

INTERVIEW OF EUNICE ROLFS BY JOAN WAGNON, AUGUST 29, 2024
KANSAS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Joan Wagon: Good morning, this is August 29, 2024. I'm Joan Wagon, and I was privileged to serve in the House of Representatives for a period of time with Mrs. Rolf's son, Edward Carlson Rolfs, and that's how I met Eunice Rolfs, who is our interviewee this morning. This interview is conducted on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing former legislators and significant leaders in state government and in the State of Kansas, particularly those who served during the 1960s and subsequent decades. The interviews are accessible to researchers, educators, and historians, and the public through the KOHP website, ksoralhistory.org, and also available through the Kansas Historical Society and the State Library. Transcriptions are made possible as a result of the generosity of our donors. The videographer today is [David Heinemann](#), former Speaker Pro Tem of the Kansas House and a long-time volunteer for the Kansas Oral History Project.

Well, that's kind of the introduction of who we are, and now I am privileged to be able to interview you, Eunice Rolfs as a part of our Notable Kansans Collection of interviews. We are in Mrs. Rolfs' home today in Junction City, Kansas, and she has agreed to speak with me about her life, her family, and especially her famous father, [Frank Carlson](#) of Concordia, Kansas.

Eunice Rolfs: It's so nice to have you here today, Joan.

JW: Thank you.

ER: And I am going to start my interview with you talking about Frank Carlson.

JW: Good.

ER: Frank Carlson was born on January 23, 1893, in Cloud County, Kansas, and his parents were Charles and Anna Johannson Carlson. They lived on a farm, which they eventually were able to buy, and how they were able to buy this farm is first they had to come from Sweden.

JW: Oh, my.

ER: Now, Charles came from, I don't know what state in Sweden. His wife Anna Johannson came from I think it was called Värmland. My husband and I were stationed in Bremerhaven, Germany in the 1950s, and my parents came to visit us, and we went to this church, a Lutheran Church. It's the most picturesque spot practically on the Norway coast. It was all trees. It was beautiful. Every child in Sweden is listed when they are born in a Lutheran Church is the way I understand it, and there was my grandma's name. We were so proud to see that.

After we left Sweden, we, of course, returned to Bremerhaven where we were stationed. That was just a day trip for us. But my father grew up on this farm in Cloud County, and that particular farm has not changed a bit except it's in perfect condition, and it is owned by my dad's sister's family. It's west of Concordia, and this is where they [lived] when he was growing up. They only spoke Swede in their home, and he learned English when he went to school and started grade school. Now the library in Concordia has this bell from that schoolhouse as you walk into the library.

After a while, Dad got very good in his English, and there was a community building in that area, and he did a Bible class. He was sixteen years old, and he had all the boys in the neighborhood that would come to his Bible class. Now they all attended the Swedish Baptist Church in Concordia, and they would go there every Sunday, Charles, Anna, Frank, and his sister, Edna, and they would drive a lumber wagon with two horses. Dad always said it was so cold going to church. They were about five miles out from Concordia.

JW: So he was not an English speaker until he went to elementary school in Concordia?

ER: Right, and he graduated eventually from the Concordia Business College that they had in our town at that time, too. That was all the education he had.

JW: Well, he certainly was a smart man.

ER: He learned a lot in life.

JW: I suspect so. Did you know your Swedish grandparents?

ER: Oh, I knew all of them. My mother [Alice Fredrickson] was born November 1, 1893. Her family lived east of Concordia. So they would only meet on Sundays at the Swedish Baptist Church because they were all Swedes. Her family consisted of four girls and five boys.

Now, her oldest sister had three children very young, and two of them were girls, and one was a boy. And one year, the husband of this sister of Alice died, and she had this son, and he was to go to Frank and Alice's house for the summer. They were so happy to have Millard [Ross]. I was not around yet. He helped on the farm. He also worked for his Grandma and Grandpa Carlson, and he would always get a silver dollar from Grandma. He was so proud of that silver dollar. He used to show me that when I was little. I didn't get one, but he got one.

JW: So he was quite a bit older than you?

ER: Yes. He was not quite ten years, but he's older, and he lived—at the end of that summer, my dad said, "Now, Millard, you can stay and live with us, or you can go on back to live at Grandma and Grandpa Fredrickson's house." Well, he decided to stay, and to his dying day, he said, "That was the smartest decision I ever made was to stay with Frank and Alice" because he finished college, and Dad helped him get set up in business and what have you, and he was a newspaper man. He graduated at Washburn, if I remember correctly.

