the time?

Richter: Busy? Well they had regular routes on regular times.

Gower: Did a lot of people ride on the streetcars?

Richter: Yes. I'd say they did, quite a lot.

Robak: How long did they last...the streetcars?

Richter: Well, I don't know. Maybe ten years.

Gower: That's after you were here, you mean.

Richter: Huh?

Gower: That was ten years after you came here?

Richter: Yeah. I remember when we were going over--the car was going over to Sauk Rapids and I had never been to it yet--out of curiosity riding with it, you know, and they turned to the right, went across the bridge and they got over to Wilson. They turned to the left and were headed into Sauk Rapids. And I've forgotten how many blocks on the north side of the intersection over there they went, but I was in the back end and I was feeling a little loose...all that bouncing up and down like that. Well, they had a little set of four wheels under that streetcar in the middle. And of course, the next thing I knew I had bounced them up in the air, so they shut off the tracks.

Robak: Oh, so you got yelled at.

Richter: No, I didn't, but I felt pretty guilty, I can say that.

Gower: Did you play some part in getting the Veteran's Hospital established here in St. Cloud?

Richter: Yes.

Gower: What—how--what did you--how were you involved in that?

Richter: Well, Dr. McDowell was the one I would attribute the starting of that idea...because he had said that he had contacted the Veteran's Administration and he felt that allowing the Veterans Hospitals to all be centered down in the Twin Cities would be silly. He thought that it would be better if they distributed around various places and he thought that St. Cloud was a very good place. So, they had people come up from the Veterans Administration and they had showed them three different locations where the Veteran's Hospital might be located. Well those

fellows went around, but they would tolerate no place except where the Veteran's Hospital is now. But the area that they were taking in was 400 acres. It went all the way from the west side of the Pan Motor Company out to the Sauk River to the west, bounded on the south by the railroad tracks, bounded on the north by the Sauk River.

Gower: That whole area.

Richter: So they turned that whole thing over to the United States of America. And of course, since that time, the United States of America has released--Well, the part where the Highway Department is in out there, just this side of the Veteran's Hospital. That was on the Veteran's Hospital land. If you drive out on Tenth Street, the minute you leave the trees, you're right on to the land that we bought for the Veteran's Hospital. So from there, all the way down to the railroad tracks, surrounded by the river, by that line on the East side, by the railroad tracks on the South Side. And of course, since that time, the Veteran's Administration has come to the conclusion it's very silly to hang onto that stuff. So they let it go and you've got a nice big high school out there now which is a part of that land. And you have several factories on the south side of the old road that goes to St. Joe, which is used for benefits of industries of the city.

Gower: You worked with Dr. McDowell and others to persuade the United States government to establish the hospital out there then, huh?

Richter: Well, it's a little hard for me to explain that, except to say that if McDowell had any influence on that, it's beyond my knowledge. I think that he did tell the VA, because he'd had them come up and had them look at that lip of land that runs along into the Mississippi River about eight or ten miles north of St. Cloud. It's on the west side of the river, but the river runs

east and turns around and you know where that famous place is up there where you can get food, on the south side of the river?

Gower: Yeah.

Richter: Yeah, well that's on the south side of it and it went backhand that area there was one area that Doc thought he might induce the Veterans Administration to establish the VA Hospital there. And he had another place in mind. And then he had this place out here in mind. Well, they picked this one. They said, "Take the rest of the stuff away, but we'll take this one." And of course they said, "We're not going to buy it." So they didn't buy it; we bought it. It came over free with the United States of America.

Gower: Oh, I see. Sure.

Richter: Oh, yes. Oh, you think that they were suckers enough to buy it? No, not on your life.

Robak: What year was this?

Gower: Was it 1927 that the building started? ...or the construction started?

Richter: It's approximately that. It's rather difficult for me to say.

Gower: Yeah. I think that's when it was.

Robak: We're almost out of tape, so I'm going to shut this off and we'll conclude on the other side for a few more minutes.

Robak: Did you have to persuade the people of St. Cloud in favor of the VA?

Gower: The hospital.

Robak: Yeah, the hospital. Was there any opposition?!

Richter: No. No, there was no opposition. We had the plan of raising the money in order to buy that land. And it's my recollection that the notes... Well, it was as we went out and solicited people. The fellow'd say he'd give a hundred dollars--of that, twenty-five dollars cash--the check payable to yourself and endorsed by you for twenty-five dollars due in one year; next one two years, next one three years. That's where we raised that money.

