

Q. Is there anything else you would like to say?

A. No. If you think of anything else you would like to ask, just give me a call.

James W. Moffitt

Nauvoo, Illinois

Birthday unknown (1930?)

Interview in October 2001 in the

Community of Christ parking lot by Jayson Edwards

Jordan Whiting also present

A. [James Moffitt] I like the Midwest. I've lived, throughout the years, just about all over the country. In fact, I lived in Salt Lake City for a while. And I came back to Nauvoo every time.

Q. [Jayson Edwards] What keeps bringing you back?

A. Oh, I suppose family, friends—I just like the area. Summers are heck, and the winters are hell, [chuckles] There's good people back here.

Q. Where were you originally born?

A. Here in Nauvoo. Just south of town out in the country a little ways.

Q. How long has your family been here?

A. Forever. Actually they predate the Mormons. The Moffitts came from Ireland in 1824 and homesteaded south of town, and the place still stands. It's been in the Moffitt ownership ever since. I'm the fourth generation to own it, and I've sold it to a nephew who lives out there now.

Q. Do they have a lot of farmland out there?

A. Seventy-five acres—just a small place. It was a fruit farm for years, raising grapes and apples. And now it's mainly just a conservationtype area.

Q. Were the grapes for the wine industry here?

A. For years we shipped them first-class up to the northern markets and as far west as Denver, and then in later years when labor got to be so bad, they were mainly bulked for juice and wine.

Q. That's the place where you lived, and you just recently moved to town?

A. Yes, about fifteen years ago I moved into town.

Q. What did your family do while they were here? Were they farmers?

A. For the biggest part, farmers and teachers. It was more horticultural than actual farming. I say it was grapes, apples—that type.

Q. Is that what you pursued as well, as an occupation?

A. Hell, I was gone for a few years, came back, took the place over, and operated it for about ten years. And then with the various herbicides—spray and brush and stuff—the vineyard was killed. And that's when I retired from the fruit business.

Q. And what did you do after that?

A. I went to work as sales manager and merchandising manager for a manufactured housing and lumberyard. I did that for about ten or fifteen years, then went ahead and opened up my own business in Nauvoo and stayed there until I retired.

Q. What kind of business did you do?

A. I had a used car dealership and an ice cream shop. In fact, the Old Nauvoo shop up on Main Street—I built that and operated it for a few years as I was slowing down.

Q. Have you found it challenging to live here as far as keeping a steady career? Is it pretty easy to live in Nauvoo?

A. It depends on what you're after in life. My kids didn't think so. [chuckles] They've all basically moved away on account of opportunity—jobs and that. I was satisfied with what I could do in this area, and I can't complain a bit. I did all right. There's challenges to it. but to me not the challenges that there would be living in Chicago. I wouldn't want any part of that.

Q. Is that where you lived before when you moved away?

A. No, I lived in Denver for a while, and then I was in Salt Lake City for a short time. I was mainly in sales, and I would move where I lived, depending on the territories I was working.

Q. How did you like living in Salt Lake?

A. Not especially well. Let's face it, we're talking about forty-some years ago, and I was from Nauvoo. It's probably kind of like some of the Mormons feel when they first came to Nauvoo. I wasn't too well liked out there. But Salt Lake was a beautiful place, and I had no complaints with it.

Q. How have you enjoyed living your life amongst the Church, amongst the Mormons?

A. Well, for the biggest part, I haven't lived among them. There haven't been Mormons in Nauvoo until recent years. There were always some of the Reorganized [Community of Christ], and there's no problems. I mean, they were part of the town and didn't create any problems at all.

As far as the LDS, they started coming I'd say around 1960, and it's slowly built up since then. But I don't have any problems. In fact, Dr. Kimball, the first president of the restoration [effort], was a good friend of mine. I helped him to acquire some of the land when they were first trying to get land. Lane Newberry, an artist, was here previous to that and was trying to get the Church—or anybody—interested in the restoration. I became good friends of his and worked with him.

I was asked one time by, it would have been President McKay and Fabian (some of the original board of restoration), here I am an Irish Catholic in Nauvoo. why was I interested in restoring Nauvoo? Hey, it's history! I don't have to agree with the religion to believe in history. And that's just kind of the way my life is.