JW: I think I saw [mention of him in] the exhibit in the Frank Carlson Library.

ER: Yes, they're in that.

JW: Where it talked about him being a newspaper man. Now you were born in 1926.

ER: I didn't come along until 1926.

JW: So he was practically grown by then.

ER: Yes, he's getting pretty big. The pictures I have, he looks big.

JW: So you were the only child, but not really because of Millard.

ER: Right.

JW: What kind of things did you do when you were a kid?

ER: Well, on our farm, there were lots of jobs. We had chickens. Chickens were one thing that I was sort of involved in. I had to pick out the eggs from under the old hens, and that just scared me to death always. And we would fill this big egg case and take that in—Mother and I would go to town with that egg case to the locker plant where they would sell those eggs, and we'd get money always, I know.

But I never remember ever hearing anything about money in our house.

JW: Really?

ER: No, never, never, never. I guess we just survived. I don't know. I just never heard—and we always had food. Mother did all the cooking. That's another interesting area was our kitchen. I say we lived in the kitchen. We had a living room, and we had a dining room, but the only times we went to the dining room was when the harvesters would come, and sometimes there'd be maybe twelve men come to help, neighbors. In the living room, we had a piano and an old radio that squeaked. I remember that. They would turn it on once in a while, but nothing like what we have today, our TVs.

JW: Who played the piano?

ER: Nobody.

JW: Really?

ER: I guess that just sat there. I'm not sure why we had that. Mother had a sewing machine, and that sort of gets back to the Central National Bank because Mr. Pierce, the founder of the Central National Bank, how he sold enough sewing machines so he could start the Central National Bank all over around out of Junction City. So maybe Mother bought her sewing machine from Mr. Pierce. We don't know.

She sewed all my clothes out of flour sacks. I think they were flour sacks. They always had pretty designs on them, and she made my dresses. I always had a dress. I remember never—and going to school, we always had plenty of warm clothes on. We had to walk a mile and a quarter to school. My cousin lived just down the hill from us, and we would meet every morning to go, plus all the other kids would come from the west. So we were a whole group going down to school together. That was always fun.

But my playmate would be my cousin Pauline, and she remained a friend of mine until she died in Topeka not too many years ago.

JW: Did your mother have a treadle sewing machine?

ER: Yes.

JW: Where she had to pedal it to make it sew?

ER: Yes.

JW: That's what my grandmother had.

ER: Mine is now in the Geary County Historical Society.

JW: That's a good place for it.

ER: And it still works.

JW: I'm not surprised.

ER: We just gave it to Tom and Shannon. Shannon Rolfs had been using it, and it has now been removed from their property to the Historical Society. We're finally getting some things moved.

JW: Do you have any early memories of going to church or school or birthdays or harvest celebrations?

ER: Oh, my goodness. I don't ever remember getting a birthday present.

JW: Really?

ER: Never. The only present I remember is getting a new coat just before we went to Washington, DC. I'll never forget that beautiful brown coat. I wore that—it had a yellow silk lining. I thought it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. I wore that to the Easter Egg Roll on the White House lawn, and I do have a picture in that coat. I still had my long socks that we had to wear to school. Mother still put them on. There I was.

And I did a lot of carrying of buckets of water.

JW: I can imagine.

ER: We had no water.

JW: You had a well, didn't you?

ER: The well was at the barn, and the barn was a long way from the house. So that was a job they could give to me. I would put my buckets of water in my wagon and try to get to the house. Of course, the road is pretty rough, but I would get those buckets of water, and the big old black stove we had that Mother had to cook on, of course, that in one area of the kitchen, and it was huge. It had what they called a reservoir, which made humidity in the room, and you had to keep the water in that. And we also had a sink in the kitchen that had a pump.

JW: A pitcher pump, I bet, where you pumped it.

ER: Yes, and if it rained, we were able to get water out of that, but very seldom did it rain in Kansas at that particular period of my life that I remember. It had a drain that went somewhere, I don't know where. We also had a deep well that I never got to go near, but they had a rope, and they would tie the cream in a bucket and put it down that well to keep it—

JW: Because it was cool.

ER: It was cool.

JW: So it was a dug well, a big well.

ER: Yes, a big well. We also had on our back porch a refrigerator that took ice, and we had to always buy—I don't know how many pounds of ice—but we'd buy it, and they'd cover it with a rug, and then we'd have to travel home three miles as fast as we could in this old car. Of course, I have no idea what kind of a car we had, but sometimes they had to crank it up in front with a tool. Dad would get out and wind it up. I don't know what that was. And now I can really get off the subject.

