

Dr. Gertrude Saxman
Narrator

Dr. Duane Thysell
Interviewer

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DT: Ah, this is Dr. Thysell, I am interviewing Dr. Gertrude Saxman for the Oral Heritage History Project. We are...have been attempting to get histories on Moorhead people in several different categories from the years 1930 to 1975, dividing it into three categories: one 1930 to 1945, 1945 to 1960, and 1960 to 1975. Ah, Dr. Saxman, I know after talking to her, she began...raised a family in Clay County near Georgetown, and...of five children. And during the 1940s...she had previously had a medical...graduated from medical school before marriage. And when her family was growing...getting along, some of the Moorhead doctors, Dr. [Olga Holie] Johnson, and [Dr. H.G.] Rice, and others...Dr. [Ernest K.G.] Ingebrigtsen, convinced her she should do some mantaux testing in schools. So she began to get back to the medical part of her training this way.

I'm going to ask her a series of...by the way, Dr. Saxman and I were both doctors in Clay County. I started in the 1930s, 1934 in Hawley and later moved to Moorhead in 1960. And she was in...started in Moorhead, in 1960 she went to Ulen. So just the setting of the doctors during this era, 1940s and 1950s and 1960s when we were...as the years we were practicing. We had Dr. [Edward] Humphrey and [Dr.] Ingebrigtsen in Moorhead. We had Dr. Fred Thysell and [Dr. James] Duncan in Moorhead. And Dr. [Bottolf] Bottolfson. And...hmmm...and some others, too, aren't there? Anyway, they were Moorhead doctors. I may have missed somebody.

And then doctor...Barnesville...and [unclear]...Dr. Simonsen[sp?] and [unclear] were in Barnesville, I was in Hawley; there was no doctor in Ulen during that time. Well, anyway, that's the background. We'll get around to...hmmm...asking her some questions now.

Dr. Saxman, ah...ah, where were you born?

GS: I was born in England, near London.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. I was surprised to hear this, because I always thought she was an American citizen and I guess she is, as she told us. [Chuckles]

GS: I am an American citizen.

DT: Yeah.

GS: My parents were American citizens.

DT: Yes.

GS: And I was born when they were abroad.

DT: Yes. Her father was a doctor, as she will tell you, and so...ah, one brother at least. And some others in the family. Her father...I think she told me...you went to England on some medical project. Would you...tell about that?

GS: Yes, ah...he practiced general medicine at Caterham near London for about twenty years. And my mother went over to England and married him. They were both American citizens, she from Indiana and he from Wisconsin.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. But you had three older brothers and you?

GS: Yes, I have three older brothers.

DT: Were they born in ah...?

GS: My oldest brother was born in Indianapolis, Indiana. But the other two brothers and I were born in England.

DT: The other two brothers in England. Which one became the doctor later?

GS: Well, my oldest brother was a doctor and my second brother was also a doctor.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: And then my third brother was a college librarian.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. And you came back to the United States at what age then from England?

GS: Well, I was almost six years old. We came back in 1916.

DT: So you had all your schooling in the United States?

GS: That's right.

DT: Where did you go to grade school, high school, and [unclear] yes?

GS: Well...I went to grade school in Indianapolis and in Worthington, Ohio. And I had one year of high school in Worthington, Ohio, and then we moved up to Battle Creek, Michigan.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. And you graduated from high school there?

GS: Yes.

DT: And I suppose you may have been induced to study medicine because you come from a medical family.

GS: Well, that was partly it. I always say that I'd been around nurses and doctors most of my life, and to be able to help people was my aim in life.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: And I knew that I wanted to be either a nurse or a doctor.

DT: Yes. Where did you take your pre-medic schooling?

GS: I took my pre-medical schooling at Berrien Springs, Michigan.

DT: But...and then you went to...took your medical school training someplace else?

GS: Yes. I took nurses training in Battle Creek at the Sanitarium, and then I took my medical course out in California.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: At Loma Linda in Los Angeles.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. And you had an internship of training?

GS: Yes, I had a rotating internship training in Los Angeles, and then I also had six months' internship in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

DT: Oh, yes. That was...when was that about that you finished in Ann Arbor?

GS: Well, I finished in June of 1938 there.

DT: Oh, yes. And you met your husband...

GS: In 1935, down in Indiana.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. Oh, yeah. And you knew him a few years before you were married then?

GS: Yes, five years.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. And you were married in 1940?

GS: That's correct.

DT: And did you immediately come to Minnesota then or you went to...?

GS: Immediately, we came to Minnesota.

DT: Uh huh. You found...thought it'd be easier to buy a farm up here on the prairie?

GS: That's right.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: Land was cheaper than Indiana.

DT: Oh. Yeah. [Chuckles] And how did you happen to land in Clay County?

