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**Louis Pilkington**

*Niota, Illinois*

*Birthday: April 22, 1924*

*Interview on October 3, 2001, in his home by Jedediah Briggs*

*Jeff Johnson also present*

Q. [Jedediah Briggs] How long have you lived in the area of Nauvoo?

A. [Louis Pilkington] I was born here in 1924 and have lived here all of my life except for about four years when I lived in Chicago. I've lived here around Niota except for thirteen years when I lived in Nauvoo. My wife divorced me after twenty-eight years, and when we got the divorce I owned a two-hundred-acre farm out on the hill. I had to sell it to settle up with her, so I bought a house in Nauvoo and lived there for thirteen years. Four years ago I bought this house.

Q. You lived in Nauvoo?

A. In the first house south of the Clark house.

Q. Did you like living there?

A. Yes, it was nice. I had a little place, but I'm probably just as well off being here. But I made a mistake one time. The boys and me were riding around and we went off a road here. My boy said, "Dad, don't you wish you were back in Niota?" I said, "No, the only way I'd come back to Niota is if I could buy the house of the Baxter's."

Q. This one?

A. Yes. I imagine that ten or twelve years before that, one day my son went to work and the guy that my son worked with come over. He said that the house was going up for sale. "So it is. Don't tell nobody else—Dad wants it." That's the way I got it.

Q. So how many years has it been since you've moved into this house?

A. Four years.

Q. And you live here by yourself right now?

A. Yes.

Q. You have kids also?

A. Eight children. Five boys and three girls.

Q. And where are they?

A. Two of the girls are in Chicago, and one of the boys is in Charleston, South Carolina. The other boys are around this locality. Three boys live here at Niota, and one girl and one boy live in Carthage.

Q. You were born here, and your parents were born here too. When did your ancestors first come to Nauvoo or the Nauvoo area?

A. I can't tell you that, because I don't know. My great-grandfather left Nauvoo with the Mormons.

Q. Really? Back in 1846?

A. I surmise that's when it was.

Q. Back with Brigham Young?

A. Yes. One of his wives stayed here. She had children, and one of them was my grandfather, Amos Pilkington.

Q. So your great-great-grandfather left with the Mormons. What was his name?

A. I don't know. My grandfather's name was Amos Pilkington. Really, I don't even know where either one of those came from. My mother's folks on the other side of the house came from Akron, Ohio. Then they moved to Metamora, and then down here to Ferris. In Ferris they built a farm out there and lived there.

Q. What was your great-grandmother's name?

A. I don't know what my great-grandmother's name was.

Q. Your great-grandmother was one of the wives that stayed here?

A. Yes.

Q. That's the great-grandmother?

A. But Francis wasn't the great-grandmother. I don't know what her name was. In fact, my dad never talked much about her. What little I found out is what he had told my mother.

Q. Have you done any genealogy work?

A. No, not really. I have a cousin in Colorado who did that.

Q. So some of your first ancestors came here. Some of them left, and some of them stayed, and now you're here. What have you done since you've been here—what occupations have you held?

A. I worked on the railroad section when I was about eighteen. Then I went to work for the Santa Fe shop as a machinist apprentice and served my time as machinist in Fort Madison. I worked there one year after I got out of my apprenticeship, and then they done away with the old steam engines. And at the time I went into being a machinist they only had two diesels running. They put the diesels in and done away with the steam engines, so I had to go up to Chicago to the diesel shop.

So I went up to Chicago and stayed there four years in the diesel shop. And then I quit in Chicago because I didn't like it in Chicago. I came back here and went to work for the Stanlon Pipeline. I worked for it about a year and a half, about a year on diesels in the diesel building.

Then they done away with the diesels and put in electric pumps, so then I went and helped dynamite the bases of the diesels in the stations in Illinois. I worked in a tank gang up there for about a year and a half, and then I got laid off. A fellow I worked with at the pipeline owned an oil station over here, and he wanted me to run it, so I've been around that oil station for four years.

Then the paper mill opened up in Fort Madison, and I went to Fort Madison and worked eleven years for the paper mill. Then someone retired as machinist, and the price being paid machinists was considerably more than I was making at the paper mill, so I went out there and put in my application. I was hired, went to work at Ortho Chemical, and worked there eighteen years. Besides, I owned a two-hundred-acre farm south of town. I fanned it a couple years myself and then had it farmed for eight to twelve years. It closed up when I was sixty-three years old. We had to put our company stocks and retirement into this new company. I didn't know nothing about them, so I didn't put my stock and

retirement in it. I took my retirement.

Q. So what do you like about living in this area?

A. It's quiet; it's comfortable. It's probably one of the nicer places you can live, from what I've seen through the West and everything. I wouldn't want to be out there and spend hot summers. I guess you'd get used to it. But I was born here.

