

Interview with Marcellus Hall and Icyleen Morris Hall

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Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

St. Cloud State University Archives

Interviewed by Calvin Gower and James Robak

Gower: Today is June 16, 1977. We're at the residence of Marcellus Hall. This interview is being conducted by Dr. Calvin Gower and James Robak for the Central Minnesota Historical Center.

Robak: We'll begin with a little bit of biographical background and perhaps you can tell us the date of your birth and then we can trace backwards from there to your family history.

Hall: August 24, 1901.

Gower: Lived in St. Cloud all of your life?

Hall: All of my life. My mother was born in St. Cloud.

Gower: Your mother was born in St. Cloud?

Hall: That's right.

Robak: And what was your father's name?

Hall: My father's name was Mathew Hall.

Gower: He was born where?

Hall: He was born in Germany.

Robak: Where at in Germany?

Hall: Essenfingen in Germany.

Gower: Do you know how to spell that?

Hall: I think it's E-S-S-E-N-F-I-N-G-E-N. It's near the head water in the Rhine. It's close to the Swiss border.

Gower: And when did your father come to the United States, approximately.

Hall: Eighteen--I think it's '82. 1882.

Gower: How old was he?

Hall: Nineteen.

Gower: Did he have some kind of a craft?

Hall: No. He worked for the railroad first. And he worked for a man by the name of Gilman, who happened to be lieutenant governor in the state of Minnesota, and lived in St. Cloud. But he had a saw mill at Gilman, Minnesota and he worked for Gilman and eventually sold some lumber that Mr. Gilman had at Ronneby. Eventually he brought the remaining inventory and moved it to St. Cloud and started the business where it's still located on 603 2nd Street North.

Gower: Did your father start working for Mr. Gilman fairly soon after he'd come here?

Hall: Yes, I would say within two, three years.

Gower: And when did the business start then, Mathew Hall Lumber?

Robak: 1889?

Hall: 1889, yes.

Robak: Did your father--do you recall--come directly to Minnesota from Germany?

Hall: Yes.

Robak: I see, so he was aware of the land here, and the situation and had a reason to come. Did you ever hear what his reason for coming was?

Hall: There were some relatives here.

Gower: In St. Cloud?

Hall: Relatives, yes.

Robak: Your father married--

Mrs. Hall: Kindlers were the relatives.

Gower: Was that the man who was in on the harness business?

Hall: Oh yeah.

Gower: What relationship were they to your dad?

Hall: They were cousins.

Robak: I was going to ask if you recall the date that your father married, and what your mother's name was.

Hall: He married Anna Volz.

Gower: How did she spell her last name?

Hall: Well, various ways. But the way we have it is V-O-L-Z. And on his tools that I have in the basement he signed them that way. But some of the certificates are V-O-L-T-Z. When they changed I don't know, but me, I would say V-O-L-Z was the name. She was one of nine and they were all born here in St. Cloud near St. Raphael's Home.

Gower: What year, day, and month were they married?

Hall: Alright, you got me. I don't know that.

Robak: I thought we'd discussed this earlier and I'd written down October 11, 1892.

Hall: That's right. You've got that, okay fine.

Robak: They had quite a large family, correct?

Hall: Well, there were ten. And there's one, two, three, seven of them left.

Robak: Can you chalk off all the names?

Hall: Al, Herb, Irv, Marie, myself, Matilda, Lawrence, Louise, Emerista, and Jerome.

Robak: That takes care of all of them. And Al was the oldest?

Hall: Al is the oldest and he's still living--in town. And Herb is still living in town.

Robak: They're the oldest two?

Hall: The oldest two. Al's 84 and Herb is 82.

Robak: Where did your family live then?

Hall: The house is still standing there where I was born--it's 30 13th Avenue North.

Gower: And is that where your folks lived most of the time of their married life?

Hall: That's where they lived all the time, all the time.

Gower: Your dad must have gotten married shortly after he started that lumber business then?

Hall: That's correct.

Gower: 1892?

Hall: That's correct.

