

**Interview with Medora Petersen**

**August 14, 1973**

**Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection**

**St. Cloud State University Archives**

**Interviewed by John Waldren and Calvin Gower**

**Gower:** This is an interview conducted by John Waldren and Calvin Gower for the Central Minnesota Historical Center on August 14, 1973. Today we are interviewing Mrs. Medora Petersen, the widow of Hjalmar Petersen, who was in a number of positions in Minnesota government including governor and a railway and warehouse commissioner. He was governor in 1936. Okay. We'll start out here by asking you to tell something about your husband's background, where he was born and grew up and so on. Also, if you'd tell something about your own background along these same lines.

**Petersen:** Well, Hjalmar was born in Denmark, in a village called Eskildstrup. I don't know if I say it like the Danes do, but we were there in 1959, in fact, in the very house he was born in. He was about a year and a half when his family came to America. There were five children, the oldest was Johanna, the sister, and four boys. The youngest child was born the following year in Chicago. They came, I recall, Hjalmar saying, on the maiden voyage of the Bismark. It was a relatively short voyage, but his mother was sick and so it wasn't a very pleasant one for the family. They came with another Danish family, in fact, Mr. Petersen had been a merchant and he had resources enough so that he was able to pay the fares of the members of this other family too. They eventually paid it back, ten dollars at a time, I guess. Some of them stayed in Denmark and some in Chicago. They developed a good business and became relatively comfortably well

off. However, I think, Mr. Petersen worked in the railroads for a year. Someone from Tyler, some land agent, who knew about the Danes in Tyler, interested him in coming out there to farm, and so the decision was made to come to Minnesota.

The father had come ahead and in the story of the family that our niece, Olga Strandvold Upfell has written, she tells about them coming by train and being met by the father and how her mother's beautiful hat flew off in the wind in Tyler and she never found it again. The pastor was with him, he had a big family, but he took them in. He kept them until they could go out to the farm, which was not a very attractive place. In fact, Johanna the sister used to tell about how her mother cried because the situation was so uncomfortable and hard.

But the story, as written by Olga, tells how they made the best of that situation, that it was a good, strong family. Hjalmar, at one time, I recall him telling about how he and Svend, his younger brother, had to herd the sheep. They used to say that Hjalmar was fat and he couldn't run as fast as Svend, so Hjalmar would tell Svend when to go and catch, and get the sheep back.

When they left the farm, they had hail, drought, and locust, so they finally left the farm and they bought a place in Tyler which they called it Kronborg, it was a cement house, a stone house. I think it was cement blocks, I'm not sure. But anyway, it really had a basement, a first floor, and a second floor. And then mother and daughter kept boarders, and the father worked in the mill. Of course, the others went to school or worked as the case might be.

His oldest brother, Thorwald, became a doctor, in fact, a well-known surgeon in Minneapolis for many years, and died in 1945.

Hjalmar went to public school and he used to tell about how one day, after he'd been in through seventh grade it was summertime and his mother had sent him downtown for meat, well, he met the editor on the street and the editor said-- Am I going into too much detail?

**Gower-Waldren:** No, fine.

**Petersen:** The editor said to him, "Kid, what are you going to do this summer?" Hjalmar said, "Well, I think I'll paint." He had a music teacher, who also painted buildings. He was very fond—Hjalmar played the violin. He liked this teacher and he had painted with him the summer before, the editor said to him, "Well why get up on a ladder and fall down and break your leg, why don't you come and learn a trade?" He asked him to come to *Tyler Journal*. Well, he went home with the meat and he came back at one o'clock, started working and he worked ever since. He worked at Tyler and then he worked at Lake Benton in the *Lake Benton News*. There, I recall him telling about, the thing he liked about that was that the man was a good printer, but he wasn't a very good collector. So, Hjalmar had to go out and collect the money to get his salary. He was a good ballplayer and liked ball playing, and Hjalmar liked ball playing too, so he enjoyed that.