Gower: Oh, I see.

Richter: Some went 125 dollars a year, some went twenty-five a year and it all varied.

Gower: What--were you active politically at all in here in St. Cloud? Were you in the Republican Party?

Richter: Yes, but I'm not a Roman Catholic.

Gower: And so you weren't active politically? Is that what you mean?

Richter: Oh, that's right. I ran for--I ran for county attorney, but of course, all the opponents belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. And you could look around through the towns here; that's where Clawson's and I had all their votes. But I didn't get any of the votes of the Catholics. The bishop told them who to vote for.

Gower: Oh, that was here--

Robak: So you felt that you almost had to be of the Catholic denomination to be successful.

Richter: Oh, sure. Because the people here are instructed by the priest who to vote for. They don't dare to do anything else but. Otherwise they'll go to hell.

Gower: Did you work in the party to get votes for the governors, and for the presidential candidates and so on??

Richter: Well, I have. And of course, I'm afflicted with the Republican attitudes.

Gower: Sure. So you did do that kind of thing, but you didn't run for office except for that one time.

Richter: That one time. Yeah, there were five lawyers in St. Cloud running for it and I wasn't one of the two top ones put on the finals, which is all right with me, because I'd sooner not win than go to hell.

ROBAK: You said that was for the county attorney?

Richter: Yeah.

Gower: And what were some of the organizations that you belonged to?

Richter: Well, I, of course, had joined the American Legion before I came here, although they don't have a record of my belonging to the American Legion, which started in 1920 at the University of Minnesota. I could never pin them down for that so maybe somebody put the dues into their pocket and went out and got drunk. I don't know.

Gower: Wonder why they didn't have that in their record—just--

Richter: I don't think that the American Legion has any records of that University unit.

Gower: Oh, I see. Sure.

Richter: I don't think that the American Legion headquarters had any record of it. I don't know. I haven't investigated. But when I got in here, of course, I immediately joined up with the American Legion here and I had come into town in 1920 and--was I the commander in '21 or '22? I don't remember.

Gower: Oh.

Robak: But you did serve as Commander of the American Legion?

Richter: Oh, yes.

Gower: And you were in the Legion. Are you still in the American Legion?

Richter: Oh yes. I've belonged to the American Legion ever since I arrived in St. Cloud.

Gower: All through those years. Yeah. What other organizations have you belonged to?

Richter: Well, the VFW. I went ahead and joined them later on. I wasn't particularly ambitious because they had a peculiar attitude when I came here. I remember that when I was in charge of the Decoration Day services that we had down at the theatre, that the man from the VFW was very discourteous. In fact, he sort of felt as though he had the privilege of chasing me and the other Legion fellows out of the place. And he was not a courteous or intelligent fellow. He was just dumb.

Gower: Was there some rivalry between the VFW and American Legion or what was--?

Richter: Well, there wasn't on the part of the American Legion, but there was a feeling on the part of the VFW that they should do something to try to dump the American Legion.

Gower: Oh. I didn't know that.

Richter: Well, then, years ago—that's the way they went.

Gower: Sure. Way back at the beginning there.

Richter: Yeah.

Gower: Oh, I see. Sure.

Richter: That's right.

Gower: But you stayed in the VFW, though, throughout the years, too.

Richter: But I don't remember when I first joined them. Ever since I joined them, I've kept up my membership.

Gower: Sure.

Richter: Yeah, I've been in their meetings sometimes—not very often, but I've been there.

Gower: Uh huh. Any other organizations that you belong to that you want to mention here?

Richter: Well, of course I belong to Masonic order. Gone all the way up to the Shriners. And I was the first head of the Moose Lodge organized in St. Cloud. They're lodge number 1400 if I remember rightly and they have changed their headquarters from St. Cloud to Waite Park. I was the head of them for two years. My wife found herself the head of the women's group. She wasn't pleased with my telling her that the people wanted her the head of the women's group, but she took it anyway. In fact, I went ahead with her and visited some people—there--had a blind couple out here that were affiliated with them. And the receipt that she and I had when we came into the home of this blind couple was really remarkable. I think it probably changed my life a little bit.

Gower: Sure. How did you like...how do you like St. Cloud, then, over the years?