JW: I think you're doing fine. You have painted a picture of family life in Concordia, Kansas with Frank Carlson when he was an active farmer, and this was in the 1920s.

ER: The twenties.

JW: And part of the Depression started with the stock market crash in '29, but I think the farm economy was pretty depressed from what I've been able to read throughout the twenties. So, despite the fact that times were tough all over, you had clothes to wear.

ER: Yes, food to eat.

JW: Food to eat, and you did like every other farm kid, and you hauled water.

ER: Yes.

JW: Picked up the eggs from the chickens.

ER: Yes, and I also—my mother would kill the chickens.

JW: Did you ever help with that?

ER: Oh, yes. She just had the log, and she put that chicken down and whacked that head off, and then put it in a bucket of real hot water. I'd have to help pick out pin—what were they called?

JW: Pin feathers.

ER: Yes.

JW: I've done that, too.

ER: You've done that, too.

JW: Yes. Now let's shift gears—

ER: Oh, yes, we didn't get to church. We went to church every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, and every Wednesday night for a prayer meeting. So we went to town three times.

JW: And then church was in town.

ER: Right.

JW: You were about three miles out of town.

ER: Right.

JW: Why was it a Swedish Baptist Church and not a Swedish Lutheran Church?

ER: There were just hardly any Lutherans in that town.

JW: Really?

ER: It's a funny thing. The Swedes, the way I understood, they left Sweden because they wanted to be Baptist.

JW: I didn't know that.

ER: I don't know either, but that's the way I understand it. And Concordia is made up of two types of people: the Swedes and the French Canadians. Now, the French Canadians made the beautiful Catholic Church, the hospital. They have schools, Nazareth Academy. A hospital, a home for their clergy. They had the bishop's house there for a while, but that was moved to Salina several years ago. Concordia was crushed when they moved that to Salina, but they did.

The French Canadians and the Swedes just all seemed to get along real well. They farmed. We had a lot of French Canadians farming just to the west of us. In fact, I can really—Sarah Munson when she graduated from college went to work at Hallmark in Kansas City, and she met Nathan

Girard, and Girard is a French-Canadian name from Concordia, and his grandmother lived there until she died not too long ago.

JW: I didn't know that connection.

ER: Yes.

JW: Of course, I know Sarah Girard. She's now the CEO of [Central National Bank](#).

ER: Right, but that's how she and Nathan—

JW: My goodness.

ER: So her kids are half Swede and half French Canadian. They probably don't know that.

JW: Let's talk about Frank Carlson for just a little bit. He was born, according to my notes, in 1893 in Cloud County. He was a World War I veteran.

ER: Oh, yes.

JW: And a farmer. He was elected—this was the part that interested me—he was elected in 1928 as a Republican to the Kansas House of Representatives. Following his tenure in the Kansas Legislature (1929-1932), Carlson ran for a seat in 1934 to the US House of Representatives where he served from 1935 to '47. Now, I watched that [Sunflower Journeys interview](#) that they did of you where they were talking about Carlson's heritage in the state, and you described your father this way: "Dad was a devout Christian, a family man, a farmer, and once he met you, he always knew your name and your issues." What can you add to that about, who was Frank Carlson?

ER: He really made a name for himself when he was Republican State Chairman, which he was after the legislature, was it '30?

JW: '32 when he left.

ER: He probably was thirty-two then. How he did it, he went to every newspaper office in Kansas. He would meet the newspaper man and ask him who the leaders of the town are. They would tell him, and he would then meet the leaders in all of these towns. He never would forget a name, and he would always remember one thing about you. If you met him ten years ago, he would know your name and he would know what—he had a terrific memory.

JW: That's remarkable.

ER: Yes. He did that again when he was running for the 6th District. Now, remember, there were seven districts in Kansas when he ran the first time for the US House of Representatives. Now I think there are only four.

JW: Four.

ER: Four. He did the same thing. But he had already been to all of those, and Millard always went along. Oh, the roads were so dusty. Mother used to be so mad when they came home. They were just covered in dust. There were no cement roads anywhere. That was where he met probably [Dane Hansen](#) of Logan, Kansas.

JW: Right.

ER: Who was one of his major supporters. He was digging oil wells at that time. He was always close with that family, even with Polly Bales, his niece, later in life.

JW: He didn't want to be in the legislature. I mean, he didn't want to leave the farm and put his name on the ballot. There's a funny story about how he actually ran for the legislature. Do you remember that?