Q. Nauvoo has kind of a unique history, you might say, with all the Mormons—

A. Practically all my uncles and aunts and relatives live around Nauvoo. Frank Pilkington was a retired farmer that lived south of Nauvoo. He moved into Nauvoo and lived there probably the last ten to fifteen years of his life. He's my uncle—the one I bought this two-hundred acres off of. He and his wife moved to Nauvoo when I bought their farm. And then I had two other uncles who lived in Nauvoo practically all their lives.

Q. That's a lot of family out here. Are any of them Mormons?

A. Not that I know of. My grandmother was a Catholic. Practically all of the Pilkingtons fall into the Catholic religion. In fact, most of my mother's relations are Catholic. My girlfriend's mother is a Mormon, and we visited the temple in Salt Lake City once.

Q. So you're Catholic then?

A. Yes.

Q. Are there any challenges that come with living here in Nauvoo?

A. Not really, no.

Q. It's pretty easy and relaxed. Did you have opportunities to serve in a civic office?

A. Yes. The district you live in has a representative for each district, like back in Nauvoo. They've asked me to run for that several times, but I've never been interested in politics and that kind of stuff. But I've belonged to KC's.

Q. What's that?

A. That's a Catholic organization—Knights of Columbus. That's what it's called.

Q. From your knowledge and history of the area, are there any groups that stand out—that made a significant mark in history?

A. Not really that I can think of. Mainly the people who have lived here are more the ones who kind of helped advance things over the years. But I don't think they organized much in a group sort of thing.

Q. As you know, the Mormons, or members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, came here. I don't know about your knowledge of the Church, but they came here in 1839 under the leadership of Joseph Smith. And over the next few years they built a city with a population of over 15,000 people. Then the conflicts rose between the Mormons and the citizens of surrounding areas that led to the Mormon exodus, which happened in 1846—which could have been when your great-grandfather left to go west. What's your understanding of the causes of that conflict?

A. I really don't know much about it other than what I've heard. It is said that the Mormons would tell people that the Lord told them to come and get this or that, so they'd go out and get it. From what I've heard, that's the reason that they tried to run the Mormons out, or did, or whatever.

Q. Because . . .

A. Because if they wanted a cow or a calf or something, they'd go get it.

Q. So the Mormons would just go around . . .

A. That's one of the things I've been told.

Q. So basically they would just sort of steal things?

A. I've never read anything on it. I've never been implicated in it, rather than just rumors. In fact, I don't think anybody today really knows. It's just hearsay.

Q. What do you hear mostly? What else do you hear about Mormons today or maybe Mormons in this area?

A. Well, I know a lot of Mormons in this area, and I have no hard feelings towards them. In fact, all of them, or most of them that I know, are real nice people.

Q. Any specific ones?

A. Dan Hall and Hugh Pierce and I were all on the committee in getting the boat harbor. And then I know the Wincesters. I know one of my boys and one of the Wincester boys do a lot of work together and stuff. These are all the people that I know and have dealt with, and we had a lot of dealings with the Mormons when we were getting the harbor put on the ground.

Q. So how were you involved in that? Did the Mormons come to you and ask if you wanted to help out with the harbor?

A. No, it wasn't the Mormons. It was brought up about getting the boat harbor put in because other cities or towns had them. There's Don Griffeth, John Allen, and John Gets, who just kind of got together and got this rolling and found out what they had to do to get the money. Dan Hall and Hugh Pierce were associated with the harbor also. Then they had to approach the Mormons. They went to Salt Lake City about three times before they got the okay to go. After we got the okay for it to go, we had to call up for money. I think I went to Decatur one time, and two or three times to the capitol in Springfield. We had to go and be interviewed every year, and the first year we got turned down flat. I think the next year we got \$147,000. We had benefits, hog roasts, and other events to make money for it. Most of the Mormons supported it; they all come to our hog roast. I'd say they were big supporters. We had good crowds, and after about five years we eventually got the money.

Q. It took five years to get it in?

A. Yes, and it was just an eyesore before—just grew up stuff and brush. It was a mess.

Q. When did you finish it?

A. Let's see, I'd say probably eight years ago. I've got old pads of papers in my filing cabinet.

Q. Of all the events that took place, you said something about the members of our Church taking pictures.

A. I used to walk with one fellow—a Mormon who worked on the railroad. He moved to Oklahoma, I believe. Me and him used to go down to the Mormon church and walk, along with seven or eight of us, in the wintertime. He had keys to the church, and they let us in there to walk in the cultural hall. We done that pretty near every day, except on weekends. He's the one who took care of the place where they did all their videotaping and had all the equipment for making pictures. He's the one who made the pictures when we were getting the boat harbor going. I can't remember his

name, but he's been gone from Nauvoo for probably ten years or so.

Q. Joseph Smith came here and established the community. What's your understanding about how he was viewed by his enemies in the 1840s? And how has he been viewed by succeeding generations down to the present time? Basically, what have you heard about him?