Then he had an opportunity to work out in Viberg, South Dakota, that's a Danish settlement, you see, so he worked there. He also worked at Irene, a nearby town. Then later he found out that there was an opening in Sandstone, and that they wanted a violin player, so when he was about eighteen, I think he was in Sandstone for about a few months, he left that and went to Milwaukee. He had two brothers, the brother who was studying medicine at Marquette was there, and another brother, who was a molder. He worked in iron works, I believe. So he just naturally gravitated there. And there he worked there for six years as a printer and became

skilled in that, but he always wanted to have a newspaper, you see, with his early experiences. Askov had been settled, some of the people from Tyler had come there. He knew the Graverseons and the Petersens. He had bought, when he was in Sandstone, he bought a piece of land up here, so when he was ready to start the newspaper, he came to Askov. He then was married in August, to Rigmor Wosgaard and they came here, the Graverseons were here, they stayed with the Graverseons until they found a place to live. They tell about having lived in six different houses until they bought this house in 1918.

**Gower:** What year did he start the newspaper?

**Petersen:** 1914.

**Gower:** 1914.

**Petersen:** Yes. Then he was, as I mentioned earlier, he ran for the legislature in '26, '28, and '30. His wife died in 1930, in August of '30. So, he was burdened with that sorrow. In his last election he called off some of the debates, I recall him saying, because of this. Then, he decided that he should make an effort. So the debates were on and he had four debates with his opponent in that 1930 election, and that's when he won.

**Waldren:** What year was he born in? What year did they come to the United States?

**Petersen:** He was born in 1890 and they came in April of 1892.

**Gower:** A year and a half, OK fine. Now, what about your background?

**Petersen:** Well, I was born in Steele County, Meriden, Minnesota, and my parents were both born in Steele County. My father's family came from Pennsylvania in a covered wagon to Prairie du Chien and then to Minnesota. They homesteaded. They lived on a homestead in Steele

County, at one time. I think the last home they maybe have exchanged, I just don't remember about that.

But my grandfather, Grandprey, came from Three River, Canada. He came to Pennsylvania where he married my grandmother, Marinda Mida was her name. She was of Pennsylvania Dutch background. We never got very much of the French from Grandprey. My mother's family, came from a long time American stock, her ancestor, Hersay, came to Massachusetts in 1630. They were three branches, as I recall to the family tree, one went to Maine, my grandfather was born in Maine and believe her mother was born in New York and then they came to Wisconsin, and were married in Wisconsin. I just don't recall, that manuscript I gave you, that my mother wrote will give some of the information about that.

Well, this little village of Meriden, of 100 population, was on the Northwestern Railroad and my father first became a blacksmith. He learned the trade from an itinerate blacksmith. Then he had a shop and he built a new shop building and he became the village postmaster. Later, he managed the elevator when I went to high school. We all had a time when we had to take care of the post office, especially in the summer, when I was out of school. After I was high school age, I used to spend a lot of time there. That's when I got my reading done. When my mother took care of the post office, she took her sewing machine over there or cleaned house, but when I was there, I read. I have two brothers and a sister now, but there were eight children born in my family. Two children died in infancy and a sister next to me, younger, died of scarlet fever when we were in high school. My oldest brother, who was just older than Hjalmar died that same year that Hjalmar died.

I went to country school, we all went to county school, and then I went to high school in Owatonna. I had to go by train, there was a train that left went through eight o'clock in the morning and another one that came back at five in the afternoon. Of course in the winter time those trains were late. It so happened that my father's oldest sister, Aunt Sarah and her daughter, had a boarding house first, then they had a hotel. So I stayed with them when the trains were not running well. I finished high school in 13, taught country school for a few years, then during the war I worked as a reporter for the *Owatonna Journal Chronicle*. So you see when I met Hjalmar, I had something in common with his newspaper experience.