Gower: What was the size of the business when it got started? Pretty small scale then?

Hall: He ran it on his own.

Gower: This was a one person operation then?

Hall: How long it was that way I don't know.

Mrs. Hall: They made six hundred dollars the first year they were married.

Gower: They made six hundred dollars the first year they were married!

Mrs. Hall: Your mother often told that.

Hall: I have a, then he paid, ugh, just a minute--That's not right! That's not right!

Robak: So he didn't buy this building--

Hall: Is that what it says in there, in '16?

Gower: In 1916, Mathew Hall bought the Fischer building across the street--

Hall: That's not right!

Mrs. Hall: He didn't have the coal business until after I met you because we couldn't get married because there were too many brothers.

Hall: I think it was '24. We bought Albany before--I think around '24. I think that's right.

Mrs. Hall: They should look in the courthouse.

Hall: I've got that stuff here too. But the '16 isn't right, I know that. You know that too.

Gower: So your dad operated this lumberyard on a pretty small scale for a while. Was he buying and selling lumber? That was pretty much all that was involved there?

Hall: Retail lumber business. And at that time it was primarily all lumber.

Robak: Were there any other--

Hall: After a while he got into a little hardware and peat and windows.

Robak: Were there any other lumber businesses in town at that time?

Hall: Four or five.

Robak: Do you recall what the names of them were?

Hall: Well, some of them changed hands four or five times. One of them was United Builders. They were at one time Hartness Minor, and at one time they were Thompson Yards. There were four or five different changes that took place there. And there was a Clark, and a Central Lumber Company, and Simonson's and a couple others I can't recall.

Robak: This might be a little off the topic, but was the railroad in at that time?

Hall: Yes. The railroad was in.

Robak: A lot of the lumber was shipped in by rail.

Hall: Primarily in the early years the lumber came from mills close by. There was a mill in Sauk Rapids by Neil's that we used to haul lumber over here in the winter time. Then we had it in the spring. And also lumber from Gilman's place--sawmill. And Sartell had a saw mill, and there was also a saw mill south of town by the 10th Street Bridge. Primarily at first it came locally, and after a while it all came in by rail--all the lumber came in by rail.

Robak: And now of course continues to do so.

Hall: I would say today it's primarily truck.

Robak: Oh it is. I'd say they unload a lot by rail.

Hall: They do, but a lot of lumber came in trucks.

Gower: Did the Mathew Hall Lumber Company expand and get into the coal business in the 1920's? Was that it?

Hall: That's right. We took over the Fischer Company who was an implement dealer at that time. But he had a coal business. We did not buy the implements but kept the coal business and we run, at one time, we run six teams of horses that we deliver primarily coal with in the winter time. And also a couple of trucks that we had.

Gower: How long did they continue with the coal?

Hall: They're still selling coal. Not very much, but--

Gower: When did it decline would you say? 1950s?

Hall: No--the coal business was good up until, I would say, sixties. When I left there in '65 it was still big business. We sold a tremendous amount of coal.

Gower: And then a number of you people, the children of Mathew Hall, worked at the business, right?

Hall: In the fall, us boys were there all the time, except the years that--Al and Herb were the oldest--put in during the war. They were drafted and went off to war and they were gone about two years a piece. But outside of that we've been there all the time until we sold out to Jim Hall, who happens to be a nephew, in '66.

Gower: Jim Hall is the son of which brother?

Hall: Irvin.

Gower: What was it, strictly a family business then all the time?

Hall: That's right.

Gower: The ownership was always in the family.

Robak: The youngest son, Lawrence, became a lawyer?

Hall: Yes. He was also in the legislature. He was also the head of the Metropolitan Airports Commission.

Robak: What years?

Gower: He was elected in the 1930s I think. Wasn't he?

Hall: I've got a circular there that gives it.

Gower: Then he became the Speaker of the House?

Hall: That's right.

Gower: Was he the Speaker of the House for several terms?

Hall: That's right. How old is Bob? He's about forty-three, forty-four years old. Then it'd be 1934.