ER: Oh, of course.

JW: You were quoted as saying that he was pushed into it.

ER: He was. They came to the farm and asked him to run, and he said—or put his name on the ballot, and he said, “Well, you can put my name on it, but I know the gentleman from Glasgow, the state representative now, a Democrat.” He said, “I don't have anything against him. He's doing a fine job,” and he didn't have time. So they put his name on the ballot. He won.

JW: And didn't campaign.

ER: And never campaigned.

JW: But somewhere in that time from what? '28 to '31 when he was in the Kansas House, he got infected with the political bug.

ER: Oh, definitely.

JW: Do you remember anything about that transition, what caused him to decide he wanted to be State Republican Chair? Because he had to leave [the Legislature.]

ER: The only thing I can think of would be his best friend in the legislature was [William Allen White](#). I think they were on the same committee, and Dad usually tried for Tax Committee. So I assume they were on the Tax Committee. That's the only reason I can—

JW: I just thought it was interesting. There's a wonderful photo of him in the Carlson Library standing on the thresher. There's a young girl behind him. I wondered if that was you.

ER: I do not know.

JW: I'll have to fish out that photograph and show it to you sometime.

ER: On a threshing machine?

JW: I'm not sure if it was a threshing machine or not. I'm not a farm girl.

ER: Well, I have been on a threshing machine, but it wasn't running when I was on it.

JW: I would hope not.

ER: They would let me go for a little ride, maybe, go up there. I liked to be part of everything on the farm. I loved the farm. I never wanted to leave Kansas.

JW: In 1934, he won the election for the US House.

ER: Right.

JW: And you said that was the 6th District?

ER: The 6th District of Kansas.

JW: By then, the Depression is in full tilt, and we're getting ready for the war years that started in 1940, which is when I came on the scene. What do you remember about those Congressional years? You talked about putting on that pretty brown coat with the yellow lining. But you actually moved to Washington.

ER: Oh, yes.

JW: Can you tell me about those years?

ER: Well, we left Concordia on a very cold day, and we were traveling Highway 36. There was no I-70 at that time, and the ice on the highway in Illinois was about this deep. They had none of that sprinkly stuff they use nowadays. And we slipped into the ditch. But first we had to buy a car because we couldn't go to Washington in the car we had, and he bought a Ford two-door with a back seat, and I was in the back seat, and it had a trunk on it so that we could put our clothes in there.

We started out, and we got into Illinois. We slid in a ditch, and Mother and I get out, and we pushed, and we got out of the ditch. Off we went again. I'll never forget that trip.

JW: You were what? About eight years old?

ER: Eight years old, exactly. I was going to be in the—

JW: Third.

ER: Yes, I finished the third grade when I got to Washington.

We finally get to Washington, DC, and the reason we're going to this Burlington Hotel is because the Vice President under Herbert Hoover, the Indian from—

JW: Topeka.

ER: Topeka. Now what was his name? I cannot remember it.

DH: Curtis.

JW: [Charles Curtis](#).

ER: Yes, yes.

JW: Our videographer, David, is a good source of things I can't remember.

ER: Anyway, they didn't have a home at that time for Vice Presidents to live in. He lived in the Burlington Hotel, and he told Dad that this was a nice place. It would be fine for us to live there. So that's where we went. And we lived in the Burlington Hotel until the middle of my eighth grade.

JW: Oh, my goodness. You stayed there for a long time.

ER: Oh, no. We lived there only between January and June.

JW: Oh, I misunderstood.

ER: Because Congress always adjourned when school was out. They never stayed in session until the next January. Just imagine how nice that would be that you wouldn't have to have them back there all this time.

JW: Yes. It probably is a good adjustment to make.

ER: It would be a good adjustment if they could go back to those days. In Washington, our first trip was to go to the old Cannon Building, which is still in use today.

JW: It is.

ER: His office was on the first floor, and you just walked in the door. There was no police, no nothing. You just walked in, these beautiful marble steps. There wasn't a soul around when we went that first time. And Dad had a key to the office, and we went in and looked at it.

Then I was going to go to school down near the Capitol because Mother was going to take me to school every day. They didn't trust the neighborhood, I guess. I don't know. But we would all leave in the morning from the Burlington Hotel.

But when we arrived at the Burlington, here stands this very tall Black man. I had never seen a Black man. Concordia didn't have any.

JW: I'm not surprised.