**Gower:** So when did you and Hjalmar meet?

**Petersen:** We met in '33, the fall of '33. I might say that after the war I had saved enough in bonds to go to college one year. So I went down to Iowa State College and then somehow or another I borrowed, stayed, and worked. I got my bachelor's degree in '24, from Iowa State. I taught in high school and went back on a fellowship. I taught as an instructor, got a master's degree, and went to Ohio State as the nursery schoolteacher in the School of Home Economics. I was there five years and then the year I met Hjalmar, I had come back to study at the University of Minnesota. I had an assistantship there and I met him at a meeting. This was in '33 and there had been a progressive meeting of some kind in Chicago. Governor Olson had been there, Hjalmar Petersen and Ed Prochaska of Pine City, who was one of Hjalmar's protégé. No, perhaps I should say that Hjalmar was a protégé of Ed's, because Ed was the one who urged him to run for office. They had attended this conference and so heard about this meeting. I went to one meeting and they were going to have another one from Governor Olson. So I went to the second one and there was Hjalmar.

**Waldron:** Did you and Hjalmar have the same political lines?

**Petersen:** Well, I had attended meetings the, what is it, Industrial?

**Gower:** Industrial Socialist Party or something like that.

**Petersen:** No, it wasn't the socialist party it was a something Industrial Democracy in, when I was in Columbus, Ohio. I was interested in social problems. But then I didn't know much about Minnesota politics. My father had been a Teddy Roosevelt man and he'd always been a Republican, but he became a Farmer Laborite when Hjalmar ran for office. He thought Hjalmar was pretty fine.

**Gower:** When did Mr. Petersen get going with the Farmer Labor Party?

**Petersen:** Well, I suppose his particular contribution to the party was his writing in the *Askov American*. He at one time he was Secretary of the Pine County Republican Party here. But he supported Shipstead, who was the first Farmer Laborite to win. Then, of course, he supported Governor Floyd B. Olson when he ran. He was elected to the legislature when Olson was elected governor. So then he ran again in '32 and was re-elected. In '34 he became the party's candidate for lieutenant-governor. The second session that he was in the legislature, was the time when the Liberals got control of the House. Hjalmar had helped with the campaign to elect Charlie Munn as Speaker of the House. I recall him saying that Charlie had said, "Well, you can have any committee you want" and Hjalmar said, "Well, I've written about the income tax, I've written about taxes and if I can choose, I want the committee on taxes and tax laws." So that was his position in the '33 session he was elected in '32. He was the chief author of the income tax law in the state of Minnesota. He had many co-sponsors and the late Judge Bell, in St. Paul who was a senator at that time, was the sponsor who was in the Senate.

With Governor Olson who had an engaging personality, and he used the radio considerably in those days. It was with his help, you see, that the people were informed about the income tax, and some of the people had opposed it for years, and who opposed it this year too. Sullivan opposed it in that session. They said, "Oh it'll just be another tax" and it was at the Depression, you see, in '33. So in order to counteract that argument they allocated it to the public school, of course, they took the larger share of the local property taxes and as a result it meant they had either better schools than they would or they would had to raise more local money to have good schools. Hjalmar used to say that his greatest service to the state was in the inauguration of income tax law.

**Gower:** Did he ever say why he had left the Republican Party and gone into the Farmer Labor Party?

**Petersen:** I don't recall that he did. But I think he observed the actions, legislative actions, the comments, and the editorials of the city papers and all. Which he found not quite in accordance with his thinking. When he was in Milwaukee, you see, there was a socialist mayor there and he had voted for this. This I recall him saying, had voted for this mayor when he was there. So he had read and always had been interested in politics. I don't know if he ever anticipated it, but he told me that some of his party friends were suggesting his name for lieutenant governor I thought he was kidding me. But it turned out that in March convention, this occurred just about the time we had decided we would be married, then he had his name was up.

There was contest and the endorsing committee came out for Loman, Senator Loman of the Iron Range, so Hjalmar had to take his fight to the floor but he won on the floor. I recall being at his brother's and waiting, all of us waiting, to hear what happened, you know. He called up about

midnight and said that he had won on the floor. Then Uncle Doc, as we called his brother, took me home.

**Gower:** Mrs. Petersen, one other question in that earlier part, did he support the Non-Partisan League, back in the teens? Do you ever remember him talking about it?

**Petersen:** Well, he was very interested, I really don't know. I would have to look at his editorials to know just how well he supported it, except that he recognized the contribution that they made to the political scene, and felt it was a movement in the direction of the people.