Mrs. Hall: Papa was born in '37. 1941 he was Speaker of the House.

Hall: Around the 40s?

Mrs. Hall: Early 40s.

Hall: Yeah, that's right.

Gower: Was he still in the legislature when he died?

Hall: No.

Gower: He had retired from the legislature or was he defeated in an election?

Hall: He retired.

Robak: Was that for this district?

Hall: Yes.

Gower: And he was a very strong political leader. His widow lives here in St. Cloud--

Hall: She still does and his son is in the law practice.

Gower: Is his name Lawrence Hall also?

Hall: His name is Mike. Wait a minute, Lawrence Michael, but he goes by the name of Mike.

Gower: Yeah, his name is Lawrence Hall also. When did you yourself start in the business then?

Hall: 1918.

Mrs. Hall: You should mention that you had to leave school because of your brothers being drafted.

Robak: We can trace back there. First of all which schools did you go to?

Hall: Well originally when we started we went to St. Mary's grad school. The school is still uptown you know. Then I went to St. John's prep school for three years and when my brothers were called in the army I came home to help. I did finish high school at the Tech. That particular year we had a big flu epidemic here. We didn't start school until about Thanksgiving it seems to me. The business during the winter time, the lumber business itself, was rather slow. So I decided to finish high school I started then around Thanksgiving time. Graduated from Tech.

Robak: You recall the year?

Gower: 1919?

Hall: Yeah.

Robak: And you went to work in the business then thereafter?

Hall: That's right I stayed there.

Gower: You'd been working for a little while before that and--

Hall: During the summers you'd come down and work.

Gower: But permanently beginning in 1919. Probably June or May, 1919.

Hall: That's right.

Gower: Until 1965?

Hall: Yes.

Gower: And were you involved in all aspects of the operations of the company?

Hall: That's right.

Robak: Can you tell us something of the business of the first ten years up to 1930? Good years, bad years, things of that sort.

Hall: Well, I would say that the business grew with the size of St. Cloud. Business was very good. At first it was primarily with individual people, but as the city grew more business was contractors. But it was always steady even growth every year more and more.

Robak: Continues to grow today even.

Hall: Yes.

Gower: Was the city of St. Cloud growing pretty steadily all through that period?

Hall: I would say that maybe in the '19's. St. Cloud was probably 12,000-15,000. St. Cloud, from that time on, had a steady growth. I mean every year 5 percent, 10 percent. The one time that it looked a little bad was when the Great Northern Railroad pulled out of St. Cloud and moved the division point to Melrose and that hurt St. Cloud. But it lasted only a short time and it

didn't affect them as much as the people thought it was going to affect them. But that was one of the big--

Robak: When did they do that?

Hall: About in the '15's, '18's somewhere in there. '15's maybe.

Gower: The change was then?

Hall: Yeah. They took all of their-- You see this used to be a division point. There were a lot of conductors, and brakemen, and engineers. They took the whole thing and moved it out and moved to Melrose and that was quite a jolt in town. I don't know how many employees there were, but if there was 200-300 people at that time—

Robak: Is there a purpose in doing so?

Hall: Well, they were going to make the grass grow green in St. Cloud-- I don't know why it was but the railroad said that it was a little too close to Minneapolis and St. Paul. But eventually they brought it back into St. Cloud.

Robak: And now we're stuck with the railroads. Okay, and you married in 1929?

Hall: Yes.

Robak: What was the date? Let's get that down.

Hall: The 29th of June.

Mrs. Hall: Wait a minute.

Hall: 27th of June.

Robak: And your wife's name was Icyleen Morris?

Hall: That's right.

Robak: You were from Douglas Country you had mentioned.

Hall: We have five children.

Gower: What's his wife's name?

Robak: Why don't you repeat the story you had told me about your name.

Gower: And we should get the spelling on the tape there too.

Robak: I-C, what is it, L-Y?

Mrs. Hall: I-C-Y.

Robak: I-C-Y-L-E-E-N and Morris with two R's.

Gower: And what is your first name?

Mrs. Hall: Icyleen.