ER: So I was just in complete shock. We go in. They take our suitcases up to our room, and here's two elevators with two Black men, and then I had my own bed. I couldn't believe it. I was still sleeping in my crib at eight years old in my parents' bedroom. We each had our own bedroom. I even had a dresser. I was so excited.

So that was our years of living there until the eighth grade, but we had different apartments at different times there, and eventually we got a kitchen. At first, we didn't even have a kitchen. We had to eat our meals in the dining room. That was another learning experience, sitting and waiting for the food. I wasn't used to that. Mother always had everything so perfect.

JW: During the time that Frank Carlson was in the US House of Representatives, he championed a number of things. There was an Agricultural Adjustment Act^[1] that he helped get passed that helped farmers, which made a whole lot of sense to me, being a farmer, that he would be involved in that. It was Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Agricultural Adjustment Act, but your father was not hesitant to support a good idea.

ER: Oh, he supported wonderful ideas.

JW: Even if they came from Democrats.

ER: Right. Especially getting electricity to all the farmers.

JW: The Rural Electrification Act.^[2]

ER: Right.

JW: My childhood memories are not as vivid as yours. I'm a little younger than you, but my dad worked for the REA. I remember him going around [to farmers] when electricity finally came as a result of all of that.

ER: Right.

JW: I spent a lot of time riding in his pick-up truck on farm roads where he was out visiting people, trying to get them hooked up and connected to the REA. I'm trying to think what else he [Carlson] was involved with.^[3] It seems to me he did a lot of road building.

ER: Right. And electricity. He was always on the Post Office Committee. Kansas got a lot of new post offices when he was in Congress.

JW: So he's well respected as a congressman. He is easily winning re-election. Is that correct?

ER: Everyone but one. I remember he came in the next morning and said, "We won by the skin of our teeth." That's the only time. I don't know what election that was. It was a primary or a general election.

JW: But he decided to leave Congress. Can you tell me why he did that?

ER: No.

JW: I thought he came home to run for Governor.

ER: Oh, is that when he did that?

JW: Yes. I think so.

ER: Oh, then that's why then. He came home to run for Governor.

JW: He left Congress in 1947, and he ran for Governor in the fall of '47, and from '47 to '50, he's Governor Carlson.

ER: Right, and those were the years when you could only run for two years.

JW: Right.

ER: And then you'd run again in two years, and that was it.

JW: So you spent a lot of time campaigning, if you were in the US House or if you were Governor. Why did he decide to move back to Kansas? Where were you at that time in 1947?

ER: I probably was the cause. They wanted me to stay in the East and go to college, and I said, "I'm not ever going to live back here. I want to live in Kansas." So then it was decided between K State or KU. I don't know. We just picked KU. It didn't make any difference to me. I just wanted to come to Kansas.

Before that, it's kind of interesting, in 1940 when I was in eighth grade, Dad said, "We're going to buy a house. We've lived in this hotel for so many years, and people from Kansas keep electing me." So that's what we did. He bought a house, but then he sold it when he was elected governor.

JW: Do you remember where the house was?

ER: Oh, yes. Chris and I—

JW: Chris is your daughter.

ER: Yes, and we drove by that house probably about five or so years ago because that's where I graduated from high school, and I graduated there in what is Anacostia High School. That's where our house was. That was a whole new section of Washington.

Well, it's the drug area of DC now. But that house was in perfect condition. While we were there, they built a Baptist Church, and Dad did the Carlson Bible Study Sunday school class there. I read just the other day in one of these books that some Democrat from Texas took over that job when Dad left that community because they came to Kansas and lived in the Governor's Mansion.

JW: Do you need to take a break? Are you doing okay if we keep going?

ER: I'm fine.

JW: Then tell me about the Governor's Mansion, and what it was like to be—you'd already graduated from high school.

ER: Right. I'm now at KU, and I'm probably in my second year there maybe. Yes, I would have been in my second year. The soldiers were all coming back from KU. There was not a man on campus at KU hardly the first two years that I was at KU. But then came '46. They all came.

JW: The GI Bill.

ER: The GI Bill. Ed had gone to KU before. He was in the Army.

JW: You're talking about your husband [Edward J. Rolfs].

ER: Yes.

JW: EJ.

ER: EJ. So he came to KU, and I met him through my sorority sister whose boyfriend was in the same fraternity as Ed. They set up a blind date, and I knew when I first met him, I was going to marry that guy. But he didn't know it for a year and a half. He was a little slow to figure it out.

JW: He was charming. He was a charming gentleman. I only met him when I went to work at the bank, but I can see why you were swept away.

ER: I was. I was swept away.