**Waldron:** Did Hjalmar run for the lieutenant-governor with the office of governor in sight?

**Petersen:** No, no, I shouldn't say not. Later he was accused, you know, of sitting around waiting for Governor Olson to die, but that wasn't the case at all. In fact, he saw Governor Olson in his room at the hospital in Rochester and he never saw him again. Oh, that's not true, he did see him when he appeared one time at a meeting, at a safety meeting maybe, Hjalmar was at the dinner with him. I know he felt very bad that Olson's health was going downhill, but I'm sure he didn't anticipate--we didn't anticipate. As I recall, that Hjalmar had a talk, had an engagement to speak over in Wisconsin for some reason or other. Just at that time my former college roommate and her husband were going to be in Minnesota. They wrote and would have come to see us in Askov, but Hjalmar had to be gone. So I suggested that we meet at the Fredrick Hotel, which we did, Karla was just a little baby. While I was there, the press kept calling to see where Hjalmar was. In fact, they came over and insisted on taking pictures of Karla and me, when Berdina was with us when these pictures were taken in the hotel. Then when Hjalmar came back why he got in touch with, I think, it was the Tribune and the picture of the three of us at nine

o'clock at night, with a five month old baby was the picture that went all over the country. A friend of mine in Chicago saw it and wrote back.

**Waldron:** There's also the story about the communists being, or the socialists or the radicals, being quietly very influential in the Farmer Labor Party. Do you have any comments on that?

**Petersen:** Well, Hjalmar felt that they took advantage of Olson's illness, for instance, in the matter of the appointment of Benson. Have you heard the story about how Henry Arens was cooling his heels in the governor's office? He'd been called in and Stockwell was considered, I don't know who else, some others. Just considered as an interim until Olson expected to run for the office himself and would undoubtedly have been elected.

**Gower:** That was for the office of United States Senator from Minnesota?

**Petersen:** Yes, which that was when Schall, Senator Schall died. What did I start to say I forget--  
?

**Waldron:** That they were waiting there, Arens and so on--

**Petersen:** Yes, and the *Minnesota Leader* came out with a headline "Benson is Appointed." Olson was mad when he saw it, but then he said, "Well, what can I do?" and he let it go. So that was the way in which some of these things happened. That, of course, was a thing that Hjalmar couldn't contend with. Hjalmar was basically an honest and open person and he didn't like this underhanded way of things being done. As I said, it wasn't until that meeting or that time when he came back from Wisconsin that it really hit us that maybe he would have that responsibility.

**Gower:** What was his opinion of Governor Olson?

**Petersen:** Oh, he had great admiration for Governor Olson's ability. He was a person who grew up in the home of a labor man, he knew the difficulties of living under unemployment. He had a great sympathy for the working man and for the farmer. In some of the homes, farms were being foreclosed.

So it was in that session that they passed the Homestead Exemption Act. The moratorium on farm home loans and some of these other laws which alleviated the stress of the people, who were down during the Depression. He had, I think, he recognized in Olson, a very effective leader, and he was regretful that he was unable to fulfill his destiny as a leader nationally.

**Waldron:** Would you say that your husband and Mr. Olson were quite different as far as their personalities were concerned?

**Petersen:** Oh yes, I should think so, I really don't know Governor Olson very well, myself. Hjalmar took me to his office and I invited him in person to come to our wedding. And I recall sitting next to him at a dinner one time, and I tried to talk to him about the symphony orchestra and he sort of put me off on that, that was not his dish, so to speak. As I say, I didn't warm up to him like many people might have. But I recognized and Hjalmar recognized his great ability and his real interest in the welfare of the people.

**Waldron:** Did your husband know Mr. Shipstead pretty well?

**Petersen:** Well, not very well. Oh, I think he recognized the soundness of his votes in the Senate. I recall that Mr. Shipstead came to see us, after Hjalmar became governor, in fact it was in the home of an acquaintance of his, a house which we later rented. There were other occasions when he met him. He used to tell about the time that he went to the rally when Shipstead and Kellogg were running. He recalled that he wanted to speak to Shipstead and so he got up to the

front. It was a big crowd and later he saw a big crowd, you know, around Kellogg and saw Shipstead walk off alone. But the next morning he was United States Senator.

