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Signature: Calvin Schroeder Date: Feb 7-03
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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

NARRATOR: Calvin Schroeder

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION: Calvin Schroeder was born in 1926 on a farm near Goessel Kansas. His family is originally Dutch as his grandfather had emigrated from Holland to Russia and then to the United States. He attended Bethel College and received his master's degree from Emporia State University. He now lives in Arlington Kansas.

DATE OF INTERVIEW: January 11, 2003

INTERVIEWER: Katie Stucky with comments by Celia Stucky

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Arlington, Kansas

NUMBER OF CASSETTES: 1 audio cassette
1 video cassette

LENGTH OF CASSETTES: 60 min.

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 21 min. 43 sec.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Calvin Schroeder's Dutch background; experience with country school, college; memories of the Depression, dust storms, hobos; Housekeeping in the thirties; coyotes and jackrabbit drives; radio and the travel of news; World War II; experience of learning English; carpentry.

Calvin Schroeder
Narrator

Katie Stucky
Interviewer
With comments by Celia Stucky

January 11, 2003
Arlington, Kansas

Calvin Schroeder - **CS**
Katie Stucky - **KS**
Celia Stucky - **CeS**

(Side A)

KS: Hello, I'm interviewing Calvin E. Schroeder. My name is Katie Stucky and I am the interviewer. Today is Saturday, January 11, 2003 and we are at his home in Arlington, Kansas.

CS: I was born in 1924 in Goessel, Kansas.

KS: Uhm, did you grow up in Goessel then?

CS: I grew up on a farm between Goessel and Mound Ridge.

KS: And how did your family make a living? Farming or . . .

CS: We were, we were farmers and at that time we were considered fairly big farmers. We farmed 360 acres is all, but it was considered to be a pretty good size farm and we had cattle, we had chickens, we had hogs. All on the farm at one time we had, uh, cows. We'd milk as many as eight cows by hand.

KS: Uhm, can you tell me about your Dutch background? Someone?

CS: I, uh, I know my Grandfather Dirkson came over from Russia when he was nine years old and settled between Goessel and Mound Ridge. My Grandfather Schroeder also came from Russia but, uh, they, uh . . . we are originally from Holland and then they migrated to Russia because they wanted more religious freedom.

KS: Uhm, how old were you when you started school?

CS: Grade school?

KS: Yes.

CS: I was six years old when I started grade school. I went to, uh, a little country school, I guess it was a mile away. We, er, about . . . twenty to twenty-four children in the class. There were two in my, uh, one other boy in my class. It was just two of us. This country school had, uhm, no running water, no anything else. We got water at the pump and brought it in. We had an outhouse out in back, one for the boys and one for the girls that we'd go to and that another barn because a lot of them rode, uh, horses in and uh, horse and buggy. We had a little horse and a pony that we rode sometimes, sometimes we walked.

KS: You just walked a mile to school?

CS: Walked a mile to school and back. There were always neighbors though so [unclear] we lived half a mile away.

KS: Uhm, can you tell me about your other educational background, like, you finished high school and went to college?

CS: I went, uh, finished Goessel High School and then I went, gone and graduated from Bethel College at Newton. While I was in college, I drove from home first quarter usually because I was raising turkeys and worked my way through school.

KS: That's how you worked . . .

CS: That's how I got money. I also did some carpentry work and worked in a filling station and, uh, when I graduated from college, I went home and we moved to Langdon (sp?), Kansas and got a teaching job. Salary was about three thousand dollars a year.

KS: Was that a lot back then or . . .

CS: That was, that's a lot. You might, uh . . . out west some of them got twenty-six hundred a year which was . . . not that more than the rest of them got and I actually, I got more than a college professor did.

KS: Wow.

CS: He was getting . . . so it was . . . must have been a pretty good job.

KS: How old were you when you graduated high school?

CS: I was seventeen when I graduated from high school and, uh, I was, I don't know, uh, twenty . . . [unclear] four when I graduated from college. After I started teaching for a while I on and went to Emporia State and got my master's degree. At Emporia State I also took some courses at Wichita U.

KS: Uhm, was it, did most of your classmates finish high school and go to college or was that, I mean –

CS: No, uh, most of them, there were very few, I think there only about out of a class of, I think there were forty-two in our class and there were probably only about four or five that went to college. Most of them just went back onto the farm and farmed. I, I went to college for the main reason, because I wanted a little more education than rest of them had and I intended to come back and farm. There wasn't enough farm ground around so I went to teaching instead.

KS: Is that, during grade school, did you help your family out on the farm or did you . . .

CS: In grade school we always, uh, uh, worked on the farm . . . Of course after I got a little older and started going to high school, we would milk those eight cows by hand and we had about two hundred chickens and use about twenty-five or thirty hogs and about forty or fifty head of cattle. So we did all those chores before we went to school, in the morning and evening.

KS: Uh, do you remember, like in grade school, was schools ever closed for dust or. . .