JW: What did you study at KU? Do you even remember?

ER: Studies were not important to me. I'm just lucky I got out of college.

JW: Somehow, I thought you took a social work degree.

ER: I think it was in child psychology. I was able to get a job then after I was married, and I think I got the job because Dad had been Governor of Kansas. I'm not sure. But, anyway, I did work there for ten years.

JW: Where was the place where you worked?

ER: Here at the Courthouse.

JW: In Junction City.

ER: Well, the Welfare Department. It wasn't always in the Courthouse. It was in the Courthouse and then it moved to the Telephone Building.

JW: I just remember having a conversation with your son, Edward Carlson. I asked him once something about a political stance he had taken, and he said, "Well, I got that from my mother who was a social worker."

ER: Yes.

JW: And that just stuck in my mind.

ER: I never did a case where they needed money. Mine was all adoptions.

JW: That's fun.

ER: It was a fun job. I got to go see so many people and write so many histories.

JW: Good.

ER: And now they started the retirement system just when I was retiring from the Welfare Department. So I started getting a retirement check from the State of Kansas, which was \$34.

JW: Oh, my. I'm glad you're not a big spender.

ER: And then it has really increased. I don't see the check anymore because it just goes to the bank. But it was \$61.00 the last time I saw it. So I don't know how people live on these checks.

JW: They probably don't live very well on those checks. That was a time in Kansas when the county welfare system was in place, and counties did their own welfare determination. So it might have been different in Geary County where Junction City is than in Shawnee County where I live. It wasn't until the seventies that they standardized that and brought it all in as a state system.

ER: I think I was at the very last of the sixties.

JW: Yes.

ER: '69 or something.

JW: Okay. Do you remember anything else about the Governor's Mansion? The building's not there, but tell us a little bit about what it was like to be—

ER: That was a beautiful house. Mrs. Landon had redone that house.

JW: Theo.

ER: When he was Governor. It was just elegant. It was built in 1879, if I remember correctly. I could get that mixed up with the house that Ed bought. No, it was 1870. It's etched on the door of that house, and that door is down in the Ramada Inn right now. What was my question?

JW: Tell me about the Governor's Mansion. You're describing how lovely it is.

ER: Okay. It had this huge living room, probably from the end of my kitchen and then some with curved windows at the one end. It was so pretty. And I know every time somebody would—other people would come there and have teas and other organizations when Mother was there, and they'd always sit around those windows. It was so pretty, and the drapes were so pretty.

We never went into any of the guest bedrooms. There were three gorgeous guest bedrooms upstairs. There was a

beautiful staircase that is now in the basement of the Ramada Inn in their banquet room. There's also a beautiful fireplace right after you sign in at the Ramada, there used to be a shop right there, and that was part of that shop was that fireplace. It was lovely, and I can't remember where the fireplace went.

Then over the dining room table was a beautiful chandelier, and that chandelier hangs at Cedar Crest, where you walk in the front door. That's about the only thing I know that got to Cedar Crest. I can't remember when Mr. Cohen bought 801 Buchanan Street. It was whenever the family gave the land to the State for Cedar Crest. I can't remember who they were either.

JW: I don't remember that either. David, do you know?

DH: Newspaper men.

JW: Newspaper men.

ER: I don't remember.

JW: I just think you've had a very interesting life from the little girl who carried water buckets to dancing in the Governor's Mansion with your father as Governor.

ER: At the inaugural ball, I invited all my sorority sisters.

JW: Good for you.

ER: They all came, but I don't know where we went. I keep thinking it was in the Capitol. Could that have been right?

JW: It could have.

ER: I just can't remember where it was. I have one sorority sister left of my class, and we visit often. I asked her the other day, "Do you remember where we went?" No, she doesn't know either. "But we had fun," she said.

JW: I'd like to kind of wrap up this conversation about Frank Carlson and then ask you about your family. So I'm going to hold that for a minute, but Frank is the only Kansas politician who served as Kansas Governor, a Kansas State Representative, a United States Representative, and a United States Senator. He retired in 1967 and continued to oversee his farms. I think at least according to the Carlson Library, he had three in Cloud County.

So, after he was Governor^[4], someone who was the United States Senator resigned. He appointed Harry Darby to the US Senate, and then Mr. Darby didn't want to stay. So Frank Carlson became the United States Senator. He was there from I guess 1950 to 1967. How did he get the title of Kansas Favorite Son? Do you remember that?

ER: I have no idea.

JW: When I looked up his achievements at the Carlson Library, he founded the National Prayer Breakfast.