Gower: Oh, that's your first name. He's got it all together. Icyleen Morris is your name.

Robak: And yet at some time it was Kathryn.

Mrs. Hall: I was baptized Kathryn because Icyleen wasn't a saint's name. And the man who recorded my birth thought my father named me Laura Icyleen. The man thought that my father didn't know how to spell Laura, so the man corrected it. So it's Laura in the courthouse.

Robak: So it's listed as Laura.

Mrs. Hall: My real name should be Laura Icyleen Kathryn Morris.

Hall: But she goes by the name of Icyleen.

Gower: Then was your family from St. Cloud?

Mrs. Hall: No. My father came from New York State in 1865 to southern Minnesota and he bought a farm in Fareta(??) Minnesota on Maple Lake.

Robak: That's over towards the Alexandria area--Douglas County. That was a large family too?

Mrs. Hall: We were three girls.

Robak: Three girls. And he was a farmer?

Mrs. Hall: Well, he retired from the farm because he had only girls.

Robak: That doesn't work, huh?

Mrs. Hall: We went to Alexandria.

Gower: And then you came to St. Cloud and went to school at--

Mrs. Hall: Graduated in '22--State College.

Gower: And then you taught school for a while?

Mrs. Hall: I taught in Princeton, Foley, Nappa, [??], Idaho, Austin, and Minneapolis.

Gower: And how did you and your husband meet each other?

Mrs. Hall: At Shoemaker Hall at a dance.

Hall: Who was the matron?

Mrs. Hall: Mrs. Shark.

Gower: Mrs. Shark was the matron of Shoemaker Hall.

Robak: Five children, names?

Hall: Richard, Yvonne, Donald, Bob, and Jerome.

Robak: Do they all live around this area?

Hall: Richard lives in Albany. Don and Bob live in Minneapolis. Yvonne lives in St. Louis, Missouri and Jerome lives in--

Mrs. Hall: Rome.

Hall:--It isn't Rome, it's--

Mrs. Hall: Westernville.

Hall: Westernville, New York.

Gower: Westernville?

Hall: Rome is the closest large city--it's about eight miles.

Gower: What were some of the changes that occurred in Mathew Hall Lumber Company business during the years you were there? You were operating with horses and wagons at the beginning there pretty much?

Hall: Yes, all together.

Gower: Then you shifted over to--

Hall: Trucks were the biggest thing.

Gower: When did that occur?

Hall: I would say right after the First World War.

Gower: Early 1920s?

Hall: Yes, early twenties.

Gower: But you continued with the wagons and horses for--

Hall: We had them until-- We had them when the big blizzard, when was that, 1942?

Gower: 1940 I think was the--

Hall: Big blizzard.

Gower: Yeah, I think that was the big blizzard. In November you mean?

Hall: Well, if you read the story it says that some people were out of coal during that blizzard—

It tells something about that in here.

Gower: Yeah, it's mentioned in there.

Hall: So that was the last--there were wagons and--

Gower: What about, did you mechanize much in the operation of the lumberyard?

Hall: No.

Gower: Is there still a lot of physical--

Hall: Hand labor, all hand labor until about sixties.

Gower: So you didn't have a, what do you call those little--

Hall: Forklifts?

Gower:--forklifts.

Hall: We got those, I would say early, late 50s, early 60s. Up until that time even the coal was all hand labor. We used to get the coal in box cars and then shovel it all out by hand. We delivered coal to--at that time--the Normal School, State University here. And it'd be probably thirty tons of coal in a car and two men with two teams and two wagons would unload that in a day. And driving from there and down there was quite a job. And they had unloaded down there with a, the old main building where the power plant was in, was off the ground about six feet. So from their wagons they still had to shovel up three feet. That was hard work.

Robak: How many people were employed?

Hall: At the end you mean?

Robak: Well, just kind of as, say 1930. Do you recall roughly how many? I imagine it sort of grew somewhat.

Hall: It did at the end. Like I said we had, oh, sixteen drivers, four in the office, and we probably had twenty-five employees.

