



Smithsonian
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Transcript of interview with Hans Jorgensen

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Transcript

Preface

Tape-recorded Interview with Hans Jorgensen

at the Artist's Home in Lincoln, Kansas

March 7, 1975

Willem Volkersz, Interviewer

Editor's Note:

This transcript is from a series of recordings made by Willem Volkersz over a number of years. They are not formal interviews, but rather records of conversations, often taped during photo-taking tours of the artist's studios or home collections. The naive/visionary artists in these interviews have unique verbal mannerisms, many of which are difficult or impossible to transcribe accurately into written form. Thus, for grasping certain nuances of speech, researchers will find it advantageous to listen to the original tapes.

Our intent in transcribing these interviews was nonetheless to translate as accurately as possible the spoken word into a comprehensible written form, making changes to clarify but not to interpret. Thus the speaker's grammar is unedited. For example, "them" for "those," "themselves," and "gotta" were all transcribed as heard. On the other hand, certain changes were made for clarity: "'cause," was transcribed as "because," "'fore" as "before," "yo" as "your," etc.

Other editorial notations are as follows: Bracketed words are of two types. Those with "[—Ed.]" or "[—WV]" are inserted by the transcriber, editor, or Volkersz. Other bracketed words indicate uncertainty: Two or more words or phrases indicate possible alternatives; "[unintelligible]" and "____" indicate words that are garbled or incomprehensible on the tape, the former being a much longer phrase than the latter; "[noise]" is self-explanatory.

The original format for this document is Microsoft Word 365 version 1908. Some formatting has been lost in web presentation.

Interview

HJ: Hans Jorgensen

WV: Willem Volkersz

[Tape 1, side A; Volkersz' No. J1-1] [45-minute tape sides]

[This tape was made on the occasion of a visit with students from the
Kansas City Art Institute—Ed.]

HJ: Took the dirt off by hand. Had to get about three feet of dirt off. And then had to scrape it and had to drill holes by hand. Then they put wedges in here to ____ ____.

WV: Oh, I see. Oh, sure, all over. Are these like fossils in here?

HJ: Yes, there's a lot of fossils.

WV: Looks like it. It's real nice. Little leaves and shells.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: You say your dad was involved in that [quarrying for rock to use for fence posts and for house construction—WV]? Your dad quarried them, and you did too?

HJ: Yes.

WV: Whereabouts would you quarry them?

HJ: Anyplace up along these hills. There's a billions of posts if you want to take them out.

WV: Right, if you want to go to the trouble.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: Are they still doing that?

HJ: No, they quit. People don't like to work like that.

WV: (laughs) Right. It's lot of hard work, isn't it?

HJ: Well, we didn't mind it.

WV: Of course. Work's good for you.

HJ: Yes.

WV: Keeps you healthy.

HJ: Yes, you're right. See, when I was a kid growing up, we had walking tools. You know, walking plow and. . .

WV: Really?

HJ: Yes. I walked many and many a day. Maybe a million miles, I don't know. Walked all day. These plows here, we put two horses on them, like we got them plows over there.

WV: Uh huh.

HJ: East of the house, or west of the house. An acre per horse. You put three horses on raking plow, three acres. And they should be good.

WV: Did you break in a lot of teams of oxen, yourself?

HJ: I broke four teams.

WV: Four teams.

HJ: Yeah. Yeah, I. . . That's the front wheels off the old hearse. Them two wheels over there.

WV: Right. Those are beauties. How long did you farm?

HJ: Well, I farm—I started in 1912—I farmed 43 years.

WV: And then when you quit, did you come to town here?

HJ: Yes. I farmed with tractor last half of my life. I was seven or eight years old when the first car came to Lincoln.

WV: (chuckles)

HJ: They said it'd go 20 miles an hour.

WV: That's pretty fast.

HJ: Yeah. I don't know whether it did or not.

WV: Were you born in Lincoln?

HJ: I was born in this county.

WV: In the county. Where. . .

HJ: My folks come here. . . Oh, about 15 miles west of here. Folks come here in 1887, and I was born in 1889. They come from Denmark, Europe.

WV: Right. Yeah, I remember you telling me. You took a trip out there a few years ago, didn't you?

HJ: Yeah, five years ago.

WV: I still can't believe that you went there all by yourself.

HJ: Why?

WV: Well, it would seem like you would go with a relative or something like that.

HJ: Well, I wrote to a couple of them, you see. They knew I was coming, and we flew over.

WV: Uh huh.

[Interruption in taping]

WV: . . .still have a chance to do any work? Do you add any more, or do you. . .

HJ: Yes, I want to add four things, several things at once. I want a guillotine, and I want one of these stocks to put the heads in.

WV: Right.

HJ: And I want a still. I'd like to get it.

WV: That's a good one. (chuckles) You going to have to build all these?

HJ: Huh?

WV: You going to have to build them?

HJ: It looks like it.

WV: Would you make them out of. . .

HJ: I can make a block. I know how to make that; I've got a blueprint to make the block that they cut the head off of Queen Mary of Scotland. They chopped her head off because she was a Catholic.

WV: Right. Did you get a drawing of that block, or something?

HJ: Yes, I did have it. And they, it's just a. . . You cut a hole in there for the chin to fit in. [said with a smile—Ed.]

WV: (laughs)

HJ: And then, get it wide enough ax. I read about it, and they said it had to take two whacks to get her head off.

WV: Pretty tough lady.

HJ: Yeah. [pauses] Come on in, I've got a few things in there.

[Interruption in taping]

Daughter: . . .couple of new ones on, and I tell you they call everybody around.

WV: Oh, really. Oh, you too?

Daughter: Yeah. (laughter)

[Interruption in taping]

HJ: . . .some old man to walk around at night, you know.

WV: Sure.