CS: In the thirties, yes, we had uh, school, they called school for dust because we could see a bank coming in like a cloud coming over and uh, they'd close school and uh, sometimes we'd walk home. A lot of times people would come pick us up because it was so dusty. I can remember we'd tape the windows shut and the doors shut with tape so the dust wouldn't come in and uh, we also went out west . . . We bought a combine, a full combine and in those early years, and uh, out west there were so fence roads that you could just see the poles sticking out. The rest of them were covered with dirt. And we also had a lot of dirt blowing [unclear] in back and uh, it would get so dark from the dust, the chickens would go to roost, they'd think it was night.

KS: Did you, uh, have to adapt your farming methods?

CS: We didn't, uh, yeah farming, uh, we didn't raise much then because it was so dry and dusty. I remember that, uh, we just had about a thousand bushels of wheat. We'd hook up red lie (sp?) wheat and we didn't make too much. We ate, uh, pretty well on the farm though. We had, uh, didn't go to town because there was any money and we'd usually, uh, have a lot of chickens and farm stuff to eat. And uh, it was really – and especially its hard for me – I can remember that my dad hired a hand for twenty-five cents a day and when it went up to fifty cents he thought it was terrible but he'd work all day for twenty-five cents and also a little, a lot of people on the road walking around. They'd stop in and mother would take them, give them a plate of food outside, have them sit down and eat and sometime they'd sleep in the barn over night because they didn't have any place or any food. They were begging for work and didn't have any. But I can also remember at that time there were, on the rail roads there were a lot of, see some guys riding the railroad or in train cars, they'd be sitting in there riding, I guess from place to place to find work to feed them. But we always had, uh, land because we had to live on a farm and raised our own food, we always had a lot of food we could eat and . . .

KS: So people that didn't their farms were eventually –

CS: There were people who didn't have farms . . . I remember mother and dad talking about my uncle who lived east of Wichita. He walked to town, I don't remember the town, miles to Wichita, to buy flour to eat because they didn't have any money, they didn't have any food because they couldn't get any work. There wasn't any work.

KS: Uhm, did your mother make any adaptation in like cleaning the house or like, cooking? How did she, like, you said taping the windows. Do you remember if she did anything different like that?

CS: Well, I don't remember, I, I just kind of imagine it. I know that probably weren't as clean as they are now because I think we took a bath every Saturday and uh, part of it was to save water and part of it was to, uh, we didn't have time for all of it I suppose. Cooking [unclear], we'd get a lot of canning. We'd, grandma, or my mom canned a lot of food. In the basement we'd have just shelves and shelves of canned food and canned meat and stuff like that.

KS: Did you have ration cards or did you . . .

CS: We had gas ration cards, we, that's, its, not the only ration card I can remember . . . of course I know there were some food rations but that, we had plenty of food on the farm so that didn't concern us any.

KS: Do you remember any jackrabbit drives or grasshopper plagues?

CS: I remember jackrabbit drives. I didn't participate in any but they would go round up jackrabbits with clubs and drive them into a fence and kill them all.

KS: How many, do you know how many they –

CS: No, but I can remember seeing pictures of them. We never had, we had a lot of coyotes to round up around our place but we didn't have any jackrabbit round ups. But it looked like there were hundreds of jackrabbits. Now-a-days I don't, you can't hardly see any jackrabbits but there were a lot of them at that time. Just all year jackrabbits were every where.

KS: What did you do for fun or entertainment when you were younger?

CS: Well, after, even after we a little older in grade school we lived about a mile and a half from a creek and we'd do a lot of fishing and swimming over there and that's about the only entertainment we had there at that time. We played some games and later on when I got in high school and older up, I played a lot of baseball. And uh . . .

KS: Did you every go into town on the weekends or anything?

CS: Not, not very often then in the thirties we didn't. Later on, after in the late forties I went to town a little bit but in the thirties we'd never go to town and I don't suppose, we get to town once a month maybe if we did then. I . . .

KS: And you just go . . .

CS: Go buy grain and that would be it. Because, we'd . . . I can still remember going to Newton. There was a hamburger stand on the corner; they had hamburgers for five cents. They'd uh, so, at that time five cents was quite a bit though it don't seem like it.

KS: Yeah. How did you hear about World War II?

CS: Oh, I'd, I think there was a filling station that we'd hang around and somebody came in and said Pearl Harbor had been bombed. In those days we didn't get news as fast as we do now. We didn't listen to the radio much because they had a battery operated radio. We didn't have electricity in the house so we had a battery operated radio and we didn't listen to it much but uh . . . Somebody came in and said Pearl Harbor and been bombed and that's . . . uh . . .

KS: Uhm, do you remember any specific radio broadcasts, some, when you didn't listen to it or like when the president declared war or . . .

CS: Well, I remember hearing that on the radio that Roosevelt said that Pearl Harbor had been bombed afterwards, I don't remember if it was a day or two afterwards and uh, we'd, war would be declared on Japan.

KS: Did, uhm, anyone in your family fight in the war?

CS: My brother was drafted and went in the army, uh, I don't remember, I think he was in about three years and he went overseas about six months. Went to Germany.

KS: Well, there, are there any other questions you think I should ask then? Any other stories you'd like to tell? About when you were younger in the thirties?