Richter: Well, St. Cloud's a good town. Yes, it's--there are many things that St. Cloud has needed and I think that I have always supported the programs that came up. I was on the group that handled the--I don't know what to call this now. I remember that the question of putting the highway through St. Cloud came up. A fellow called me up and he said, "We're going down to see the Commissioner of Highways and you've got to come along." So I said, "What for?" "Well," he said, "You're the only fellow that can talk about it." So I found myself down there with the Commissioner of Highways and I was talking about it--we got it through.

Robak: That was for putting which highway through town?

Gower: Division Street?

Richter: Number 23. Yeah, it comes through Division, you see; it formerly had been on St. Germain Street. There was a bridge crossing the Mississippi River right across St. Germain Street and it went at an angle across the river and landed over where you land at the present time on the east side of the bridge; but the west side of course was at that time on First Street North. And that was something that--oh, a lot of people were opposed to it. They didn't think that we should make St. Germain Street a dead street, but we killed it.

Gower: Okay.

Richter: They went ahead and closed the St. Germain Street—Main Street there—for three blocks. I had nothing to do with that but they did it and I'm sure that there were many of the merchants who were on that street who were greatly offended at the removal of the traffic from in front of their stores.

Robak: Felt it took away from their business.

Richter: Yeah.

Robak: Well, if you had to do it over, would you again be an attorney and in St. Cloud, do you think?

Richter: That's pretty hard to say, but I'm inclined to think that I would, I've been pretty active, you know, in the Minnesota State Bar Association and I presume you are aware of that. What was I?

Robak: You were--I've got it written down here. Hey, look...just says that you served on all the Bar Associations—Minnesota State Bar Association—you were president of some local Bar Association, weren't you?

Richter: Yes, but you see, the thing that I'm having in my mind right now is the fact that the State Board of Law Examiners, having been in conflict with the Minnesota State Supreme Court—in a manner of discipline of lawyers—they finally told the State Supreme Court to go to hell. "You worry over this thing yourself. You can go to the devil with that." So the chief justice got ahold of--seems to me that the fellow in question from the State Bar at that time is presently the Chief justice of the Supreme Court of Minnesota. But he went to see the court about that. And the problem had come up over the fact that the State Board of Law Examiners told the Supreme Court that they would have nothing to do with...this committee wasn't having anything further to do with the supervision of the lawyers who had been admitted to practice. And so the lawyer who is presently the chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court was then not involved with any particular item, but he did go over to see the chief Justice of the Supreme Court. And he told him that this Minnesota State Bar Association had an ethics committee which was called the

Practice of Law Committee. Paul C. Thomas, the attorney in St. Paul at that time, was chairman of that committee. I was a member of it. And the next thing we knew, we found our-selves dumped into that particular program of supervising the proper conduct on the part of lawyers. I don't remember just what Paul got--Paul, yeah. They shoved him up to vice-president of the State Bar. And the next thing I found, the president telling me that I was the chairman of that committee. And I guess I was the chairman of that committee for eight or ten years. And so I was heading up the matter of discipline of lawyers, handling complaints against lawyers for improper conduct. So I had that job for quite a long time and I finally complained to them that I didn't think that it was proper for me to finance all those things, which I was doing out of my personal funds. And I guess they were a little ashamed of themselves because they suddenly gave in and provided some money. And I was the head of that particular committee for quite a long time. I don't know who the person was who was instrumental for getting me onto that. As far as I'm concerned, that was very good, but I can't say that I enjoyed getting in for discipline of lawyers. So you pass judgment on a guy—how do you know that the complaints that are made against him are true? You can call him in and ask him and he may not go on to disclose. You get in all kinds of trouble.

Robak: It's a tough job.

Richter: Yeah. Rather difficult, but I'm thinking right now...one time when I spent two full days in my office with a complaint from down in south-central Minnesota. Oh, he wasn't going to pay for me...pay me for my time. Heavens no, understand--it was out of my own pocket. It was after that time they finally decided to give me--what was it? Thirty seven dollars and a half for month for expenses.

Robak: Is that all?

Richter: It was some goofy little amount.

Robak: Okay. Do you have any other questions, Cal?

Gower: No, I don't think so.

Robak: Anything else you want to discuss or talk about?

Richter: Hell, no. I'm probably making a fool of myself.

Gower: No, that's fine.

Robak: Fine. We're out of questions, so I think that'll do very well.

Gower: Okay. This concludes this interview, then.