HJ: No car or nothing, you know, no guns or nothing.

WV: Yeah, now it takes five policemen and five cars and guns. . .

HJ: And a six-shooter, you know, hanging on the side.

Female voice: Hi!

HJ: Hi. Any more [students—Ed.] out there?

WV: I don't think so.

[Interruption in taping]

HJ: The son-in-law of. . . That park, what's the name of the park [in Kansas City—WV]?

WV: Volker?

Male voice: Swope.

WV: Swope.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: Swope, uh huh.

HJ: And it seems to me about 50, 60 years ago, they had him accused of poisoning Swope.

WV: Yeah, I never knew about that.

HJ: That's in the Kansas City Star and Times. There's quite a. . . Every day there's a trial. I forgot how it turned out. They accused him of poisoning.

WV: I didn't know about that.

Male voice: I didn't hear anything about it.

HJ: Oh, that's in the Kansas City Star and Times, that is, oh, that's back 60 years ago, 70, I don't know how long. When I was around 14, 15 years old.

WV: That's along time ago.

HJ: Yeah. And I never heard no more of it since. I been, I's in Swope Park quite often here 40, 50 years ago.

WV: Really?

HJ: Yeah.

WV: What were you doing in Kansas City?

HJ: Well, my wife was born 30 miles south of Kansas City—40 miles south.

WV: Oh, so you passed through.

HJ: Yeah, and then she had relations that lived in Kansas City. We was all over Kansas City, in them days. My wife was raised down by. . . [to another person: Ed.] What the devil's the name of that place?

Daughter: What one?

HJ: Where Mother was born.

Daughter: Cleveland.

HJ: Cleveland, Missouri. Right south of Belton, if you know where Belton is.

WV: Yeah, I know where Belton is.

[Interruption in taping]

HJ: [Explaining a model coal mine he built—WV:] One side'd come up, the other'd go down, and then they had four-wheel carts [later, that'd], [roll the coal] out.

[Interruption in taping]

WV: Isn't that beautiful?

HJ: Here's the coal mine. [they are apparently looking at photographs— Ed.]

WV: Uh huh.

HJ: Of course that's cobbled up. And of course, I had to kind of shorten things out a little _____. There's an ox team I broke. And of course there's the same one right there. And them picture I got from you is in here someplace.

WV: Boy, that's real fine. Is that here in Lincoln?

HJ: Yes, that's on a main street.

WV: Now, which one's you? Are you in there?

HJ: I'm standing right there.

WV: That's you, huh?

HJ: Yeah.

WV: Beautiful.

Janet Pihlblad: Is this you?

HJ: No, that's the. . . I'm standing up here in front someplace. That's the Wheat Queen. [long pause]

WV: These are pictures that different people have taken of you? Of your place?

HJ: Yes. Now, this's supposed to be the same place.

WV: Oh, yeah.

HJ: But it. . . That thing, I was in that building in Denmark. It was built in 1747. It was built for a cow barn to start with, then they made that a youth center. They come there and stay. They claim they have 300 beds. You don't see but a little of it. Most of it's sticking. . .

WV: It's like a youth hostel, one of those places, where kids can come and stay, you mean?

HJ: Yes.

WV: Boy, that's a nice big place.

HJ: Here's. . . What do you call that then? You see that, to me, that. . .

WV: Oh, it looks like a farm. So what made you first decide to collect all this stuff?

HJ: Well, I retired, and my wife died, and. . . [looking at another picture—Ed.] There's a team I broke. That's about 12, 14 years ago. And I had a hog in a parade here one time. I don't know where the picture is hid. It must be in here somewhere. You going out to Lucas? [to see Samuel P. Dinsmoor's "Garden of Eden"—WV]

WV: Yes, we're going tomorrow—tomorrow morning.

HJ: Tomorrow morning.

WV: Do you ever stop out there, yourself?

HJ: Oh yes. I was there when he was alive, see.

WV: Oh, you knew him, even.

HJ: Oh, yes.

WV: Wonderful. Yeah, that's interesting that right in this area there's a lot of people who have done some interesting things, like you and Mr. Dinsmoor and. . .

HJ: Yes, but up at Beloit, they got some good stuff up there.

WV: In Beloit?

HJ: Yes.

WV: Right in the town?

HJ: One place is in town. One of them's out in the country. It's on Mill Street, on the west side. His last name is Cox. [did not visit him— WV]

WV: Cox. Now what should we look for? What does it look like?

HJ: Well, it's just. . . He made a home out of it, how they lived 75 years ago or 80 years ago. And he's got a nice collection.

WV: Primarily of old tools and things like that?

HJ: Yes. Yes, he's got. . . Oh, he's got me beat all to pieces.

WV: (laughs) Well, maybe we'll stop in Beloit too.

HJ: And his name is Cox. He's a retired auctioneer.

WV: But now did. . . Like, when you've collected all this stuff, you also added something to it. Like you would paint these things.

HJ: Yes.

WV: Has he done that too? Mr. Cox.

HJ: Oh, yes. He's got. . . It's worth seeing.

WV: What made you decide like to paint the things as well? Like, you didn't stop just at collecting of them. You had to do something more with it.

HJ: Oh yes.

WV: What made you decide to do that? Just to make it more decorative?

HJ: Well, I had to do something to keep out of mischief. (laughter) Now, I think a lot of that thing right there. Did you notice he's sitting on a bunch of books; he couldn't read them anyway. And that's when the human race, it vanishes off this earth, and he finds that skeleton. And he's just wondering if that's any resemblance of him. [looking at a primate holding a skull—a commentary on Darwin's theory—WV]

WV: (laughs) Right.

Female voice: Kind of like the "Planet of the Apes."

WV: Right. Where'd you find that?