CS: In the thirties? Uh, I don't know, it uh, it was, I guess, its hard realize how much different it was then. News didn't travel very fast, we didn't get around much. Uh, we did have a telephone. My grandfather had his own telephone line which we ran to all his children which were probably, let's see one, two, five of us [unclear] had a telephone line to each one of them. They'd [unclear] it was a family line about eight miles into town and we kept in up and . . . Our number was three long rings. When that would be it would be our signal for us to get on the line but a lot of times we'd call, everybody would be on the line. I can remember cold, windy, snowy day that the whole family was on the line visiting back and forth; how much of the snow and what was going on. And uh, if there was an emergency then they'd usually keep ringing just short rings back and forth to, keep ringing that they'd know somebody needed help, a fire or something like that because they didn't have any fire trucks that would just all go out and fight a house fire.

KS: Do you remember any specific dust storms that were especially bad? Did they hurt your livestock or farming?

CS: Well, I don't know, I vaguely remember the one day when they came out and got us out of school and it was so dark that we had turn the lights on and we couldn't see coming home. We were just little kids then but it was hard to breathe and dust was getting in your mouth. Quite a few people died of dust pneumonia because it was uh, just pretty bad. It seemed [unclear] but it would just hang in the air.

KS: Ok, well, I don't have anymore questions. Thank you for letting me interview you.

CeS: I do.

KS: Ok, [laughing] Celia Stucky, my mother.

CeS: You don't have to show this part, but I want you to tell about, you didn't speak English did you until . . . ?

CS: When, uh, when we started the grade school I couldn't talk English. We talked Dutch at home all the time and we couldn't talk English when we started grade school. And it was quite odd, it was uh, I remember later on that uh, we could talk Dutch and as soon as the car would come in the drive, in the yard we'd immediately switch over to English. I don't know it was just a habit of what we did and we uh, at that time of course, we did most of our farming by binders and we'd hire harvest hands to do the shocking and I . . . uh, they stayed at our place and uh, I remember we had one harvest hand from Alabama and whenever we would get scolded, or Mother or Dad wanted to say something, they'd talk Dutch so that the others couldn't understand it and this one guy was always grinning. We found out later that he talked Dutch. And he could understand what was going on but he . . .

KS: So did you learn English by going to school? Did they teach you English or did you just have to pick it up?

CS: Going to school. They, we picked it up in school. I suppose we knew a little English but not very much because we always talked Dutch at home.

KS: And did your parents learn it from you or . . .

CS: No, they knew English. Apparently, for some reason, I don't know why but we always talked Dutch at home but not English. I think about thing in grade school that kind of bothered me more than anything else though was I was left-handed. And they all thought that was a great big long omen. They tried to make me write with my right hand and I had to hide it and write with my left hand because I couldn't write with my right hand and they'd insist that I should be right handed and not left handed because it would bother me the rest of my life. But I kind of went out on that one.

CeS: Did Granddad do some carpentry work during some of those years?

CS: Well, yeah. Granddad was a carpenter.

CeS: Your dad.

CS: My dad, yeah, my dad was a carpenter and he learned the trade when he was young, when he was, I don't know, about thirteen or fourteen. He went, finished the sixth grade and my grandpa told him that he didn't need to read more, that he could go on on his own. And he missed [unclear] for that because he didn't have the up support of the family. So he went out and he went into a carpenter gangs that went around and built houses and run . . . they stayed in places and took time and . . . in group homes. That's how he met my mother. They built a granary for them and, and uh, at my mother's place and that's how he met her. But we'd always, about every year we would, to some carpentry work and my brother and I and my dad we would usually build one house every year somewhere. And after harvest we would go rough it in and in wintertime we'd finish it out.

CeS: Would you do that even during the thirties? Were there people wanting homes built during the thirties, when you were that small, or how old were you when you did that?

CS: Well, I started, uh, I was, oh, I suppose in high school the time we did carpenter work but I started working on the farm, I'd plow all day when I was nine, I started plowing, and I worked on a tractor all day on the farm when I was nine years old. But the carpenter work, we were older when we did that but one thing we like about carpentry, we got to keep the money that we earned and my dad told us we got paid according to what he did. If we did half as much as he did we got half his wages and if we did as much as he did we got the same wages that he did. So that was kind of incentive to work harder.

KS: Did most of the kids your age help on the farms?

CS: Most of them did. Of course we couldn't travel that much really because it was, there just wasn't any money at all at that time and we were lucky that we could get out and do some work to earn some money.

CeS: Do you remember when the war ended? Do you remember when World War II ended?

CS: Oh, yeah, I kind of remember when but I never was uh, all, celebration, of course, you know, I don't know just how quickly we heard it, you know. It's [unclear]. We just didn't have a radio and TV like you, you go sit down and look at the evening news now, we didn't know it. We just uh, somebody probably told me that the war was over and "Oh, it is?"

I remember when I saw the first TV walking down Main Street at Newton's, a little TV set about ten by ten. They had it running and it was all foggy and all . . .

CeS: What year would that have been, like in the fifties?

CS: Yeah, it was just a little old set and there wasn't much on it of course there weren't many TV stations.

KS: Celia Stucky, ask the question straight [laughing]. Ok, we're finished.

(End of Interview)