Q. I got to see some of those Newberry paintings up in the hotel and in the Assembly Hall. They have some of them up there, and she told me a little story about that. What was Newberry like?

A. Strange, [chuckles]

Q. He was Catholic as well, is that right?

A. Well, no. His wife was Mormon. To my knowledge, Lane was supposed to be Mormon—more of what we'd call the “jack”-type Mormon. He'd sit in his art studio doing his paintings, drinking a beer, and smoking a cigarette. But he was a very fascinating person to know. He was a dreamer—naturally a good artist. But he had a dream that he wanted to paint Nauvoo before it was restored, which he basically did; and then as it was restored, he wanted to paint it again. He'd have a collection of before and after paintings, but he died just as the restoration got started.

Q. What do you think he dreamed about Nauvoo? Did he have any ideas of how he wanted it to be or what he wanted to do?

A. Yes, and a lot of it is what has taken place. He wanted to see the uptown area more or less, let's say, restored—which I agree with. But he could do it. I've never accomplished to get them to do it—to go with the brick sidewalks, the gas lights on the street—you know, make it blend in with the restoration. It's a costly deal, and most of these merchants don't have a lot of money. I can understand it. But he wanted to see that happen. He visualized this being restored more or less like it is.

Dr. Kimball, he visualized the temple over on North Hill instead of on temple square, which surprised me. I made the remark to him that I assumed that someday there'd be a temple on temple square. He said, “No, it'll probably be on North Hill, overlooking the Mississippi River, where people in boats could see it comin.” And I agreed with him. It should be. [chuckles] It would move the congestion, but again, temple square is temple square. I mean, it depends which way one is looked at.

Q. What was Dr. Kimball like? He was a mission president in Chicago, is that right?

A. I think he might have been president of it at one time. He was here as an individual, to restore the Heber C. Kimball home in Nauvoo. That was his grandfather. He purchased that property and had it restored before restoration was even thought of. He was a doctor out of Salt Lake City. You could say he was like Newberry; he had a dream. He wanted to see all of Nauvoo restored to what it was at one time. He worked with the Church end of it, and Newberry was working with other angles.

Kimball was a funny character too. [chuckles] A very quiet, reserved man. I always felt that he was pretty much a straight shooter. If he told me something, I felt like I could believe it. That don't hold true with all people, whether they be Mormon, Catholic, whatever the heck they are. He was a wealthy man with a dream, he pursued it, and I would say he was the main force in getting the restoration started.

Q. How did you come in contact with him?

A. I met him through Lane Newberry, the artist. I met Newberry because I was involved quite deeply in promoting tourism in Nauvoo, and he was part of Nauvoo; that's how we happened to cross paths. Between the two of us we formed an organization: the Nauvoo Area Foundation, whose purpose was to promote Nauvoo and try to get people interested in investing money to restore it. As things progressed, I met Dr. Kimball through him and kind of went from there.

Q. How long did you stay in contact with Dr. Kimball?

A. Up until the time he died—which would have been from 1950, the time I met him, till the sixties or seventies. I can't quite remember Nauvoo Restoration was formed around 1960. He was the first president. So I'd say he would have been between seventy to eighty years old when he passed away.

Q. How do you view all that has taken place with the Nauvoo restoration?

A. Okay. It's followed like things ordinarily do. I've been in favor of restoration from the beginning. I'm against what it brings, [chuckles] In other words, my quiet little peaceful town is shot to hell. But you knew that was coming. It's been done primarily like I thought it would be. I can't say that I had regrets that it took place—I worked on trying to get it started. For my own personal selfish self, I'd just as soon that it hadn't have. But the road's bigger than any one of us.

I don't see any reason why Nauvoo can't maintain some of its own identity, along with something this massive. Nauvoo has a lot of history besides just the Mormon history. The Indian lore, the Icarians, the wine industry, the cheese industry—I mean, it's full of history. And I like to hope it can maintain its own identity along with the Monnons.