HJ: Abilene. I went to the auction. I patted him on the head—he's on a table like that—says, "You're going home with me." (laughter)

WV: Did you buy a lot of your things at auction?

HJ: Most everything. Sure. And sometimes the junkpile.

WV: Did you bring any of it with you from the farm?

HJ: No. Well, I had four sets of harness. That'd be eight. ____ every darn one of them. And when I quit farming I didn't have a darn one. Just threw them away or, you know, used them here.

WV: Yeah, didn't care to save them.

HJ: No.

WV: Oh, there's more of them. So about what year did you start to collect?

HJ: About 15 years ago.

WV: Fifteen years ago.

HJ: Yeah. After my wife died, why I went to collecting. And I didn't think much about it when I done it. But if I had knowed what I know now I'd a really had a place here.

WV: Well I think it's a pretty good place as it is.

HJ: And when I started to buy, I made more mistakes than I done things right.

WV: Like what? What kind of mistakes?

HJ: Well, I bought a windmill. A brass windmill. It's the first windmill with a double gear and the first windmill that could throw [sic] itself out of gear in a hard wind. And I paid three dollars for it. And I had it at the Hudson Fair, and Beloit Fair, and Sylvan Fair. Anybody ask me what I wanted, I said I wanted a hundred dollars for it. And I went to a four-day sale up here north of Beloit—west of Beloit—and somebody took me up on the hundred dollars. Now I can't buy it back for four hundred.

WV: That's right.

HJ: I bought a bell one day, up at Beloit on a Sunday, for thirty dollars. Somebody drove in here, and I started to clean it up, kind of looked for a place to put it—on Monday. And he asked me, "For sale?" I said no. He looked at it a little bit, said "I'll give you fifty." I said yes. (laughter) Now it would cost me 80 dollars to get the same one back.

WV: That's right.

HJ: Then I let a lot of opportunities that I didn't buy here and times that I should have.

WV: Yes, right, right. So you would just go around to the auctions in towns in this area?

HJ: Yeah.

WV: How often would you go to an auction to buy things?

HJ: Oh, I don't know. A couple times a month, sometimes three. Just depends on. . .

WV: How would you bring the stuff back? By car? Put things in the back of the car?

HJ: Well, I. . . Yeah, back of the car. Sometimes go with somebody with a pickup.

WV: I bet you're not used to having this many people in your house? (laughter)

HJ: Well, that's quite a few to have for me live here by myself. I told my daughter to come on down. I didn't know. I thought maybe you all would come at once and [want something t' eat].

WV: Well, if this is too much for you, we'll. . .

HJ: And I'm not as accurate as I used to be, for some reason or other.

WV: You're doing all right.

HJ: I haven't been living right. (laughter)

WV: Oh?

HJ: That's right. I know darn well if I'd a knowed what I knowed when I was young and was paying any attention to it I could live to be a hundred.

WV: Well, that's only another fifteen years.

HJ: Well, the life span should be around ninety and a hundred.

WV: Sure.

HJ: If you take care of yourself.

WV: You won't have any trouble making that.

HJ: Oh, uh uh. [everyone chuckles] Now my dad, my grandfather, one of them lived to be a little over ninety

and whiskey killed him.

WV: That's not a bad way to go. (chuckles)

HJ: They claim he drank a quart a day, when he was young.

WV: How old did he become?

HJ: 91.

WV: Well. . . [comments from crowd]

Female voice: With a quart a day?

WV: Maybe that's the key to it all. (group laughter)

HJ: Have a good liver. If something happens to your liver, if you drink too much. That's what killed him.

WV: So you don't drink a quart a day, huh?

HJ: No I don't. (laughter) Nope.

WV: Why did you decide to. . . I mean, you have a lot of windmills in there.

HJ: Well, I got started to making them, so I kept on making them.

WV: Uh huh. Of course, it's pretty windy country around here.

HJ: Yeah. And the people's that way too. (laughter) My wife come from Missouri; she always called us windy Kansans. Yeah. My wife's got a cousin living first door east of where Harry Truman lived, Miller.

WV: In Independence, or in. . .

HJ: Yeah, Independence. And I think he still lives there. I haven't heard from him for twenty years.

WV: When's the last time you were in Kansas City?

HJ: Well, I was in there to a horse sale one time. I rode with somebody down to the stockyards and then we come right back.

WV: How long ago was that?

HJ: Oh, about five years ago.

WV: There's not much happening in the stockyards anymore, I don't think.

HJ: No, not much. Not like it was 50 years ago. That was quite a place down there.

WV: Pretty busy.

HJ: Yes.

WV: Did they come from the whole midwestern area?

HJ: Yes. After the '51 flood, that. . . Was that the '51 flood?

Group: Yeah. Yeah, it was.

HJ: Was that it? Well, then, that kinda knocked the props out from under Kansas City.

WV: You mean the Missouri River flooded?

HJ: Yeah. Even went up to the second story there, in the building down below there.

Male voice: And all those mills—or all those grain bins down there, they were all flooded out, too.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: [to HJ's daughter:] You live here in Lincoln as well?

Daughter: Yeah. We run a drive-in up north of town.

WV: Ahh.

Daughter: Asked me to come by.

WV: So you remember your dad building this all the way from the beginning pretty much.

Daughter: Yeah. (chuckles) Bring the grandkids down; they're the one that enjoys this.

WV: Oh, that's wonderful.

Daughter: Oh yeah, they really enjoy it.

WV: What do the people in town here think about all your work?

HJ: Well, ah, they don't think much of it. They see it every day.

WV: Uh huh.

HJ: That's right.

WV: But do they ever bother you about it?

HJ: No.

WV: Anything like that?

HJ: No, no, no, no. I get on good with the kids around here.

WV: That's good.

HJ: The young people, get along fine together.