GS: Well, he bought the farm.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: Before we were married. And it was from the...National Life Insurance, I think, was the...the farm had been rented out.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: And then the agent, [unclear – sounds like Krieselmar], I think his name was.

DT: Uh huh.

GS: Was the one that sold it to my husband.

DT: And you farmed there from 1940 until after...

GS: Until he retired.

DT: In the 1980s...1980, early 1980s?

GS: Well, yes. He had it rented out the last years.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. Oh, yes. And...how many children have you?

GS: Five.

DT: How many girls, how many boys?

GS: Two girls and three boys. And the oldest is a girl, the youngest is a girl, and the three boys are in between.

DT: In between. The...your youngest one, Susan, is a nurse.

GS: That's right.

DT: And...uh huh. And your other daughter lives where?

GS: Well, she had the library science course at the University of Minnesota.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. And your three boys are scattered now, too?

GS: Oh, yes.

DT: One in Texas.

GS: Yes, the youngest boy is in Texas with IBM.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: And the middle boy is in Wisconsin, self-employed.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: With the commercial sewing machines for factories and things like that.

DT: Oh, yeah.

GS: And he installs them and services them. And then the oldest boy graduated from Moorhead State University here, and he's been with IBM for twenty years.

DT: Where does he live?

GS: He lives at Rochester, Minnesota.

DT: Rochester. Yeah. And how many grandchildren have you?

GS: Twelve.

DT: Twelve. Mmmm-hmmm. And then I guess we'll go on to...how did you happen to get started back in medicine again? You were raising your family during your 1940s.

GS: Mmmm-hmmm.

DT: I think you told me they were born between 1941 and 1949.

GS: That's right. And then I started back in medicine part time with the encouragement of Dr. Rice and Dr. Johnson, particularly.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm...

GS: To do Manteaux testing. And then when my oldest was ready for college, then I started back to work full-time.

DT: That was about 1959 then?

GS: 1959.

DT: Yes. And...

GS: I started in Ulen...it's 1960.

DT: You told me in talking to you previously that you did a lot of manteaux testing...

GS: Yes.

DT: During the late 1940s, I suppose, or early 1950s. Maybe after 1950...

GS: Yes. And I did some as long as I was there.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: Because I did it on the employees and people in nursing homes.

DT: Nursing homes.

GS: Mmmm-hmmm.

DT: And schools, too.

GS: Yes.

DT: Hmmm, you told me, I think it was you did it in Moorhead, and Ulen, Felton...

GS: Georgetown.

DT: Glyndon, Georgetown...

GS: Dilworth at times.

DT: And Barnesville?

GS: No.

DT: Hawley? Maybe I took care of it in Hawley, I was in Hawley at that time.

GS: Yes, you did Hawley and Glyndon, I think.

DT: Yeah. Anyway, hmmm...let's see, what was I going to say? Hmmm...that was in 1950, some of that. And you meanwhile lived at home on the farm, didn't you?

GS: Yes.

DT: So you were...lived...living on the farm and you were...went to town...these towns to do this project all over the county.

GS: That's right.

DT: And in 1959 you started working with Dr. Johnson, didn't you?

GS: That's right.

DT: And you knew Dr. Johnson for quite a while before this?

GS: She was the family physician.

DT: She delivered all your children, I think you said.

GS: Yes.

DT: That'd be between 1941 and 1949?

GS: That's right.

DT: And you used Dr. Johnson as the family doctor.

GS: Yes.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. You were telling me everybody thought so highly of Dr. Johnson. Young people, old people...

GS: Everybody did.

DT: Yeah. And...the college students.

GS: She was...Mmmm-hmmm. She was very popular with the Mexicans, too.

DT: Yeah, I'm sure she was. She...oh, I worked with her then, after coming into town in 1960, we shared the emergency room every six weeks. It was Dr. Duncan, Dr. Carlson[sp?], Dr. Rice, Dr. Holton[sp?], Dr. Johnson and myself. We took turns of...I always enjoyed working with her. Then in 1959 you started in her office, and were with her for a year or more. And...then you went to Ulen.

GS: Yes, December of 1960.

DT: Yes. This is a little more background. I was in Hawley from 1934 to 1960, and then I moved to Moorhead—Dr. Thysell, speaking. And so there was no doctor in Ulen. Previously, Ulen had had doctors in the turn of the century up until in the 1930s. Dr. [Unclear – sounds like Meegan] died in 1934, Dr. [Unclear – sounds like Bothney] in 1938. And between 1938 and 1960 I took care of quite a few people out in Ulen because it was only sixteen miles northeast of Hawley. Other doctors in Lake Park and Twin Valley would take care of other people in Ulen. Ah, they had a Dr. [Unclear – sounds like Kasmy] there for a while in the 1950s, but not more than two or three years. So when doctors...I left for Moorhead in 1960, Dr. Saxman was convinced to go to Ulen. They hadn't had a doctor for a few years then, I don't believe.