ER: Oh, my goodness.

JW: And recruited President Eisenhower to speak. Were he and Ike good friends?

ER: Oh, my goodness, yes.

JW: Tell me about that.

ER: That's when we were in Bremerhaven.

JW: You and EJ.

ER: EJ. And they [Carlsons] came to visit us. After they left us, they went to Paris to visit with General Eisenhower to encourage him to run for the Presidency because there was a group of men in Abilene that were wanting him to run for President. Then my father traveled on their train when they traveled the—I don't know how far they traveled. I guess across the United States. He traveled on the train, and he worked at his [campaign] office at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago.

And then one day, a man came into the office that wanted to see General Eisenhower, and he didn't have an appointment. Well, it was Mr. Hilton with all the Hilton Hotels. So Dad made room so Mr. Hilton could visit. Well, when Dad was in Congress, then they had this prayer group in the Senate, and they were going to have a Prayer Breakfast for Mr. Eisenhower, and who was going to pay the bill? Well, Mr. Hilton furnished the hotel, which was the Mayflower Hotel at that time, and he did it at the Mayflower for two times, and then they moved it up to another Hilton Hotel.

JW: And that was Conrad Hilton, right?

ER: Conrad, yes. And, of course, that was where Reagan was shot after a Prayer Breakfast at one of those, and as far as I know, every president I have seen has gone to that Prayer Breakfast except I didn't follow it with Biden. So I don't know if they went.

JW: They probably did.

ER: They've been having it every year. It's been amazing.

JW: It's quite an institution, and the picture in the Carlson Library showing [Carlson] with Eisenhower and with John Kennedy. He's there with Reagan. They're great photographs. It was a very influential place to be.

I also noted that Carlson played an important role as a US Senator in passing a bill that I particularly like called Medicare^[5].

ER: Oh, yes, we all like that.

JW: We all like that. That was 1965, but it was your father that knew that that bill had to pass. So Lyndon Johnson had proposed it, and Frank Carlson helped get him across the line, him and Everett Dirksen, I believe.

ER: Lyndon Johnson used to call him at night in his apartment when they were living at the Wardman Park Hotel. Mother and Dad lived there when he was a Senator. He would call late at night. They were good friends. He wanted to buy some property just out here in our Flint Hills.

JW: Johnson?

ER: Johnson. But he never got the opportunity. He died before that was ever accomplished.

JW: The other thing that is near and dear to my heart is the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and your father played a key role in that, and that again in partnership with Lyndon Johnson.

ER: They were good friends.

JW: As Governor, Carlson initiated new and modern treatment for the mentally ill. He was actually on the Menninger Foundation Board.

ER: Right. He was crushed when they moved out of Kansas.

JW: So was I. I was on their Kansas Board at that point. In fact, I just resigned from it. I thought the work that he did in helping the mentally ill was foundational work here in Kansas.

ER: He started that almost immediately when he became Governor.

JW: Yes. The other thing that caught my eye was he served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and was a delegate to the United Nations. He traveled all over the world.

ER: Well, he was on the International Christian Leadership, and Queen Wilhelmina of Holland was the other person he worked with. They were both the head people on that, and he was all over. Mahatma Gandhi, I remember. was one he visited in India. He was everywhere. He went around the world.

JW: Frank Carlson retired from the Senate in 1967 and continued to oversee his farms. He passed away in '87. So he farmed for quite a while after he left the Senate.

ER: After he left the Senate, he tore down that house on the farm himself.

JW: That's a rather vigorous activity.

ER: And he fell down through the-- I don't know what. He was by himself on the farm with his car, and Mother, of course, was not in good shape. He managed to crawl down-- to the neighbor, my uncle, and get a ride into town. They just left him, I think. He survived. He's a tough guy, my daddy.

JW: I think he is a tough guy.

ER: I don't know who took down all the other buildings. He had not done that, but they're all gone. Everything's gone. It's all farmland now and has been for several years.

JW: Let us turn now and talk about EJ Rolfs and your family and your three children, Christine Munson, Tom Rolfs, and Ed Carlson Rolfs. They're here with us today.

ER: They're with us today. I don't think I can say too much other than they've surely been wonderful children for me. They do everything for me. They're even here today to listen to me.

JW: You are now I guess the matriarch of a banking family where your granddaughter is running one of the big banks of Kansas with what? Twenty-six different locations? Is it still twenty-six?

ER: Yes, it is.

JW: So tell me about your family.