WV: Do they ever keep you awake at night when they're spinning around?

HJ: No, no. (chuckles)

WV: You're used to them by now.

Daughter: They bother us more up at our end of town. (laughter)

WV: Really? He doesn't keep them oiled?

Male voice: You can hear them that far away?

Daughter: No, but they drive up there and turn around and come back, see. See, the highway bypasses town. We live up there on this junction, see, and then they run up and down them streets. Through our drive-in, you know, because we live in a mobile home behind the drive-in. [she may be thinking Volkersz was asking about the young kids rather than the windmills—Ed.]

Female voice: Drive-in movie or drive-in restaurant.

Daughter: Drive-in restaurant. We have ____ ____.

WV: Now sometimes when somebody in a small town does something pretty unusual, like sometimes, you know, like maybe like your work, people would bother them about it, you know.

HJ: No, they don't.

WV: Don't bother that.

HJ: They have swiped a few things from me, but it's a darn wonder I haven't got more. But the general, young people and one thing another, I get along with them a hundred percent.

WV: Good. It's just the older ones who give you trouble, right.

HJ: Huh! Yes. (laughter)

WV: Oh, that's great.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: So when are you going to start building the guillotine?

HJ: Huh?

WV: When are you going to start building the guillotine?

HJ: [pauses, uncertain]

WV: That chopping block.

HJ: Oh, that guillotine. Yeah.

WV: You going to start work on that pretty soon?

HJ: Well, I talked with several, you know, welders, blacksmiths. 'Course the block, I could cut that out myself. I know how to. . . I've got a blueprint here someplace. But I started too late. I can't do much anymore.

WV: Hmm. You've got a yard full of things back there you could work on.

HJ: Yeah. Now Dinsmoor, he took a jug of water with him, in his, in there with him [in his mausoleum—WV].

Janet Pihlblad: That's right.

WV: I didn't catch that one.

Daughter: He has a jug of water by his body.

HJ: In his coffin.

WV: Oh, that's right, that's right.

HJ: He told me he was going to put one in when he died, see.

WV: Just in case he goes down below?

HJ: Well, I don't know.

WV: That's what he says. (laughter)

HJ: He might need it.

WV: That's what he said, yeah.

Daughter: ____ a fire extinguisher. (laughter)

WV: Might need that.

WV: [to a student:] What do need?

Female voice: What are you going to do with that big piece in the back?

HJ: Do what?

Female voice: What are you going to do with the big piece in the back?

HJ: What big piece?

Female voice: That big one.

HJ: The windmill?

WV: The big windmill.

HJ: What am I going to do with it?

Female voice: It doesn't, it's not standing up now, is it?

HJ: It'll run.

Female voice: It does?

HJ: Yeah, it will if I turned it loose. Well, that's the common kind they have up, you know, you see on the farms.

WV: Did you ever have that one running here?

HJ: Oh yes. It was running right where it's sitting.

WV: Oh.

HJ: But I could get a tower and put it on, but. . .

WV: That's a lot of work.

HJ: Yeah. What do you do? Taking pictures?

Female voice: Yeah, does it bother you?

HJ: Huh?

Female voice: Does it bother you?

HJ: No, don't bother me a bit.

Female voice: Okay. (laughter)

WV: Good.

HJ: Don't bother me a bit. I was reading about these pictures. See that one and this one over there? Mother in the old country, she claimed they went around after harvest and picked up the heads, take a bunch of kids out and picked up the heads. And then when they got the heads picked up, well, then they had to herd the geese out there to pick up the kernels. [is he perhaps speaking of a print of *The Gleaners*?— Ed.]

WV: Huh.

HJ: That isn't the way they harvest nowadays anymore. And they harvest with a flail, you see. Back to about 1920.

WV: You've seen a lot of changes in farming while you were farming.

HJ: Oh yes. You ___ing to. . .

WV: You said that first it was all with horse, and then the. . .

HJ: Yes.

WV: Towards the end it was with a tractor.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: Did that changeover come very rapidly from horses to tractors?

HJ: Ahh, pretty fast.

WV: When was that? In the twenties, maybe?

HJ: Yes. Well, it started in the 1919, '18, '19, '20. By 1913 [sic—probably meant 1930] why practically everything was farmed by. . . It's rarely kept on the farm by horses from then on.

WV: How many acres did you farm?

HJ: Well, I varied. I had 400 acres before the war. And then there was time I had, well, about the same amount, and then when the boys came back, we had about six, seven hundred acres. They farmed, we farmed together for a couple years, and then they farmed for themselves, _____.

WV: You mean brothers of yours?

HJ: No, my boys.

WV: Oh, your sons.

HJ: They were in the navy during the Second World War.

WV: How many children did you have?

HJ: Eight.

WV: Nice big family.

HJ: That's one of them, sitting over there.

WV: Right.

Daughter: We all live within, what, 35 miles of each other?

WV: Really?

Daughter: It's fine. The rest of us really like it.

HJ: Yeah.

Daughter: You can't talk about our relatives, because we're all related. (laughter)

WV: Right. Do you get together a lot, for like Thanksgiving and things like that?

Daughter: No, not so much anymore; there's too many of us.

WV: Ah, yeah.

Daughter: We get together. . . I'd say us kids get together more up to the lake than we do because we all camp and everything ____ we go up there.

HJ: They sell boats and one thing another up at their. . .

Daughter: But we're all outdoor sportsmen. We go out a lot. But in the wintertime, we have a clubroom, and we used to always get together, but everybody, you know, all the in-laws, and all this and that, you know, some go. .

Female voice: Too large.

Daughter: . . .yeah, they go one way and the other way, and. . . I think this is the first year we haven't had Christmas dinner with them.

HJ: We used to have Christmas supper Christmas eve.