**Gower:** Your husband voted for Kellogg probably in 1916 and then in 1922 vote for Shipstead? Do you think that's probably it?

**Petersen:** I wouldn't know about that. I'm sure he voted for Shipstead though.

**Gower:** But he was a Republican earlier there?

**Petersen:** He was to the extent that he went to Republican meeting and they asked him to be the secretary, and so he did. But that was the extent of his participation then.

**Gower:** Okay, then. Did your husband run for the nomination for governor then in 1936?

**Petersen:** Yes. He ran-- In 1936, he attempted to get the endorsement at the Farmer Labor convention. But as he used to say, "Well, 60% of the delegates had already been committed. So, what was the use of knocking your head up against a stone wall?" He was offered the Railroad and Warehouse Commission endorsement, so he took it. I recall him telling about one of the men who had hoped to get that endorsement who said, "What does a person have to do to get the endorsement, run for governor to get the endorsement for Railroad and Warehouse?" But there might be some who would have said, "Well, why didn't he go down the line and fight it to the end?" Well, those are some of the questions you don't know which is right or wrong. I think it was right for him to take the railroad warehouse commission, because that is an office in which he was able to serve well. Again, Hjalmar had a great feeling for the people. I recall when people used to come, around here and see him about this, that, and other thing. He always had a sympathetic ear for anything and if he could do anything, he was at their service. So, the

Warehouse and Railroad commission, you see, is a semi-judicial position, and weigh the pros and cons in the protection of public interest.

**Gower:** Did you have a question right along there?

**Waldron:** Well, no.

**Gower:** Then in 1940, he ran for governor? Or 1938?

**Petersen:** 1938. He ran in the primaries against Elmer Benson. He felt that in the legislative session – and I'm sure that Hjalmar wished Benson well. He was the leader of the party, he had been elected and he certainly would like to have seen the party flourish, but for one thing he felt that they had sabotaged the Civil Services legislation. Hjalmar was strong for civil service. Then, of course, he felt that Benson was not really a free man in his office, but that he was being dictated to by his secretary. He felt that the influence of leftists was hindering Benson from performing his responsibilities. That's why he ran in '38.

**Waldren:** Was this the campaign issue he brought out in the election?

**Petersen:** Yes. In fact, we had a piece of campaign literature, you know, that showed these men what he called the Mexican Generals. One of his advisors vetoed that and so that piece of campaign literature wasn't used. I've often thought that maybe that fellow was paid to keep it off the streets, I don't know but--

**Gower:** Really?

**Petersen:** At any rate, he won. He came within, what was it, 16,000 votes. We were up, of course, all night that night and we went back to our apartment in Minneapolis with a morning

Tribune saying, "Peterson wins by 50 thousand." Then by 6 o'clock that night the votes had been changed with returns from the Range and some parts of Hennepin County.

**Gower:** Well, did your husband feel that Benson was a leftist himself?

**Peterson:** I suppose he did or he wouldn't have let himself be so influenced by him.

**Gower:** Then he ran for Governor in 1940 and '42?

**Peterson:** Yes, of course, Benson was defeated by Stassen and then he ran against Stassen as the Farmer Labor candidate in both '40 and '42. He was not elected, of course, but he increased his vote in '42 over '40.

**Gower:** Did your husband know Mr. Stassen very well?

**Peterson:** No, I don't think so. I think he met him after the primaries. But he didn't get to know him, no. As I recall his impression was that he'd like to have used Hjalmar. In that position but he remained, he wouldn't make a statement for either Benson or Stassen.

**Gower:** Well, that was in 1936. In 1938.

**Peterson:** Yes, the thing that he campaigned against Stassen was the iron ore taxes. He felt that the iron ore interests had gotten the advantage from Stassen and the legislature in '40 and in '42. He had good arguments about that. Another issue was the small loan business, you see, that was -the opportunities for higher rates of interest were increased during the Stassen administration. And Hjalmar campaigned against that.