GS: Mmmm.

DT: And you were there from 1960 'til...?

GS: 'Til July of 1981.

DT: 1981, yes. Did they build that medical building when you came? Or at...?

GS: They built it for me.

DT: Built it for in 1960.

GS: And it was done by donation entirely.

DT: Oh, yes. Mmmm-hmmm. And did you ever have any other doctor with you in Ulen?

GS: No, I didn't.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. I think they bought my old x-ray machine in Hawley and moved it to your office in Ulen.

GS: And it's a very good one today. Bob [Unclear] said he could use it all day!

DT: Oh, yes. I know it was a made over one. And I bought it in 1954. I had it in 1954 because I had a doctor who came to me...we started a medical clinic in Hawley. Dr. Bentley, that dentist, and Dr. Arnold Berg, a doctor. And so we went and moved to a new building. And we...I bought that x-ray because I didn't have a good one before. I was using a dental x-ray.

GS: Mmmm-hmmm.

DT: And we used it six years and it worked fine. Then Dr. Berg only...this medical doctor stayed only one year, and then moved to Roseau, and later to Thief River Falls. But anyway, sold then our x-ray to Dr. Saxman's clinic in Ulen.

GS: Well, actually, the city bought it.

DT: Oh, yeah.

GS: I didn't.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. It was a made over machine with a...some...Pickering...and...or...General Electric or something, but it sure worked good.

GS: Mmmm-hmmm.

DT: Anyway, then to go on from there, your practice in 1960 and on included a lot of office practice and house calls. A lot of house calls, I suppose. And what hospitals did you use?

GS: I used St. Ansgar, mainly, but I did take some to St. Mary's.

DT: In Detroit Lakes.

GS: And for a period of years I took them to the Ada Hospital, too.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. When you had some OB's, the delivery...medical baby deliveries...ah...and a lot at St. Ansgar's, and some in the other places.

GS: Yes.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.. Hmmm. Was Dr. [Unclear – sounds like Stateham] in Twin Valley?

GS: He was there for about...I guess six or seven years after I went there. Then he went to Crookston.

DT: 1966 or 1967.

GS: Mmmm-hmmm.

DT: So that enlarged your territory in Ulen then, so you got more Twin Valley people too then. They're about twelve miles...

GS: Yes, I did.

DT: Ten, twelve miles north of Ulen. Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm. I know you used to make a lot of trips to St. Ansgar's from Ulen. That is about forty miles, I suppose.

GS: Just about.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. Hmmm. Trying to think what we should ask you next. You had always enjoyed medical practice.

GS: Yes, I did.

DT: Uh huh.

GS: I...I didn't want to specialize.

DT: No.

GS: I enjoyed general practice.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. Just...I was thinking, when you talked about your father...[he] was a general practitioner but later became a psychiatrist and worked in psychiatry. And you have one brother that was a teacher at Loma Linda...

GS: Yes, he was a specialist of neurology and psychiatry, but he taught neurology.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: For many years at Loma Linda.

DT: Anybody else in your family become physicians?

GS: Yes. My second brother was a pathologist in the State of Michigan.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: For years.

DT: Yeah. Ah...do you think you...can you think of any unusual experiences you had as a doctor, country doctor, and that...anything that stands out in your mind that you can recollect that would be worth mentioning?

[Pause]

DT: [Chuckles]

GS: [Chuckling] I guess I'd better not say anything to that!

DT: No. Okay. Okay. Had the usual run of medical practice, I suppose, like I did.

GS: Mmmm-hmmm.

DT: Hmmm...if you had to do it again, would you do it all over again, take medicine?

GS: I certainly would.

DT: You enjoyed it.

GS: I enjoyed the study.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: I wasn't a brilliant student, but I enjoyed it.

DT: No. Well, you raised a family of five in northern Clay County, and you're nine and a half miles from Georgetown, and you worked in Moorhead doing...and all over the county doing manteaux work. Later, was a physician in Moorhead for a year or more, 1959 to 1960, and it must have been forty...twenty or more years in Ulen then...1960 and on.

GS: Yes, that's right.

DT: Yeah. Mmmm-hmmm. Your health has been pretty good all those years, except it's...

GS: Yes, it has.

DT: ...mentioned you had some cataracts done.

GS: That's right.

DT: One, and then the other one recently.

GS: Mmmm-hmmm.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. Hmmm. Your daughter...one of your daughters, Susan, is a nurse. You want to mention something about her? She worked at St. Ansgar's Hospital for a while.

GS: She worked at St. Ansgar's Hospital a number of years, and then she went over to the Blood Bank in Fargo and she worked there for some years. And now she's up in Alaska, and she helps out at the Blood Bank of Alaska, which is in Anchorage.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. Her husband is...