Daughter: Yeah. But I don't think you all got together this year. Son's going to be gone, and. . .

WV: Obviously, you have grandchildren. Do you also have like great- grandchildren? Or does it go that far?

HJ: Yes. I don't know how many great-grandchildren I got.

Daughter: Well, three on my side.

WV: Uh huh. Lost count, huh?

Daughter: I have three grandkids.

HJ: I'm going to sit down. I'm getting tired.

WV: Yeah, sure.

HJ: This is a sundial.

WV: Oh, so it is. Yeah. Is it metal? No, it's a cast piece. Did you pick that up at a sale?

HJ: Yes. You see, it run north, south, east, and west.

WV: Right.

Female voice: Did you build one like that?

HJ: Let me get you a chair someplace.

WV: That's all right. Oh, yeah. What a nice old chair! That's real nice.

HJ: [away from microphone—Ed.] Did you find a place to sit down?

Male voice: This is fine.

HJ: Now, my wife was a [Dalton]. I could write a book about all the stories I've heard. (group chuckles)

WV: Did you, where were you married? Back in. . .

HJ: Right here in Lincoln.

WV: Oh, you were married here.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: How did you meet your wife?

HJ: She, they moved in here, about 1914.

WV: Were they in farming, too?

HJ: No. They just worked here and there. They left Missouri in 1914. They originally come from Tennessee, most of her relations. And her great-grandmother, my wife's grandmother lived at Pleasant Hill, Missouri. You know where that's at?

WV: Sure. Sure do.

HJ: And they had 40 slaves when they had to turn them loose. And half of them were children, and half of them were working slaves.

WV: Have your people always been in Kansas here? Your family?

HJ: Yes. Well, my one brother, two brothers went. . . One of them went to Nevada, and the other one, well, two of them went to Nevada. And they lived there and died there. They went there when they was young. One homesteaded out in Colorado, at Meeker, Colorado. And then he sold out. Then they went to [Tunnapov], you know where that's at Colorado.

WV: Yeah.

HJ: Then he come back here and died.

WV: Did you ever travel much in this country?

HJ: Oh, I been to New York three times. Montreal, Quebec, Niagara Falls.

WV: Were those vacation trips?

HJ: Yes.

Daughter: Well, you went to Denmark, Europe, for what. . .

HJ: Five years ago.

Daughter: . . .five years ago.

WV: Yeah, he told me about that once, yeah.

HJ: That's a hundred percent socialist.

WV: Uh huh.

HJ: There's no rich people; there's no poor people.

WV: What do you think about that?

HJ: Well, now, they're far more contented than we are here. You go up and down the street, there's nothing to pick up. They don't throw nothing down. And things are clean. And if our yards was, if my yard was in Denmark, then it'd be the dirtiest one there. (laughter) That's right. Everything is spick and span. And they don't waste nothing. Nothing, they don't waste nothing.

WV: That's what I like a lot about your work. Like, in a way, it's like using things that somebody else has thrown out, in a way.

HJ: Yeah, a lot of it was junk which I picked out of the junkpile.

WV: Yeah. What kinds of things would you find in a junkpile?

HJ: Well, I found a plow, I found a windmill, I found them bicycle wheels, and. . .

WV: What did you use on a lot of those bicycle wheels? You have like, it looks like a funnel or something like that, to _____. . .

HJ: That's just off of cream separators.

WV: Ahhh.

HJ: Of course you people are not raised on a farm, so you. . .

WV: Right. We wouldn't, we don't know.

HJ: No.

WV: That's true. There's a lot of things in there that I don't recognize, that I don't know what they came from.

HJ: Well. . .

WV: [to students:] Any of you raised on a farm?

Female voice: [meekly:] My father was. (group chuckles)

WV: A generation back.

[Interruption in taping]

HJ: About two hundred years ago, ninety percent of the people lived on the farm. And now it's five percent.

WV: Yeah, it's very small.

HJ: And when I was young, I think it was forty percent. And I've got a boy that farms in [Grenola]; there was eleven people living on that in 1900.

Daughter: You mean eleven different families.

HJ: Huh?

Daughter: You mean eleven different families.

HJ: Yes. And there's one family there now. If you had to cut wheat with a scythe, and raise your flour that way, you know, that's pretty slow. Now a combine can cut a hundred acres in a good, big day.

WV: Sure.

HJ: And thrash it and load it in the wagon. And they knocked it out with a flail, you know, and then held it up with the wind and let the wind blow the chaff away.

WV: That's right.

HJ: Now my. . . My dad done like that in the old country. He come here when he was 27 years old.

WV: Were you born in this country?

HJ: I was born here, yes.

WV: Yeah, that's right.

Female voice: Do you grow your own food out there? In the back?

HJ: Do what?

Female voice: Do you grow anything in the garden back there?

HJ: Oh yes. I generally have quite a few garden stuff.

Female voice: What do you have? Vegetables and things?

HJ: Yeah. Tomatoes is my strong point. Leeks, garlic. Yeah, I do it.

WV: Do you raise enough to actually sell tomatoes, or do you keep it for yourself and the family?

HJ: Oh, I give them away once in a while. I don't try to sell.

WV: Did you buy this house right away after you retired?

HJ: I think we bought it about six months before we retired. Didn't we? Or a year?

Daughter: Didn't you buy it and rent it out to [Lloyds], and then you lived in Beverly for a while?

HJ: Yeah.

WV: Was it quite a change, moving from the farm into town?

HJ: Well, if my wife wasn't sick I didn't want to leave the farm. But it looked like we couldn't get by, so we just quit. And moved here. I bought a house here and then I bought a house in Beverly. That's the next town down the line. And we stayed there a year and a half, and then we moved to—or I fixed that up, and then. . .

WV: Do you still own that house in Beverly?

HJ: No, I sold it.