Q. Did your family have any involvement with the Indians here?

A. Yes. [chuckles] Chief Keokuk—who has a monument down in Keokuk—I am told he was a frequent visitor on our old homestead. It was built sometime between 1824 and 1830. The family came here in 1824, and we know it was built by 1830, because the first white child born in Hancock County was a great-great-uncle of mine that was born in that house: James Moffitt. My great-grandfather, who homesteaded the place, was a trapper, and in the spring of the year he'd take the furs on a raft down to St. Louis, then come back upriver working a keelboat with his supplies. It always amazed me [chuckles]—him taking off on a raft looking back at his family with the area inhabited by Indians—there wasn't white people here. Captain White, who lived on the Joseph Smith homestead, was about the only white person here when the Moffitts came. I could always visualize the thought of him leavin', with all these Indians.

I'd say twenty years ago, I knew a Bob Talbot who was an Indian historian. He was doing research, and he knew that Chief Keokuk was a frequent visitor in the house. Well, Talbot saw me one day and said that he had some history that would interest me. He said that I had mentioned Chief Keokuk being a frequent visitor over at the home I live in,

and I said yes. He said that according to history that I have uncovered, there was a white man on the Illinois side of the river that supplied Chief Keokuk with his whiskey, [laughs] No wonder my great-grandfather [John Moffitt] didn't worry about the Indians: he probably was bringing whiskey back on the keelboat along with his supplies to keep the Indians as friends.

Q. Did he build the home?

A. He built the homestead, yes.

Q. Did they come right from Ireland to here?

A. They come from Ireland to New York and then from New York to Galena, where he worked with his brother. They worked on the lead mines, then came on downriver to what is now Nauvoo. From here they went on down to St. Louis, then came back upriver, and from here returned to New York, where he married, then came back and started the homestead—all on foot.

Q. What was the name of your great-grandmother?

A. Mary Moffitt. On research I have done, through going to Ireland three different times. I found that the Moffitts are all part of the same clan. It originated in France back in 1062. During the Norman invasion it went to England. Finally one of the clans got kicked out of England; that's when they dispersed and took various spellings of the names—the *-at*, *-itt*, *-et*,—and went to Scotland. From Scotland they went on into Ireland. The relationship of the two of them was probably fourth cousin or eighth cousin—I don't know.

Q. What brought them here? Why Nauvoo? Why the Indiansurrounded swampland of the banks of the Mississippi River? Most people weren't too fond of Indians at that time.

A. [chuckles] Beautiful spot. Let's face it—it was an adventure to begin with. This wasn't because of the potato famine; he came before that. He came here, and according to letters he had written, he had spotted a beautiful place between two locust trees on the banks of the Mississippi. He stated he was going to return to it. It's cross-country to settle this area. They would have come from the area of the Shannon River in Ireland, which could explain why he wanted to be by the river.

Q. Have you done a lot of your genealogy?

A. Oh, a certain amount. I am familiar with it. I'm no historian, but I'm pretty familiar with it.

Q. Has the Church been able to help you out?

A. At this point I have never gone to talk to them. They have asked me to come down to supply what I had and to learn more, but I just have never gotten around to it—no reason.

Q. Are there any stories about relations between your family and the Church?

A. Well, I could send you back up to the academy with a whooping story that my great-grandfather shot Joseph Smith, but that's not true, [chuckles] So we're going to have let that one go.

Q. Is that a story in your family?

A. No, I just threw that in for the hell of it. [chuckles] Most of the knowledge I have is from my dad. As far as he was concerned, he did not consider Joseph Smith a bad man. He said a lot of stories that took place—robbery, rape, et cetera—are true. But due to the militia the Mormons had, and setting this area off from the state, any criminal in the state of Illinois could come to Nauvoo and get asylum, because the authorities couldn't come in and get them. From what my dad had heard, he felt that the biggest problems were because of this type of element. Yeah, so they were Mormons. They came in and joined the Mormon Church, probably to keep their neck out of a noose.