Robak: That's what it is now?

Hall: I don't know. I don't know what their employment is now.

Robak: Well that would be the guess.

Gower: When you were operating back there in the 1920s were there other people other than just the Hall's?

Hall: Oh, yes.

Mrs. Hall: Not too many. You had two trucks--Irv drove the big one and you drove the little one.

Hall: At first. Up until Matt Wagner and John Fischwyler and four or five other employees.

Robak: Which years did the business begin working with contractors?

Hall: It was a gradual process over the years.

Robak: More and more so as time went on. So I suppose construction business started to boom. Now, even today, there's a tremendous amount of building going on.

Hall: And I would say that 90 percent is probably done by contractors. I don't think an individual goes out and builds his own house and hires his own help.

Gower: Right, that's unusual.

Hall: And years ago that's the way it was. They bought their own materials and hired their own labor and then they sublet maybe the wiring and at first they didn't have heating plant and they heated it with stoves. Yet the process has changed considerably with contractors. Because they, to start with, kind of control the land sale. Remember when they opened up Centennial addition over here. The stipulation was that they would sell one lot per individual and the reason for that was that the contractors didn't come in and control things. I bought the first lot since Centennial addition. And I had told a man by the name of Matt Ampe--who you probably know, he was on

the council--I told him before he ever put the price on the line that I wanted three lots, because one wasn't large enough and then I could split another one off the way I wanted. They weren't going to sell three or more.

Gower: They were only going to sell one lot.

Hall: Per person.

Gower: Two lots, or one?

Hall: One. Anyway, I had given him a down payment on the lot you know.

Gower: Was Matt Ampe the real estate person?

Hall: At that time he was the commissioner-- He was not the real estate person. He ran a restaurant over--

Gower: Was he on the city council you mean or county commissioner?

Hall: City council. So eventually he sold me the three lots and said that anybody can buy three.

Gower: I see. But they still were holding down a number of contractors.

Hall: That's right. It was in '59. Wait a minute--'59 when I bought it.

Robak: That was the first year that Centennial opened up.

Hall: I bought the first lot since Centennial addition in '59. The lots at that time cost me \$1,650 for a seventy-five foot front, sewer, water, and toilet.

Gower: That was per lot, \$1,650?

Hall: \$1,650, right.

Gower: Prices have gone up quite a bit.

Hall: I just saw some in the paper last night at the airport--\$10,000.

Robak: That probably wasn't with water.

Hall: No, they're putting it in up there, you know where those sand piles are?

Robak: Oh, here?

Hall: Yeah, that used to be the airport.

Gower: Well, the ones beyond us, they're on 24th. I think when they sold the lowest price was \$4500. That was about five years ago. Some of them are higher than that. The ones on Pandolfo Place--

Hall: You see when we bought--Centennial has restrictions--we decided to build a new place. We couldn't build over there so this is right under the area. And the lady had ten lots here and she wouldn't sell one or two or three. She wanted to sell all ten.

Gower: All along here you mean?

Hall: I'll explain it to you. The lots here are only forty-one feet.

Gower: Wide, you mean?

Hall: Wide. So I knew a man that would that was trying to build in this area and I told him that I could get ten lots and I didn't want ten lots--dumb as I was--but I would like two of them. I could

have two and we could dispose of the other six and we would make one lot out of two which would give me an eighty-two foot lot. So two are over there.

Gower: The corner there, huh?

Hall: And two here and two next door and two in the back and two over on nineteenth. So we sold them in pairs instead of as single lots. Years ago they built the houses a little bit different than they do today. By the time they get a 24x 28 garage on, the lots were too small.

Gower: How long did your dad continue in the business, himself?

Hall: Let's see, he died in--he was in business all the time until he died and he was 95 years old. He died in--

Robak: 1958 your dad died.

Hall: Yeah, I guess that's right.

Gower: And he was still in the business there?

Hall: Yeah, he stayed in the business.

Gower: Even when he was ninety-five? When did your mother die?

Hall: She was 94 years old and she died in 1963. She was born in St. Cloud.