WV: Oh, I see. What were the crops that you raised on your farm?

HJ: Wheat. Oats. And cane. And then had cattle, you know, had sheep a while—for ten years or eleven years. But wheat was the main crop.

Female voice: What do you like to eat now?

HJ: Huh?

Female voice: What do you like to eat now? Like for breakfast and dinner?

HJ: Eat?

WV: She wants to know what kind of food you like to eat.

HJ: Well, I like to eat what'll keep me alive.

WV: What's that?

HJ: Well, fruit and vegetable with the peelings on.

Female voice: The peelings on? Or off?

HJ: Yes, on.

WV: That's good for you.

HJ: The middle leg, between the hide and the. . .

Female voice: ____ ____.

HJ: Yes.

Daughter: Don't you eat honey, a lot of honey?

HJ: Do what?

Daughter: Don't you eat honey, too?

HJ: Oh yes. I don't use sugar.

WV: Yeah. Honey's good for you.

HJ: But I don't use salt.

WV: Huh. Do you think salt's bad?

HJ: Definitely. And if I hadn't changed my way of living about 25 years ago, I'd a been a dead one. I'd been up there at the cemetery.

Female voice: Do you not use salt at all, or do you just. . . Do you not eat products with salt on it, like peanuts, or do you just not use it yourself?

HJ: Just not use it. You can buy peanuts, you know, without salt.

WV: Sure.

Female voice: Do you still eat meat?

HJ: Huh?

Female voice: Do you still eat meat?

HJ: Yes. I'm a meat eater. (chuckles)

WV: What do you mean by changing your way of living?

HJ: Well, my wife was strong on fried potatoes, for one thing. That didn't agree with me. I've got about a hundred and fifty dollars worth of books on health right here, and I think that's the best investment I ever made. There's one book there say—one article in there, the heading is, "Can you prove that you're not crazy?" (group laughs) And it look like. . . The way it reads, why it looks like you [can—Ed.] pret near convict anybody for being crazy and send them to the bug house. [group giggles]

Female voice: Do you still read a lot?

HJ: Well, I don't read as much as. . . I can't read very much anymore, so I don't read too much now.

WV: How did you meet Mr. Dinsmoor?

HJ: Just drive out there, that's when he was a-building it.

WV: You heard that he was building, and you'd go out there?

HJ: Well, there used to be a miller place. Used to be another place out there. But they tore that up; he died.

WV: What was that place like?

HJ: You remember why they were going over there?

Daughter: Yeah, we used to go up there. It was made out of rock, and he had replicas of like Pike's Peak in it, and. . .

WV: Oh, really?

Daughter: . . .oh, what's the bridge out there?

HJ: Do you remember ever going out there?

WV: _____inay, or something like that?

Daughter: No, out in Colorado, you know, that. . .

WV: Oh, the one that's over the gorge there?

Daughter: Yeah, yeah. He had that. He had, oh, a yard as big as this empty lot down here, all full of stone fixtures. It was fantastic—and the mountains and cars and everything—and we'd always take the kids, you know, like fourth graders up every year at the end of the school year. And they always had that, you know. . . But they tore it down and moved it somewhere. Where did they move it to? Some guy bought the whole. . .

WV: And moved it.

Daughter: And moved it. They could probably tell you up there.

WV: The place was. . . Miller was the name?

Daughter: Yeah. It was Miller's Park is what it was called.

WV: I've never heard of that.

Daughter: I think about ____ fifty.

HJ: Pretty near's I remember about ____ old Dinsmoor.

Daughter: Yeah, we were up there once or ____.

HJ: I mean, when you was a little kid.

Daughter: Oh, no. I don't remember when I was a kid.

HJ: I think that's before you got big enough to. . .

WV: People were always visiting Dinsmoor, right? Even when he was building it.

HJ: Yes. Lot of them said he was crazy.

Daughter: ____ was (laughs) ____ said he was nuts.

WV: Well, you have to be a little bit nuts to build a place like that.

HJ: Well, don't you have to be a little bit nuts to build a place like this?

WV: Ahh, I think so. But in a nice way.

HJ: You have to be an oddball.

WV: Right, that's a better way of putting it.

HJ: When I started to put this up there, a lot of them made fun of it.

WV: What would you tell them?

HJ: Oh, I just let them have their own way. I have to have a spot for what the other man says. [group chuckles]

WV: Yeah, you don't have too much room left here, really, do you? I mean, you couldn't put that much more up, in a way.

HJ: Well, I think there is probably room for all the things I suggested. If I could get it, I'd find a place for it.

WV: I see.

HJ: I could put it here east of the house, you know, I could put a lot of it there. But if I had what I suggested, I'd have something that'd be worth looking at.

WV: It's worth looking at now.

HJ: Well, I didn't think it'd ever be as attractive as it was.

WV: Did you have in mind when you started to build it that people would come out and look at it?

HJ: No! I never had that in mind at all. I don't know why, I just kept on it. But I knew that these hames [part of harness—Ed.] and one thing another, got around there, they don't make them anymore. That's a thing of the past. And I realize that the longer you wait, the more it'd be worth. I can probably get three times more for what I paid for it. But I enjoyed going to the sale and, you know, and buck up against this mand and that man and this woman.

WV: Yeah.

HJ: But I can't hear as good. And I can't see as good. And I've lost quite a few of my marbles, so, you know. . . [group laughs]

WV: What do you think will happen to this place eventually? Do you think somebody will preserve it and. . .

HJ: Aaahh. . .

WV: Would you like that?

HJ: Well, to me, when I die, I don't care what happen. I don't think I will.

WV: Do you think the people in Lincoln might like to keep it, just as an attraction?