ER: Well, I have three children. Christine is the oldest and just celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary. Edward C. keeps us busy. He does all the farming for us around farms here in Clay County that we own. And Tom keeps all the bookwork for us for the farms. I think they have done very well for themselves. Chris's husband is a farmer in Geary County—or was a banker and then a farmer.

JW: He ran the big bank in Junction City.

ER: Right.

JW: Robert Munson.

ER: Robert Munson. And Edward lives in Topeka, and Tom now has moved to eastern Geary County. So he's still out on the farm. He lives near a farm that my husband's father, EW Rolfs owned years ago, where Ed and I would send EC and Tom on their bicycles from town to ride out and get all the weeds out of the Milo fields. That's how we kept them entertained when they were young.

JW: And your son went into the Kansas Legislature.

ER: Yes.

JW: Which, of course, is where I met him. He was a wonderful Chair of the Tax Committee.

ER: And that follows in—Frank, too. Frank was always on the Tax Committee, the Ways and Means. Post Office, Ways and Means, and Senate Foreign Relations.

JW: Right.

ER: That just seems to run in the family.

JW: So several of the major tax reforms that we've had in Kansas, your son chaired the committee in the House that brought those about. So I hope to have a chance to interview him at some time about those tax issues. But you've got a wonderful family. They're well respected in the banking community, having lots of banks all across the state.

ER: Yes, they've made many friends across the state.

JW: They have indeed. They've made a little money doing it, which is okay.

ER: Right.

JW: Well, I thank you very much for taking time to sit with me this morning. Do you have any final thoughts about the state of affairs in Kansas?

ER: No.

JW: Or things that you remember—

ER: I can tell you another very sad story that stayed with my dad all his life was World War I.

JW: Please tell me.

ER: He was stationed at Fort Riley during the flu epidemic, and he said that was such a terrible, terrible time. All the soldiers were dying from flu, and he said they were just young kids. He himself was a young kid, but he called them young kids, and he said they were all screaming for their mothers, and, of course, there was nothing they could give them. We had no medicine at that time for that flu. They lost so many soldiers, and he was so lucky. They sent him to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, because they were going to go overseas or to Europe.

Well, he gets to Fort Sam Houston, and the General calls them all to attention and says, “Would there be anybody, any soldier that doesn’t smoke?” So Dad stepped out. They asked him to step forward. Dad stepped forward. He was chosen to be the chauffeur for the General because this soldier had dropped some ashes and burnt the upholstery in his car, and he was very upset with that soldier.

Well, the General and my dad and his wife just got along beautifully. So he learned a lot being in the Army, how to deal with the General. So when he went to Congress, he was in good shape. He learned how to be with people.

JW: But he never was sent overseas.

ER: No, the war ended.

JW: Oh, that’s good.

ER: Yes, it ended. So he didn’t have to go because he was busy taking the General around.

JW: That’s a great story to end on.

ER: Yes.

JW: Thank you.

ER: Okay.

JW: I so much appreciate it and thank you for letting us in your lovely house. We need to look at David and smile.

[End of File]

[\[1\]](#) The **Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA)** of 1933 was a federal law of the New Deal era which provided subsidies and protections to farmers across America.

[2] The **Rural Electrification Act** (REA) of 1936 provided loans for the installation of electrical distribution systems to serve isolated rural areas of the United States.

[3] One of the most significant pieces of federal legislation sponsored by Frank Carlson was a plan proposed by **Beardsley Ruml**, a New York businessman to allow businesses to “pay-as-you-go” which led to the development of the withholding tax for income.

[4] Governor Carlson is best remembered for improving public education, reorganizing public welfare, increasing rural medical care, completing public works projects and improving mental health facilities. At the end of his term four years later, Kansas went from 48th to 11th in the nation. During Carlson’s second term as governor, a US Senate seat became available. Carlson recommended that Harry Darby fill the vacancy. After 9 months in the Senate, Darby resigned and Carlson himself campaigned for the seat, winning easily to return to Washington in November of 1950 to begin a remarkable eighteen-year Senate career.

[5] President Johnson signed the Social Security Act of 1965, creating Medicare on July 30, 1965. Providing affordable health care had been a topic of interest to every administration since the 1930’s. During Carlson’s final Senate term, Congress passed the act creating Medicare, a health plan designed primarily for older Americans. Carlson, a Republican and member of the Senate’s Special Committee on Aging, was integral in generating Republican support for the bill.

The attached biography of Frank Carlson and photographs were provided by the Frank Carlson Library in Concordia, Kansas.