Gower: She lived here all of her life, 94 years?

Hall: The story about that is, this is kind of interesting, the house is gone now. It was just removed a year or two ago. I can go back to 1887 and they lived in a house on 5th Street and 10th Avenue North. The house is still there. It's on 10th Avenue, see. The house that I think my

mother was born in was originally where the Great Northern freight house is. When the railroad comes--they were going to bring the railroad through, they said to get your house off. No compensation or anything, just said to get your house off. They said if you don't we'll wreck it. So when he moved the house across the street east of St. Raphael's Home on the corner, there's nothing there now. They took it down about two years ago. It was a little bit of a house.

Gower: Right. Where that vacant lot is?

Hall: That's right. That's where it was. The reason I go back to the old records is that's when the directory first came out. In St. Cloud, at that time--that's about 1900--was about 9000. And then they lived on 10th Avenue and the directory shows that they lived at that address. Before that I'm not too sure.

Mrs. Hall: It's an interesting thing to note that there was one year, or three or four years we had no lumber at all.

Gower: Because of a shortage or because of World War II?

Hall: It was rationed. You could sell what you had, but in order to sell 90 percent of it you had to have priorities. And St. Cloud not being a big industrial town as such and granite business didn't have any priorities, the only thing we had that had priority was like Franklin and places like that. And transportation had priorities. If you wanted to buy a car you had to have a permit. Or you want to buy sugar you had to have a coupon--did you know that?

Robak: I wasn't too sure about it.

Hall: There was rationing in almost everything. Coffee, clothing, butter--

Mrs. Hall: Shoes, meat-- But he had no business. The point I was trying to bring out is that if he wouldn't have had the coal and the oil business priority we would have starved that winter.

Gower: Well, your construction was way down also though.

Hall: I lost a very good customer, because I had some plywood there and he'd been one of our best customers and he wanted to buy it. I couldn't sell it to him and he said, "I'll never buy another piece of board here as long as I live." It was because I wouldn't sell it to him and I said that it's not my regulations--the government regulation.

Robak: So you lost a good customer?

Hall: Very good. The best.

Gower: Did you have any decline in business during the 1930s? During the Depression?

Hall: Well, yes.

Mrs. Hall: We got married in '29--the year of the crash.

Gower: That was rough time there too.

Hall: Very rough.

Mrs. Hall: We had a house but we didn't have any money.

Hall: Until during Roosevelt's Administration, FHA--Federal Housing Administration--was starting and up until that time a lot of people that had mortgages on their houses, or on their house I should say, got them from individuals rather than from banks. They knew somebody that wanted to let some money and just wanted some interest. And up until that time people weren't

concerned about paying off mortgages. They just paid the interest every year. FHA came in and they would give you up to 90 percent of your house and lot and everything which was unusual at that time. And the interest rate was probably--I don't remember anymore--say around 6 percent. One of things that I remember was there was a man who built a house by the Veterans Hospital and he had government bonds they were selling at that time and they were paying 4 ¼ percent or something like that. He had enough--he had worked for the government for a long time. He had enough money to pay for his house when he retired but he took off his loan. Then they paid their payment every month. And it would include a part of the principle. The year before they only paid the interest. So eventually over a period of twenty years he has his house paid. I asked this man why he wouldn't take his money out at 4 percent or 4 ½ percent and he was paying six percent. He said if you know all the trouble I had putting it in there you wouldn't take it out either. As I remember the house at that time payments were probably sixty dollars a month. It included their taxes, interest and payment on their principle. Pay it over twenty years the house would cost \$5000 complete with the lot, everything. That changed the housing picture.

Gower: And that's how you came back on the construction?

Hall: Yes.

Gower: And then you get into World War II and it declined again because you just couldn't get the material.

Hall: That's right.

Gower: And then after World War II it was pretty good business all the way through.

Robak: Did it ever get so bad that there was any thought you were going to sell or discontinue the business? Did that ever enter the picture?