**Gower:** How about the lien on the property vote?

**Petersen:** He voted against the old age lien. He always pointed out that he really wasn't, it wasn't profitable. It cost more for the counties and state to take over this property than they were worth. It was demeaning to the people to have that on there.

**Waldern:** Well, what about Stassen sweeping out of the Civil Service?

**Petersen:** Well, he, of course, campaigned for the Civil Service, and then he got the advantage of spoils and Civil Service both. Because he swept out the one that he wanted to, then he got his people in with Civil Service, so he really had it both ways.

**Gower:** Would you discuss those four and a half months in 1936 when your husband was the governor?

**Petersen:** Well, one of the first things he was confronted with were strikes, two strikes. Mill and elevator workers and one other one, I think. There was a situation in which a man on duty had his eye shot, which made Hjalmar call the National Guard in readiness, but he never called them out. But he went down to the place where they were, where the strikers were--where the people who were not striking who were being employed to investigate that. Then he got the two sides together, the strikes were settled. He had many appointments to make some of the appointments had been vacant because of Olson's illness. So, I think, there were nineteen appointments, and seven of them major. There was a Railroad and Warehouse Commission and one of the commissioners died. There was, I believe, a Supreme Court Justice and other judges. He always had the gratification to know that the people he had appointed were elected by the people afterward. He attended the governors' conference in Missouri. It was there that he became alerted to the fact that Minnesota employers had been paying into the Social Security treasury, but without an unemployment insurance act in Minnesota, that would not be returned to them. So

that's why he called the special session in December of 1936. The Unemployment Insurance Act was an act that was drawn and adopted in that special session.

Shortly after he took office, you see, President Roosevelt called the Drought Conference in Des Moines. So, he attended that and found that very interesting. He sat next to President Roosevelt at the luncheon and he told him about the story of Teddy Roosevelt's attempted assassination in Milwaukee, which Hjalmar had almost observed. He had not been where the assassination took part, but he was in the auditorium in Milwaukee when Roosevelt spoke with a bullet in his chest. He used to tell that story. He wrote it in the *Askov American*. He recalled that, there was a little old lady in the seat ahead of him, and after Roosevelt had been talking for a while she said, "Colonel, don't you think you'd better stop?" Roosevelt saw her and he pointed his attention right down to her and said, "My dear lady when I'm through these men will take care of me." You see, they were waiting for Roosevelt to appear in the auditorium, and someone came out and said, "Is there a doctor in the house?" Ten or eleven doctors in the audience went back, and, of course they were all wondering what had happened. Well, shortly they came out with Roosevelt and the chairman of meeting said, in introducing him, he said, "In spite of the fact of having a bullet in his chest, the great Colonel will speak." Of course, the just roared with applause. Hjalmar said that in the balcony there was a fellow who said, "We're from Missouri, show me." And Roosevelt opened his chest and his white shirt had blood on it. So, it was quite dramatic.

**Gower:** That was the 1912 campaign? Then of course President Roosevelt had gone through sort of a similar incident, the attempted assassination in 1932 and the mayor of Chicago died then.

**Petersen:** Yes.

**Waldron:** What did your husband think of diffusion politics in 1944, the Democrats and Farmer Labor Party?

**Petersen:** I don't think he had much enthusiasm for it, but he recognized that perhaps it was the practical thing to do. He ran on the DFL party later, but he did run in 1946 as a Republican, you know. He used to say that it was a mistake.

**Waldron:** When? 1946?

**Petersen:** Yes. He ran when Youngdahl was the candidate and the big issue Hjalmar raised, I think that's one of the values of political campaigns, one can talk about something in a political campaign that never gets aired any other time and that was the unsatisfactory situation in the Faribault institution. As you recall, Governor Youngdahl took great credit for what he did for the mental institutions in the state afterwards. I'm sure he was stimulated to do something by the issue that Hjalmar raised in the campaign.