There was an orchard down by our homestead. The Mormons used to come and help themselves to the apples. Was this condoned by the Church? My dad didn't think so. At the time that Joseph Smith was killed, his wife Emma was taken in by a lady named Samantha Moffitt. That place might interest you. You know where the Mormon cemetery is? Back this way from the Mormon cemetery, you cross a bridge down at the bottom. A road goes up to the right, and at the end of that road is a house that sits up there—that's the Samantha Moffitt place. Emma and her children were taken in by Samantha and spent, as I understand, the first winter there. So it shows that the relationship wasn't all that bad between the Moffitts and the Smiths. Or I could just say that the Moffitts were just good, holy people, [chuckles]

The time of the Mormons in Nauvoo, according to history as related to me, was not pleasant. A lot of the stories are true but maybe misinterpreted. I think probably my dad and ancestors felt a lot like I do—believe it or not, every man has a right to practice what he believes in. That's probably how they handled that situation in those years.

Q. Do you think it was hard for them to have the Mormons here? How did it influence them?

A. Oh, I would have to say—and this is just assuming—I would have to assume that they had wished that the Mormons never came. Just as a lot of people in Nauvoo today wish that the Mormons never came back. Here was a real large influx which could swallow them up. Whether a good influx, bad influx—it makes no difference. And from that reason I would say, yes, they probably weren't in favor of it. But they didn't fight it.

Q. Did any of your ancestors have any scuffles with the Church?

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A. Not that I know of. My grandfather [Thomas Moffitt] was baptized a Catholic in the Monnon temple. Buy that one now. And that's a fact! There was not a Catholic church in Nauvoo at that point. Joseph Smith used to allow the temple to be used for baptisms for local people.

Q. So he was baptized in the temple a Catholic?

A. Right! [chuckles] The Mormons probably snuck one in and got him baptized on the side too. But seriously, it was used for that purpose; at times it was allowed.

Q. Being a Catholic in Nauvoo, how have the relationships been here between the churches? Has everyone gotten along pretty well through the times? Or has one been more dominating than the other?

A. Well, you go back fifty or sixty years, every church was more or less prejudiced toward every other church. It isn't like today. There were prejudices between every religion in town. I would say for the biggest part, through my lifetime, they've gotten along very well. The RLDS have stayed here through the years; have been a good part of the community—a little bit more withdrawn than the other churches from each other. The LDS, it's a little different story. I mean, there's no fighting between them, but to put it bluntly—they're clannish. They don't mix with the others like the other churches do between themselves. I don't want that to be misinterpreted. The elders and leaders of the Mormon Church belong to the ministerial association and work on projects like the other religions. But in general, it seems more separated. There could be reasons for that on both sides. Maybe lack of acceptance to an extent from the people of Nauvoo, and it could be a feeling of togetherness because we've come here and got to hang on to each other—on account of the Mormons.

Q. Do you feel the majority of Nauvoo residents wished we [Church members] were not here?

A. Oh yeah! I would say the majority of the population of Nauvoo wished that this never happened.

Q. Starting from the original Saints, or the time when the restoration started to take place?

A. I'd have to say till the restoration part, because the other predated all of them. They'd just as soon not have the Mormon influx and keep the town the way it was. It's changing their town. They lived here because they liked this quiet little community, and also it's a natural thing to have fear of the unknown. Here's this large influx come in, and they're afraid of it.

Q. Do you think most people here know about the Church's teachings and doctrine? And do they understand what really happened here and the significance this place has to us and our faith?

A. I think they realize the significance. As far as knowing the teachings and doctrine, I would have to say probably the biggest part of them don't really know it, They have to realize the significance of this to the Mormons! I mean, let's face it, [chuckles] it's the Mormons' holy land. As far as I'm concerned, if Joseph Smith hadn't been here and been killed here, there probably wouldn't be a Mormon religion today. It's the basis more so than Salt Lake City to the Mormon religion.

Q. A lot of special things took place here.

A. Right, right. It was always said here by the old-timers in Nauvoo that if Joseph Smith hadn't been murdered, the Mormon religion probably would have faded away, because there was a lot of problems within the Church at that time—quite a bit of it, in fact. Him being martyred could be compared to how it made John F. Kennedy a great man. A feeling of a lot of the old-timers was that it probably would have blown up had it not been for that.