GS: He's teaching school.

DT: ...teaching. Yeah. How many children does Susan have?

GS: She has three children.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. And...let's see...what do you consider that...your hobbies? You mentioned, I guess to me, when you were young you did a few things.

GS: Oh, when I was young it was swimming, and tennis, and bicycle riding.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: Now that I'm older, why, I guess it's music, and I enjoy driving, and looking at the scenery.

DT: Oh, yeah. [Chuckles] Yeah. Do you belong to an organization?

GS: Altrusa Club. It's a service club of Moorhead.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah. Dr. Johnson belongs to that, too.

GS: Yes.

DT: Yes. Your association and friendship with Dr. Johnson goes back to the early 1940s then, she delivered...delivered all your children.

GS: Yes.

DT: Was your family doctor, and delivered at least...well, you...delivered all your children, you said. Ah...I've...just...I've got this down as a question. Do you want to say anything at all about politics? [Chuckles]

GS: [Huffs]

DT: [Chuckles]

GS: Well, it's like this. When I got married, my parents asked what my husband's politics were, and his family asked what mine were. And at the time it was Republican. Now I'm glad they've added Independent, because I've been Independent for a long time in voting! [Chuckles]

DT: Yeah. How about your husband? Wasn't he...?

GS: He was very active with the Republican...

DT: Republican Party, yeah. Your husband was Webster Saxman.

GS: That's right.

DT: Quite well known as a farmer east of...northeast of Georgetown.

GS: Georgetown.

DT: Passed away two years ago?

GS: Yes, it's nearly two and a half.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: But two years.

DT: So Dr. Saxman is a widow, just like I am a widower. My wife passed away two years ago. Ah...was it easy to be a doctor, and also live on a farm, and see your family, and put everything together? [Chuckles]

GS: Well, I do say it was a challenge. [Laughs]

DT: [Laughs] Yeah. You've maintained a home in Ulen, so you could be there.

GS: Yes.

DT: [Unclear] your working time and then went out to...

GS: That's right. And home for the weekends.

DT: Home for the weekends at...and near...

GS: And holidays.

DT: Near Georgetown. Well, I suppose that was about fifteen miles west of Ulen.

GS: Yes, the farm was about twenty miles.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: It was west of...I don't know, around nineteen and north some.

DT: Yeah. You have lots of places to visit family, I guess. You've got a daughter in Washington?

GS: Yes.

DT: You're going to go up and see your...

GS: Susan in Alaska.

DT: Yeah. And I should mention, you are now retired, and your husband is...you retired two years ago, about that, 1983? Your husband passed away, you are leaving Moorhead soon, and will live elsewhere. You want to tell us much about your future plans? Do you still have some ties in Michigan, California, and elsewhere?

GS: Well, my family want me to travel, and I'll probably do some.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm.

GS: But other than that, I just want to do something useful.

DT: Yeah. You're going to Alaska to see your daughter up there.

GS: Well, I'm going to see up there, but I'll be living in the state of Washington, I think.

DT: With your other daughter.

GS: Mmmm-hmmm.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. And you've got no brothers living yet?

GS: I have a brother living in Michigan, and I have a brother living in Williamsburg, Kentucky.

DT: Oh, yeah. Your brother in California then who is...?

GS: He died.

DT: He died. Yeah.

GS: Less...less than two years ago.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. Do you have relatives back in Michigan?

GS: Well, this one brother lives in Michigan.

DT: Or...yeah, that's right. Well, I wonder what else we should mention here. [Pages turning] I guess we've got...covered it...quite a bit of it.

[Rustling papers]

[Pause]

DT: Can you think of anything you'd like to mention?

GS: Well, I feel the same as my husband, that Minnesota has been very kind to us.

DT: Yes. Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah, I think Minnesota is a good place to live. I like living in towns about the size of...I was in Hawley, I grew up there, and I practiced medicine there twenty-six years, and then Moorhead. I like that better than bigger cities.

GS: I do, too. I don't care for big cities. Never did.

DT: Yeah. I don't like...I don't like all that traffic. So I guess maybe we're both satisfied with Minnesota and this area.

GS: That's right.

DT: Mmmm-hmmm. I've known Dr. Saxman through the 1940s, and 1950s, and 1960s. We were both practitioners, and used the same hospital, St. Ansgar's Hospital. And...I've always enjoyed working with her. She used to send some patients when I was in Moorhead and she was in Ulen. Some of the patients that we knew in common she sent up to me in Moorhead, so I took care of several patients that she sent in from Ulen for me to take care of when they needed to be hospitalized in Moorhead, and so we've had quite a bit of association together. Well, maybe that's just about it, don't you think?

GS: I think so.

DT: Yeah. Okay.

[End of interview]