Daughter: I don't know. I mean, I know that they're starting, what, a historical museum, and I think they'd like to have it, but they don't have the money or anything. Matter of fact, I think they bought a building they're going to move, the old ____ ____.

HJ: They didn't buy it. The railroad gave them the depot down here.

Daughter: Well, didn't they buy land to put it on? But I think the man next door wants to buy this whole rigg'in', you know, eventually. . .

HJ: Yeah.

Daughter: . . .is what his idea. . .

WV: What's kind of ____ is that? What's involved?

HJ: Now I'd sell out right now. I'd sell out right now. And walk right out.

Female voice: Where would you go?

HJ: Why, there's a hundred places I could stay all night. [group laughs]

Female voice: Is there a place where you'd like to go?

HJ: No, no particular place. But I'm getting so I'm afraid I can't keep it up. I should keep on a-building, you see, I shouldn't stand still. You can't sit still. Nothing stands still. You either go downhill, or goes uphill.

WV: Would you ever consider like selling some of some work to an historical museum or an art museum or something like that?

HJ: I'd rather sell it out; sell it and walk right out. I don't like to have an auction. And this house would be here a thousand years from now if you took care of the roof and around the sides. And this, I think, is the oldest house in Lincoln.

WV: Really?

HJ: A year and a half after it [slated] for a townsite, why the record shows there's a stone house here. These walls'll stand forever.

WV: Yeah, that's pretty true.

HJ: If you take care of it.

WV: What do you have to do to take care of a stone house? I mean, you have to take care of the roof, of course.

HJ: And the roof, and then the sides so the water don't come in. You know, keep it a little bit higher around the outside. That's about all.

WV: When did you put your name on the side of the house?

HJ: Huh?

WV: I notice you put your name on the side of the house there.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: When did you do that?

HJ: Oh, about three or four years ago.

WV: It's like signing a work of art.

HJ: Hah! Would you call that art?

WV: I do.

HJ: Do you? It's not fancy.

WV: Plain. Plain art.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: Well, there's some people that we call folk artists. People who didn't go to school to learn to be artists.

HJ: Yeah. Well, if I went to school I wouldn't a done this, would I?

WV: I think you're right.

HJ: I wouldn't a done it. No. This is oddball stuff. They ain't nobody else that'd build anything like this. You don't do what majority does, then you're wrong.

WV: I think that's true. How far did you go in school?

HJ: Hah. Hah. [group chuckles]

WV: Don't want to talk about that, huh?

Daughter: I don't even know! (laughter)

Male voice: Okay, you don't have to say anything!

Daughter: ___y.

HJ: Well, the first year I went to school we had three month's schooling. And I think I went about a month. We had [it right at] three miles to walk. And then 1904, that's the last year. I worked up. . . We had to get our work done at home—get wood up, and get the feed up and one thing another—and I went one week before Christmas and then I finished up after Christmas, and then that was my last year. And far as I know, there was nobody ever passed common school in our district. And there's 36 going to school. And there's two living in the district now that's in school age. And that time, when I left, there was 36. And Dad's idea was a man could read, write, and subtract. What else was there for a farmer to learn? To walk behind a plow or milk a bunch of cows? You didn't learn that in school.

WV: Right. Well, that makes sense.

HJ: Well, a lot of them that went to school, went to college. Most of them been dead so darn long that. . . Some 20 years, some 25 years. And the two of them went to the Department of Agriculture to learn the farming, and by God, they made a true failure of it. So I can't. . .

WV: So much for education.

HJ: It's the ruination of some people, I guess. If everybody's educated, what we gonna do? Who's going to do the real work? There's real work to do everywhere.

Daughter: ___ his own boys. ___ you look at ___ _____. (laughs)

WV: Yeah. It's an art school in Kansas City.

Daughter: That's what I ____.

WV: I'm very interested in people like your father, who express themselves in these kinds of ways.

Daughter: Yeah. Sure.

WV: [Speaking to HJ's daughter:] And I've been taking a lot of slides of them and making some recordings, and I'm going to write an article about some of these people. I would like to include your father in that.

HJ: Now a man from Kansas City. . .

Male voice: Did he fix this picture up here?

Male voice: He fixed this picture here.

WV: [reads softly:] "This here is a picture that I said I would offer you, and as I lifted off the newspaper, and ____ ____ work. Hope you like it and ____ ____."

HJ: That was in the ____ General.

WV: You just lifted that out of the newspaper, right?

HJ: Yes.

WV: That's beautiful. Huh. That's real nice. You get a lot of people that send you back pictures and things of. . .

HJ: You're the only one. And there've been hundreds of them taking pictures here. Now I mean hundreds of them, several hundreds, you know. But I didn't know who it was.

WV: Now you know.

HJ: Yeah.

Daughter: He's the one that fixed this?

WV: No, no. I sent him some colored prints a month or two ago.

HJ: They're in the bunch there someplace. He said he was coming back.

WV: Right, I wrote you a note.

[Tape 1, side B; Volkorsz' No. J1-2]

[The group apparently moved outside where they received a demonstration of one of HJ's windmills and a tour of the decorated yard. At least part of the group then moved to a cafe, where the conversation with HJ continued—
Ed.]

Daughter: My father can drink coffee five. . .

HJ: Why don't you go over and talk to the mayor [who is a customer at the cafe—WV]?

Female voice: What am I going to say to him?

HJ: Huh?

Female voice: What am I going to say to him?

HJ: I don't know. ____, set in the middle there.

Daughter: Want me to bring him over?

HJ: Huh?

Daughter: Want me to bring him over?

HJ: Why don't you catch him over there and talk to him that ____ talk.

Female voice: (giggles) [crowd noise]

WV: This is not the only cafe in town, is it?

HJ: No. No, there's a real nice one up there. [gestures] And then up, a quarter of a mile north there's a nice one. This is the busiest place.