**Gower:** What office was your husband running for in 1946?

**Petersen:** He ran for governor.

**Gower:** Oh, for governor again. In the general election?

**Petersen:** He ran against Youngdahl in the primaries.

**Gower:** Against Youngdahl, I see. Why was he unenthusiastic about that merger in 1944 of the Farmer-Labor and Democrats?

**Petersen:** I really don't know. I don't know. It may have been that he had no enthusiasm for anything Benson did, because Benson had control of the Farmer-Labor Party and the Association. The Association was running the party when Benson was in place of power.

**Gower:** Maybe you don't recall about this, or maybe it's inaccurate, but I have the impression that the Democratic Party in Minnesota was considered somewhat sorta a Twin Cities party, back in the 1930s and '40s with the Irish control there and so on. And that the Farmer-Labor, one reason they had been opposed to them because of that, whereas they stressed the more farmer element as well as the laboring group. Do you think that might have played any role in your husband's attitude?

**Petersen:** I don't remember him saying anything about that, I never recall him saying that or contending anything of that sort. But, of course, it was just a third party, and a minor party at that. However, because there was no National Farmer Labor Party, the natural place for the farmer laborites to go was with Roosevelt, in the national elections. Of course, also they saw in Roosevelt a dynamic leader, we might question whether it's good to have such a strong president today. But in those days certainly something needed to be done. I'm sure that Hjalmar supported Roosevelt for his re-elections in the subsequent elections. Although I think that, he felt that two terms was enough.

**Gower:** He supported him in '40 and '44 both?

**Petersen:** Yes, in '44 and '40.

**Gower:** After your husband had the one term as a Railway and Warehouse Commissioner, was he out for a while?

**Petersen:** Yes, he was. He worked as a safety lecturer at the New Brighton plant for a time.

**Gower:** A safety lecturer?

**Petersen:** Yes. As new employees came in, he explained and demonstrated or whatever it was the safety precautions that they as employees had to take in working in that plant. As the number of employees dwindled, why then his work was finished. It was then that he just happened to go to Washington where our daughter was. Our older daughter by that time had finished college, university and was working in Washington. She said, "Come on down here, Dad." So he went and sure enough there was this opening in this Office of Defense Transportation. He got to know somebody and by December he had been appointed. He then worked at that until '45. He came back from there and closed the office in Minneapolis and that's when we came back to Askov, to the *Askov American* again. We were back here nine years, I believe he says in one of his letters ten years, but it was nine years. Karla by this time was in grade school, she was nine years old and Evelyn was in Washington. So, Karla went to school here and high school. She graduated from high school here and then she went to the university and became a dental hygienist.

Then Hjalmar was elected, re-elected Railroad Warehouse Commissioner in 1954, so we moved down in '55. I was teaching, I taught high school out at Morris for a couple of years while Karla was in college. When school was out, we moved down to Minneapolis in the summer of '55. Karla then continued and got her degree in '55, then she went on and got her bachelor's degree. She worked part-time as a dental hygienist.

**Gower:** Now how many children did you and your husband have?

**Petersen:** We had one, Karla.

**Gower:** Then your husband had one child with his first wife?

**Petersen:** There were three children born by his first marriage, who did not live. Evelyn was born in 1921, I believe, and she lived, a very fine, able person. She and her Dad were mutual admiration parties.

**Gower:** I have a question, did your husband continue his association with the newspaper here all through those years that he was in politics?

**Petersen:** Yes, all through these years he wrote the editorials. So it was natural, you know, for him to continue that and to plan to come back to it. He did the year that he retired in '66, he and I together wrote the editorials. I write the editorials now.

**Waldren:** In 1956, there was the DFL split over Adlai Stevenson and Estes Kefauver.

**Petersen:** Hjalmar supported Kefauver.

**Gower:** Oh, he did?

**Petersen:** Yes, He had nothing against Stevenson, of course, in fact he admired him, but he felt that the party here had just simply made up the leaders made up their minds without a consultation with the rest of the people. He saw no reason why Kefauver shouldn't have a chance in the primaries too and so when Kefauver came to his office and asked him to be his chairman, why he gave him consideration, and said "good."