Q. Did they feel most of the conflict was with Joseph Smith, or was it more with outside sources?

A. No. I'm talking about the conflict within the Church itself. Outside forces sure were there. But they were speaking mainly of problems within the Church itself, which most religions go through at one time or another.

Q. Are there any type of stories you know which you think people should know about pertaining to the early Saints? I know a lot of people don't talk to the old-timers, and there are stories that go around, and this is a chance for us to get a different feel or different look.

A. Well, I'm not too much of a person that likes to talk about—I'm going to use the phrase "bad things." Polygamy was creating a problem for them. Power, kind of a carryover. I mean, let's face it, they had problems within themselves before they came to Nauvoo going back to Kirtland. When I say problems, a lot of it is from doubt. I had heard there were problems related to finances—who controlled money within the Church and who didn't. It's just what you would run into with any big thing. And like I said, I wasn't there, so I don't know how much is true and how much isn't. I do feel certain, yes, there were problems within the Church. I feel certain of that because of what was related to me from ancestors.

Q. And that's the things they would share with you—things about polygamy, power, and finances?

A. Yes, and there was of course a lot of documented history that backs up a lot of stuff. I speak of the documented history, not every book that's been published, [chuckles]

Q. Have you found there's been a lot of anti-Mormon feelings here, as far as things that have been published, like things in history such as the *Warsaw Signal*?

A. Oh yes, I'd say there's been a strong anti-Mormon feeling in and around this area since I was born. A lot of it you didn't hear about for years and years because there wasn't any activity to stir it up. And I suppose there will be a lot of anti-Mormon feelings as long as I live, and a good chance as long as you live. Time most usually takes care of things, and I think it has to an extent already. Some of the people of the Church who have come to Nauvoo have been good for the Church as far as public relations with the town. To me, Hugh Pierce was a perfect example. He came here and the town accepted him enough; they elected him mayor—and he was a good mayor. I guess I'm sayin' there's a heck of a lot of good Mormons in town—as far as I'm concerned. I had a lot of opportunities to meet the tourist Mormons coming in because of my ice cream shop. You people love ice cream! [laughs] Probably the smartest thing I ever did in my life, and I didn't know it when I was doing it. It was a type of operation that I had a chance to visit with people. It made it easy for me because of the fact that I had been to most of the places where they were from—Idaho, Utah, mostly. I had traveled both states, which would help us in conversation. Cal Christiansen—I don't know if you are familiar with him—has done a lot here in Nauvoo, as far as mixing with the town and breaking barriers. It's going to take a lot of that and a lot of open-mindedness of the people of Nauvoo. Bluntly, I don't believe in your religion. Bluntly, I think it's a little ridiculous. That's not the point. The point is, it is a religion that you and a lot of other people have found a home in that might not find a home in my religion or somebody else's. You've got as much right to live and practice as I do—regardless of what I think of it. And the whole world should feel that way about things.

Q. What things has the Church done that have been the biggest contribution to Nauvoo, in your opinion? We've talked about a lot of negative. How about the positive, besides your ice cream business? [chuckles] What was the favorite flavor, by the way?

A. Oh, vanilla always runs way out ahead. In the hard-dip ice cream, butter pecan. I also had a lemon flavor. They loved it. [chuckles] But vanilla is always the standout. As far as a contribution, anytime you bring people to town, financially you help it—that's a contribution. You can't look at the flats and say that isn't a contribution. This area restored like a park is a contribution any town would like to have. Most people would say, and I'd probably agree, that the biggest contributions they've made have been in their own interest. But if everybody in every religious organization worked as hard for their own interest as the Mormon Church has, this town would really be booming. They're going to come and work for what they're interested in. It's their money, they're spending it, and that's where they are going to put it.

Q. What do you think about the temple being rebuilt?

A. It's going to be a beautiful landmark.

Q. Do you think the Nauvoo residents will enjoy having that beautiful building here, even though they don't believe in that religion?

A. I doubt it. [chuckles] Let's put it bluntly, I'd say for the biggest part, through my lifetime, they're not going to accept it where they would enjoy it.