A. Not a whole lot other than that he was buried one time somewhere up in the hills, but nobody around here seems to know for sure, I guess. Somebody said that he is buried somewhere down on the flat in by the river, but I don't know. That's what I heard at one time. That's what I've heard people say, but other than that I really don't know anything about Joseph Smith. I've never read up on him.

Q. You've never heard anything about him over the years—who he was, especially about what he did in Nauvoo?

A. Nothing, other than that he was head of the Church here, or he was called that, or people thought he was head of the Church, anyway.

Q. You've heard that he died in Carthage?

A. Yes, and I've heard that some man from Warsaw was the one who shot him, but I don't know.

Q. The Icarians came here in the 1840s or early 1850s. What do you know about them? What kind of legacy did they leave? Were any of your ancestors related to them?

A. Not really, other than the Baxters, who live here. They were descendants of them. Lillian Snyder is also related to them, and she's in charge of the Icarian Museum in Nauvoo. She writes for newspapers, even for newspapers in New York. She's older than I am. She's always been real active with the Icarians.

Q. What do you know about the Icarians?

A. They started the grape vineyards around here, and they came from France. They, at one time, had vineyards all around the Nauvoo area. They had some awful big wine cellars.

Q. Have you been in any of them?

A. Yes. When I was a boy I worked for a fellow picking apples, and we hauled them into the wine cellars so they'd keep. Lloyd Starr has got a wine cellar at his place also.

Q. Why did the wine industry go into decline?

A. When I was a boy you couldn't hardly buy a soybean, but nowadays soybeans is one of the biggest crops they raise around here.

Q. What did you plant on your two hundred acres that you had here?

A. Corn, beets, clover, oats, wheat, and a variety of things.

Q. Were any of your ancestors involved in the wine industry?

A. I had an uncle that owned a winery in Keokuk, on Johnson Street Road.

Q. How long ago was that?

A. That was about fifty years ago, but he's passed away. In fact, all my dad's brothers, sisters, and husbands

have passed on.

Q. What happened with your uncle's family?

A. He had a boy and two girls, but I don't really know what happened to them.

Q. What do you know about the Nauvoo bleu cheese industry?

A. I remember when it started, but I don't know what year it was. I was probably ten or twelve years old, so maybe in '34 or '36. The Faulks came to Nauvoo and lived with my aunt. He came here with the company that started the cheese factory. They were young at the time, and they had two children. They lived and ate together with my aunt. That was a block north of the temple square, on the east side of the street. I remember when they came from Minnesota and started to plan. They still live here today.

Q. Are they still involved with the cheese factory today?

A. No. He has one boy that lives in Colorado, and the girls live around here.

Q. Is the Nauvoo bleu cheese industry still thriving?

A. Yes. It's changed hands probably three or four times.

Q. We're going to switch gears a little. What churches have been influential in the Nauvoo area over the years? We've talked about the Mormons, and we know that you're Catholic, and you know that we students are living in the old monastery.

A. I remember ten or twelve years ago, when some fellow was talking to the Mormons on temple square. The Mormon said to the other guy, "We'll own where the ladies [nuns] live across the street." And I said that that day would never come. But it did. I guess that's where money talks.

Q. It has been three or four years since they bought it?

A. Yes. I think they've owned it for four years.

Q. Do you know why the Catholics sold it?

A. I think they gave them more money than what it was worth! [chuckles]

Q. Why would they want to sell it?

A. They used to have a big girls' school there, but it started to decline. Mainly, older nuns taught there, and their number started to decrease. The Mormons offered them enough money, so they went up to the tri-cities and bought a place up there.

Q. Speaking about the Mormons buying things, what have you heard about people's thoughts and feelings in the Nauvoo area about the Mormons restoring the Nauvoo flats?

A. The Mormons have done a lot of improving there, but I know that a lot of people that live there figure that the Mormons gave such a price for it that it's going to hurt them on their taxes. A lot of the stuff that the Mormons bought would be twice the amount of what the people around here would give for it. Like the one house east of the Clark building—I lived close to it—and they told me it sold for eighty-something thousand, and it ain't worth twenty-five. It would be worth that to the Mormons for parking, but it wouldn't be worth that to live in. Because of things like that, the property taxes go up.

Q. The neighbors are scared that the taxes are going up?

A. I bought this house for \$30,000. It had brush growing around it, and nobody lived in it for about ten years. I've redone the inside of it, and I bulldozed the brush out. I really don't get implicated in pinions of that nature [about the Mormons].

Q. Do you think the changes have been for the good, the bad, or both?

A. I think it's been for the good more than the bad, but people think their taxes are going up because the land looks more valuable. But they have cleaned the flat up, which was nothing but shrubs before.