**Waldren:** So he was the Minnesota chairman for the Estes Kefauver campaign?

**Petersen:** Yes. There were other men on the committee who probably did more work than Hjalmar did, but Hjalmar was probably the best-known person statewide and that was the reason why Kefauver wanted him.

**Waldren:** Did he win the primary?

**Petersen:** Yes, he won the primary in Minnesota.

**Waldren:** That was against Hubert Humphrey, right?

**Petersen:** No.

**Waldren:** Well, I mean Hubert Humphrey backing Adlai Stevenson.

**Petersen:** Yes, that was right.

**Waldren:** Then again in 1958, your husband ran against Eugene McCarthy?

**Petersen:** That's right, he did. It's hard to recall why he did that, but, I think, because he liked McCarthy, he did it, I think, there were those who felt there should be a primary contest. He certainly got encouragement from the people, I'm sure that he had no misgivings about a Catholic in an office or anything of that kind. But there were enough people who felt that McCarthy was probably not the man, so he ran against him. I don't recall how it was, but he didn't do very well. That was never important to Hjalmar, if he thought there was a case for a contest, he went into it.

**Gower:** Was this tied in with that Kefauver-Stevenson thing at all, do you think?

**Petersen:** I don't think so, I don't recall that it was.

**Gower:** I had the impression that there was certain amount of support for Eugenie Anderson against McCarthy. Did your husband's actions have anything to do with that?

**Petersen:** I don't recall that it did. I think that, there were those who thought if Eugenie Anderson would just have run for Congress, why we'd have had another Congressman. Of course, she was ambitious. When she didn't win, well, I guess, she became Ambassador to Bulgaria after that. She was a person of means and she could afford to be an ambassador. She was the Ambassador to Denmark and I guess she performed well there. But I don't recall that there was any connection there.

**Gower:** Yes, I see.

**Petersen:** It's strange how those things, if they aren't too important, you know, you don't keep them in mind.

**Gower:** Sure. Would you characterize your husband there, I would say after 1936, as somewhat of a rebel in the party?

**Petersen:** Well, I recall what my friend of mine said, one time when we visited her. They were interested in Hjalmar telling about his experiences in politics, they lived Chicago. Sort of at the close of the conversation Edith said "Well, just keep on being a gad fly." And I sort of think that Hjalmar was just that.

**Gower:** But despite that, he was pretty successful in a number of the contests there, wasn't he?

**Petersen:** Yes, I might say that in 1952 he assumed the responsibility with the endorsement of some other people, who were interested in an amendment to the constitution, which would redistribute the highway user taxes, so that there would be more money for the farm to market

roads. And so he went all over the state, I think he went to 70 of the 87 counties and he met with county commissioners and other county officers. With the help of the county auditor here in Pine County, who did some computations for him, they set up the formulas which described what the counties or the towns would get if the funds were redistributed. They won that in the 70 of the 87 counties, but, you see, in the Twin Cities, Duluth, and other places where there were big highway contractors and Automobile Association influence, they didn't want to have this big money split up into small amounts, you know. So, they opposed it, it lost in the Twin Cities, Duluth, and some other places too. But there again was a piece of education being done. When the legislature met, they got the message and they get a better formula than what the amendment was.

**Gower:** Then in 1966 your husband chose not to run again.

**Petersen:** Yes, he was ready to retire, he was 70 years old. In '67 he would have been, let's see, he was born in 1890 so he was 76 years old.

**Gower:** 76. Sure.

**Petersen:** It was time for him to retire, in fact, he considered it in 1960 and he talked to a doctor in Washington when we were visiting the daughter. Her husband's a physician. So we talked it over there and the man said, "Well, if you want to run, well, go ahead, but don't take the chairmanship, you don't have to do that." So Hjalmar didn't, usually that position goes to the person, who is going to run again, so he didn't care for that. Paul Rasmussen was there and he liked it. So he didn't take on that extra responsibility But I was with him during one of the last hearings that he had on railroad crossings. I know he was performing up to par.

**Gower:** Okay, that concludes this interview.