Female voice: You point over there with ____ and [I'll set, also] the guy in the red hat's the mayor. (giggles)

WV: (laughs)

Male voice [the mayor?]: What's the matter, [babe]? [everyone in restaurant laughs]

Female voice: Your finger's too long. [apparently he pointed—Ed.]

HJ: I told her to talk to the mayor.

Male voice/mayor: Oh, is that right?

HJ: Yeah.

Male voice: One day we was up fishing in Canada, and we had Indian as guides, you know, and we had [unintelligible passage] [continues amid laughter—Ed.]

HJ: Now _____. That's him [the mayor—Ed.] a-talking there. He bragged on the time that you. . . He owns a Ford, sells Ford cars.

Female voice: How long has he been mayor?

HJ: About been there about eight. . .

[Interruption in taping]

Female voice: Did you want coffee, Hans?

HJ: Yes.

Female voice: Did you want coffee?

WV: I'd love some. Thank you very much.

HJ: This is an instructor here, and the rest of them are his. . .

WV: These are my students.

Male voice/mayor: I guess that's all right, then. (laughter) Hans, you take care now.

HJ: I will.

Male voice/mayor: You're around these young sprouts, now, you be real careful.

HJ: Yeah.

WV: We take good care of him.

Male voice/mayor: Is that right?

WV: Thank you.

Female voice: Our mayor doesn't look anything like that.

WV: Well, what town are you from?

Female voice: Philadelphia.

HJ: Huh?

Female voice: I'm from Philadelphia.

HJ: Philadelphia.

Female voice: Pennsylvania, yeah.

WV: She says the mayor there looks different than your mayor here.

HJ: I went through Pennsylvania, down through the mining part, one time.

Female voice: I don't even know where it is. (giggles) I live in the city. I'm a city slicker. It's all new to me.

HJ: And I had a granddaughter lived in Pennsylvania a while.

Female voice: Really?

HJ: Yeah.

Female voice: Do you know where?

HJ: Well, I think in Pittsburgh, about ten miles out in the country. They had a different name for it.

Male voice: You want some sugar?

HJ: No.

Female voice: You ____ it? Are you sure?

Male voice: I'm going to go back and film.

WV: You going to film the place some more?

Male voice: Yeah.

Female voice: Now, will you two want tea?

Female voices: Yes, thank you.

Female voice: Y'all want sugar?

WV: They're going back to take some more pictures of your yard.

HJ: That's all right.

WV: The first time I came here, you weren't home. The police told me to get out of your yard.

HJ: Told you to get out of the yard, huh.

Male voice: They were just protecting your property.

HJ: I've never asked them to.

[Interruption in taping]

HJ: . . .pay them a hundred percent, if I buy it.

Female voice: True.

HJ: And the actors on it make millions. They get to be millionaires.

Female voice: Do you watch TV a lot?

WV: I watch the news.

Female voice: Is that it? You don't watch the soap operas? (chuckles)

HJ: Some.

Female voice: And ____.

HJ: And Gunsmoke, I watch it once in a while.

Female voice: Oh, I haven't seen that in years. That's been on since I can remember.

HJ: Of course I like to see something about the horses.

Female voice: Yeah, I can see you like horses a lot.

HJ: Ahh. I've rode a lot of horses in my day, broke a lot of them.

Female voice: I fell off a couple, that's about it. (giggles)

HJ: So. I know I been throwed off a hundred times before I was 21. They shipped broncos in this country, and they sold them for 10, 15, 20 dollars. They had to break them pret near every time you got on them. [group chuckles]

Female voice: Where I live now, they have police on horseback.

HJ: Do what?

Female voice: They have policemen on horseback, riding through the city with all the cars, ____ police and horses. Trotting around. ____.

WV: That's funny, and here they're in, here they have cars. Philadelphia's a big city.

Female voice: Yeah, right.

WV: Something is ____ backwards, here. What's the population of Lincoln, about?

HJ: I think about 1800.

WV: How big was it when you first came here? Was it about the same?

HJ: About the same. Has been for the last 40 years, about 1800, somewhere around in there.

WV: How about the young people? Do they sort of stay around here, after they graduate from high school?

HJ: No, they leave.

WV: They leave, huh?

HJ: And the old people stay. This is an old people's town. That's right.

Female voice: Why is it? It's nice.

HJ: Yeah. You know, there's nothing here for them, so they leave here. My children didn't leave.

WV: That's nice. Do you like having your family around?

HJ: Well, sometimes. [group chuckles] You know how it is.

WV: Yeah, I do.

HJ: Such is life. I've got a grandchild going to get married, right away, and wanted me to come out in western Kansas and go to the wedding. I said, "What the devil you want married for, because half of them get a divorce anyway after. . ."

Female voice: Two years.

HJ: That's about the way it turns out.

WV: How long were you married?

HJ: Well, I was married, oh, about 43 or '4 years. I was 28 years old before I got married.

WV: It's a good age. Yeah, I was 26 when I got married.

HJ: Well, I can't see it makes any difference—whether you get married young or you get married old.

WV: Well, it did for me. I sowed some of my wild oats when I was a young man, you know.

HJ: Well.

WV: That sort of. . . You know.

HJ: Well, I sowed some of mine after my wife died. [laughter]

WV: Okay.

HJ: Better late than never, you know. [giggles]

Female voice: Are you still doing it?

HJ: [silence]

Female voice: [giggles]

HJ: If I go and tell him to charge it, do you think he'd. . . You think he'd stand for it? [speaking of the coffee at the cafe—WV]

WV: For what?

HJ: If I said, "Charge it."

WV: Charge it?

HJ: Yeah.

WV: I could stand for that. [chuckles] [general group mutterings]

[Interruption in taping, followed by long section of windmill noise]

[End of interview]