Hall: No. Like my wife said, during the war we had a necessity that we were selling. That helped us greatly. Like fuel--coal and fuel oil. Everybody had to have it.

Robak: And having this other item, or other business--

Hall: It carried us over, and at that time I would say that when we first ran into the fuel business 85 percent of the heating was done with coal. And about 5 percent with oil and the rest was local wood. We used to sell wood. The farmers would bring in wood--trade it in or something. We'd sell it for heating.

Robak: But most of it was coal?

Hall: I would say 85 percent and then it gradually went to automatic heating oil and gas. And now its 90 percent the other way.

Gower: Do you think it's going to go back to the large percent coal?

Hall: I don't think that houses will ever be heated with coal.

Gower: You don't?

Hall: I don't think so. They're either oil, gas, electric, or solar. One of the reasons for that is you have a problem of handling. I remember when we were getting to the end of the coal business they were talking about pulverizing the coal and blowing it in. Well it still is an expensive deal, see. Now as far as big companies are concerned I think that if I remember right the paper mills-- St. Regis paper mill--has a pulverizing plant and they blow their coal in. Whether they still have

it or not, but they did at one time. I'm talking about I've been out now ten years. They may have changed. They may be gas now, I don't know but at one time they had the only pulverizing plant around here and they were working on making small pulverizing plants for homes. They originally, when they first started mechanizing, they came with what you call a stoker. You fill the hopper and the coal would gradually worm itself into the furnace as it was needed.

Thermostat control-- You know what I'm talking about?

Gower and Robak: Yeah.

Robak: I think St. Regis evidently does continue to use coal. I know they've got a big stockpile.

Hall: Well the stockpile doesn't tell you anything because in these big industries the bigger the industry the more they have to rely on stand-by equipment. What I'm talking about is the big gas companies will give a big user a special price in the summer and maybe until it gets down to zero temperature. And when it gets colder they shut them off and they have to have stand-by equipment so that they could be working on stand-by coal. They could also be on stand-by oil. Or as it was the last few years they would have to use the coal instead of gas or oil. Now I know some people that were on all three.

Robak: That involves a necessity.

Hall: Sure because--yes. State College used to be on all coal. They had, well, first they had hand fires and then they had stokers. And then they built that new plant down there and, of course, that was all automatic. Now they're on gas I think, aren't they?

Gower: They're on--

Hall: It's oil, they're on oil.

Gower:--and then they go out and get--

Hall: Stand-bys. And they've thrown out all their coal equipment. They used to have silos down there. I don't know if they still have the silos or not.

Gower:--I don't think they do. I don't know for sure.

Mrs. Hall: What year did you buy the oil business? Before we moved off of 22nd? It must have been in the 50s.

Hall: Oh, long before that.

Robak: You mentioned earlier branches in Cold Spring.

Hall: And Albany.

Robak: And Albany? Can you give a story on that? What years and—

Gower: Did branches follow the Mathew Hall Lumber Company?

Hall: Yes, but we sold them off before we sold the business in St. Cloud. See when my father died there were four of us boys left running the business here. And I think it was in about '56 that we sold off Cold Spring. Oh wait a minute, that's wrong. I'd say '66. In about '67 I took over Albany.

Gower: In what year? '57 you mean. I thought you retired in 1950?

Hall: Well I retired here and then I had that as a hobby.

Gower: Oh, I see.

Hall: I had my boy running it. I'd go up there occasionally. And I sold it two years ago.

Gower: When did you start with Albany and Cold Spring?

Hall: I would say that the Albany one was started in the early 20s and I would say that we got Cold Spring in the 30s.

Gower: Why did you decide to retire?

Hall: Too fast of a pace.

Mrs. Hall: No, the older brothers wanted to sell out and Al decided to retire. He was the oldest brother. Somebody had to pick up his stock so we decided to sell too.

Gower: So it was more of a cause of the circumstances of the family.

Mrs. Hall: Right. It was family.

Hall: And I wanted to get out.

Mrs. Hall: That's what the youngest one did.

Hall: Yeah, and I was 65 years old when I started picking up the business.