Q. You personally?

A. I wish it sat on North Hill.

Q. Is that the spot that looks out over the river?

A. Yes, Inspiration Point. The original plans which I saw of the restoration showed the temple on Inspiration Point, with your Marriott motels and your airstrip all over in that area. Overall layout, it would have been better. The temple wouldn't have been boxed in. crowded like it is. It could have stood out on its own without the other things there, but it wouldn't be on temple square. Temple square to me should have been preserved as a landmark-museum. There was a perfect museum on it, and to put it bluntly the idiots tore it down. It was a large building on temple square built out of temple stone. At the time the temple was destroyed, the Mormons left Nauvoo, and the French Icarians, a communistic group, came. They built a communal hall out of the destruction of the temple. It was a pretty big building, and when their dream went to pot after five or six years, the Catholic Church wound up buying the property from the Icarians. I went to school for twelve years in the building. That building portrayed every segment in Nauvoo's history: the Mormons, because of the temple stone; the Icarians; and the Catholics, which are a big part of the history of Nauvoo. It was the complete thing. The Mormons came in here with bulldozers and shoved it down and didn't even save the stone. Figure that one out—I can't. At the time it took place, I was on the road on business. Byron Raveston was the person in charge on site for the restoration. I came into Nauvoo and saw all the bulldozers start tearing down that building. I went right to Raveston and asked him what in the heck was going on. He was very unhappy. He said he had nothing to do with it and had just returned to Nauvoo from Salt Lake last week from a meeting where nothing was mentioned about it. I went to the mayor to try to get an injunction to stop it. It didn't get the job done. I mean, there could have been moonstones, sunstones, anything down underneath that thing. And it's all out at what used to be a city dump, buried east of town. They were ridiculous. I don't know what their reasoning was. That building could have been put into a museum for the Church, but it wasn't. The temple was beautiful as it was—as a park. And it will be beautiful again.

Q. How long were the Icarians here?

A. About six or seven years as a group. Within a couple years after the Mormons had been driven out, they came. They were in Texas and they heard of the vacated village here. Etienne Cabot was the leader. When the settlement broke up as such, most of them stayed here, but they just folded in with the rest of the people instead of practicing their communistic way of life.

Q. Then how did the Catholics get here?

A. They were always here. The first settlers were Catholic. They were served by missionaries out of Rock Island, I believe. I know Father Allamen, who was very missionary-minded, was out of Rock Island. They built their church, what is now that big building right next to the Catholic church, what they call the Villa Marie. That was the first Catholic church; it was named St. Patrick's. The present church was built 160 years ago—something like that. I can't tell you the year they built the first church. I should be able to, but my mind doesn't retain like it used to.

Q. Overall, non-Mormons, Mormons, anyone that comes to Nauvoo, what do you want them to know about this place? And what do you want the future generations to know about it?

A. It's a place full of history, and all history—that's the biggest thing that I would feel. Outside of being the beautiful spot it is and the history that it holds, that's the main thing.

Q. Do you think your family will continue to live here in the future?

A. As times progress, it looks more doubtful. My sons and daughter live in different places: one in Boston, St. Louis, and Burlington, and a daughter in Cedar Rapids. I don't have a son in Nauvoo. I've got some nephews. One is on the home place. He's got two sons. Whether they stay—I don't know. The opportunities aren't here. They talk about the huge growth of Nauvoo and what is going to happen—I don't see it. Are you going to come here to live? Where would you work? These are my feelings. Some people say a lot will be coming here to retire. Am I going to go to Salt Lake when my family's all back here? No. There's going to be growth because there's going to be employment at the temple, and there's going to be restaurants and stuff, but I don't see a large growth like a lot of them basically fear. But I could be wrong, [chuckles]

Q. What do you think the future of Nauvoo holds? The same way as it is, just keep on going?

A. Oh yeah, it will keep on going more or less as it is. It will be a tourist town. Without tourism, Nauvoo would die—let's face it. It's going to be a big tourist town. Not only Mormons coming here, but other people as well. At the time the restoration started in Nauvoo around 1960, there were a lot of tourists coming to Nauvoo—not as many as today, but there was a lot. Only around 30 to 40 percent of them were Mormon, and most of them were coming here because Nauvoo was Nauvoo, which was Mormon history, more so than other histories.