Q. You think it looks better?

A. Yes. There's no comparison to the way it looked.

Q. Do you think the Mormon tourists or anyone who comes to Nauvoo help the economy out?

A. There's no doubt that they help the economy out, but we haven't got the roads for the amount of people that are coming. It'll be like Branson, Missouri, was a few years ago. We haven't got highways built to really take care of the traffic that we have in the summertime here. When the *City of Joseph* is on, which I've seen three times, there's cars from here to Fort Madison.

Q. Did you like the pageant?

A. Yes. It looks like a lot of work.

Q. You've heard the announcement of the building of the temple. What was your initial reaction to that?

A. It really doesn't affect me one way or the other. It's going to be a nice building, there's no doubt about that.

Q. Have you been over there to see it?

A. Yes. Many times.

Q. Have you heard any one else's thoughts or feelings about the Mormon temple going up?

A. None other than Lloyd Star, who goes down and takes pictures and noses around. He tells us about it in the club meetings.

Q. What do they say in the club meetings with reference to the temple—is it positive?

A. I think so. It's putting a lot of money in this side of the country, like for workers and what-have-you.

Q. There's a lot of local people working on the temple?

A. I think they've got what they can get. I've talked to one fellow that came here from Utah, who was looking for help in carpenter work. It helps the economy out.

Q. Do you think the tourist population will rise?

A. There's no doubt that the tourists are going to come through. I think, for about ten years, a lot of tourists will come. The newness will wear off once a lot of people have seen it.

Q. Do you think a lot of more Mormons will come into the town to live?

A. That's the intention of it, from the Mormon side of it. They're going to bring their older people from the church and make their home here. I've heard a lot of their meetings, which represent their intentions. The Mormons talk right in the open, and they said that they figure that they're going to bring a lot of the older folks here.

Q. For the past few years, students have been coming here from BYU. Have you had any experiences with them?

A. Not other than they've come to talk to me several times.

Q. Did they come to your house?

A. Yes. They walked around town and talked to a lot of the people living in the houses. Last summer two of them were here, and two years before, they came here.

Q. [Jeff Johnson] Were they dressed like us?

A. No. They had ties on.

Q. [JB] That was probably the missionaries. But you've never had any contact with students from the Joseph Smith Academy?

A. No. This is the first time. It was probably the missionaries that I talked to before.

Q. Have you heard anything about the students being here in the town of Nauvoo?

A. I have only heard that there's kids going to school out there.

Q. What do you see in the future of Nauvoo?

A. I think it'll grow. With the building of all the houses, it's bound to grow and bring the people here. Before all the Mormons came, we could hardly hold a grocery store in Nauvoo. Jack and Jill Groceries was here, and they moved out of Nauvoo. A fellow from Hamilton bought the grocery store because he owns a Ducks Groceries in Hamilton. That's when the Mormons came in, and I bet he's doing more business in Nauvoo than in Hamilton—that was his main store before.

Q. You think Nauvoo will grow and prosper?

A. It'll have to. The more people that are here, the more it will prosper. I think that eventually Nauvoo is going to expand fast.

Q. What would you like to see happen with Nauvoo and the surrounding areas such as Niota?

A. I don't know, but I think we're going to need bigger roads. With a bigger population, we need better highways.

Q. Do you have any other comments or observations before we end that you'd like to make?

A. No, not really.



Dr. Lillian M. Snyder  
*Nauvoo, Illinois*  
*Birthday: September 14, 1914*  
*Interview on September 26, 2001. in her home by Diana Johnson*  
*Tyler Dahl also present*

Q. [Diana Johnson] When is your birthday?

A. [Lillian Snyder] My birthday is September 14, 1914. so I just had a birthday. I'm eighty-seven. It was a very fine birthday. People came in and sang "Happy Birthday" I don't know how many times.

Q. How long have you lived in the Nauvoo area?

A. I actually moved back here in the summer of 1973 when I took the position of professor at Western Illinois University. I moved back here to be with my mother, Florence Baxter Snyder, who lived here. Actually, before my mother and my father were married, my mother said, "Now, if we get married, I want a contract. We're going to take the children to Nauvoo every summer." So when I was two weeks old, she started bringing me to Nauvoo. I spent more time in Nauvoo than anyplace. I've lived all over—Paris; New York City; Washington, D.C.; Baltimore; Galveston and Houston, Texas; and St. Louis. I've lived lots of different places, but Nauvoo I consider my home.

Q. Were you born in Nauvoo?

A. When my folks got married, they went to my father's farm, in Kankakee. I was born on the farm in Kankakee, Illinois, as was my father. My mother was born here in Nauvoo. Of course, that will be part of the story, how they happened to be here. If my great-grandfather hadn't come to Nauvoo, I'd be living in Paris. I'd rather be here. I really do consider Nauvoo to be my home.

Q. How old were you when you started moving around?