Q. And the other tourists were coming for what?

A. To see it, the history of it.

Q. The cheese? [chuckles]

A. [Laughs] What's a tourist? How far do they have to come to be a tourist? The Hotel Nauvoo draws more damn people to Nauvoo than . . . I mean they come here—fifty miles away is nothing—to eat. It's always been a big thing in this town. It's very good. They've done a good job of promoting it and maintaining it. But Nauvoo's going to be a tourist town. It's going to be a beautiful place. There's always going to be feelings between people—it's human nature.

Q. Do you ever foresee a time in Nauvoo where everyone will accept everybody?

A. Not in my lifetime. Of course, that's getting shorter all the time, [laughs]

Q. How old are you, by the way?

A. Seventy-one.

Q. How many years of your life have you been here?

A. I have lived in Nauvoo all but about five years of my life.

Q. What was it like growing up as a boy here? A lot of adventures, I suppose. Did you have a horse?

A. Oh yeah. I don't now, though. Oh, I suppose it was like any other town in the United States, basically. I was bom into the Depression, so what you did, you did as a family. And you did it at home because you didn't have money to do anything else.

Q. Any good fishing down there in the river?

A. There is good fishing, although I was never a fisherman. I've lived on it all my life, and I never did like fishing.

Q. Do you hunt?

A. Oh yeah. I did a lot of hunting. I'd start out in the fall of the year with the squirrels, then to the duck and

goose season, rabbit, deer, and coon. I hunted them all for years.

Q. Are there a lot of deer out here?

A. Oh God, they're getting to be too many. I live right next to the state park on two and a half acres with fruit trees and berries—it's a hobby. They just come in and just riddle the place. We sat on the porch last night and watched eight of them out there just like they were grazing in a meadow like a bunch of cows. They just went around eating some of the apples and nibbling the blackberries and strawberries.

Q. Did that meat support your families?

A. We ate what we shot because we didn't have a lot of money—we would have survived without it. But yes, I ate a lot of rabbits and squirrel. Not too much deer, because they didn't come into this area heavy until about 1960.

Q. So the biggest tie your family has to the Church would be Samantha taking in Emma and the children?

A. Yes, that would be the biggest thing as far as the family with the Church.

Q. How long did she stay? The first winter?

A. I think it was just for the one winter. I won't say that definitely, though.

Q. Was Samantha married at the time, or was she widowed?

A. I think she was widowed.

An interesting point I think I should mention is that the homestead out there is the oldest homestead of continuous family ownership formiles, possibly in the state—I don't know. It's never been out of the family. It's always been lived in and maintained by the Moffitts since it was built in the 1820s.

Q. Do you know the exact date it was built?

A. I know it was built by 1830. I also know that they started homesteading it by 1824. They built just a small log shack that they lived in while they were building the main house.

Q. How big is it?

A. It's pretty big for the time it was built. The log cabin part was two story, and it's fifty by, I think, eighteen feet. I should remember, as much work as I did in it. There is another part that was built on to it a few years after that, which wasn't log cabin style. It's a pretty good-sized home.

Q. How did Samantha know Emma? Was it through relations in town?

A. I would assume that she probably knew of her. How well she would have known her I have no idea. But with the turmoil that took place, the rest of them leaving, and her staying here, I would say she would have taken her in even if she didn't know them very well—that's the kind of woman she was.

Q. Well, you certainly do have a great history.

A. I don't know how great it is, but it's long, [chuckles]

Q. We appreciate you sitting here with us and telling us about it.

A. I hope it helped you in some way. It would have been a lot more fun if I could have said my great-grandfather shot Joseph and you could have gone home with that story, but it just don't work, [chuckles]

Estel Neff

Nauvoo, Illinois

Birthday: September 29, 1928

Interview on November 15, 2001, in his bookstore by Jedediah Briggs Rachel Alley also present

Q. [Jedediah Briggs] Tell me a little about your personal history.