

Carol Cook Oral History Interview
Southeast Seniors Neighborhood Stories & Memories Oral History Project
Fall, 2018



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Interview with Carol Cook

Fall, 2018

Brandon Yee, Interviewer

Brandon Yee: **BY**

Carol Cook: **CC**

Track 1

00:00

BY: Alright, so when did you first move here to this neighborhood?

CC: I was at the university in 1958 and graduated in 1961. So, I decided then to stay in Minneapolis because it seemed like a good place to be. And I started working eventually at Hennepin County. And part of the job was to drive around Hennepin County visiting people in their homes. And I decided that I wanted to settle in the Mary-Holmes neighborhood. I liked the diversity of this area, close to the university with its energy, close to the river, and the walks around Nicollet Island. I liked the history of the area, the mix of housing and the stores on East Hennepin, and I even like the light industry on East Hennepin.

I rented at first in this Marcy-Holmes neighborhood and bought a condo on 8th Street Southeast in 1983. And this is where I've lived and where I hope I can stay as long as I possibly can manage it. And again, I like the diversity I found living in this building. And again, hope I can stay here as long as possible. And what I found in Southeast in this Marcy-Holmes neighborhood was a community and a neighborhood with opportunities to be a part of the neighborhood through volunteering.

I was a member of First Congregational Church for a while and did some volunteering through there. And then I read with students at Marcy Open School which I really enjoyed. I helped with mailing for Amy Klobuchar when she was running for county attorney. I helped cleanup along the river and volunteer things like those opportunities. And now I am involved with Southeast Seniors, and this has added to my sense of community and neighborhood through the Connections Program and the Pen Pals Program. It's opened up new areas of opportunities for volunteering.

Now this area is changing because there's an increase in buildings and an increase in density and traffic. And it somewhat takes away from that small neighborhood feeling that I had in the

beginning and somewhat decreases that sense of community and neighborhood. And that's what I had written down.

BY: Do you remember when you first came back to go to the university, did you think you were going to live in Minneapolis permanently or more like this neighborhood? Were you planning on living here permanently or maybe moving somewhere else?

CC: I thought probably when I moved here from Philadelphia that I would attend the university, graduate and then maybe go somewhere else. But in the end, I just liked what I found here, and seemed like a good place to be and a good-sized, manageable-sized city to get around in, so I decided to stay and settle in.

BY: So, you mentioned earlier how the neighborhood is changing and you think it's maybe taking a little bit away from the community. Do you think it's every going to get to a point where you might not enjoy it as much or it won't mean as much to you? How are your feelings—if you could talk more about your feelings about how the neighborhood is changing?

CC: Well, it used to be a very nice mix of housing. Like there were on 5th Street the old historic houses. I like that. And then, throughout the neighborhood there's small, working-class kind of houses or just a mix of houses. And gradually, more of those are taken over by students—student housing. And now most recently, next to the building where I live is a very small—one of those little houses that's been bought, and somebody wants to tear that down and put in I think a five-storey—I think it will be apartments building. And it will probably take up a full lot there. And that will certainly change, I think, how it feels. It will affect our building, I think.

It has changed, and the little shops on East Hennepin aren't there as much now. I think there's more places to eat which is interesting and fun. There's a new high-rise on 4th Street and East Hennepin which seems totally out of place to me, totally inappropriate to have that building there. And then there will be another 40-plus-storey building going on Central and 2nd right across from the tiny little Ard Godfrey house which is the oldest house in the city. And that seems kind of incongruous to me to have that huge skyscraper be there and then this tiny little historical house. It has taken away from some of what I found pleasurable in the neighborhood somewhat. There will certainly be more traffic.

BY: Maybe we could talk a little bit more about when you first got here, you mentioned a lot of different activities—like reasons why you liked it here, like walking around Nicollet Island and things like that. Do you have any specific memories about maybe days like that or just like kind of what made that so special to you and made you really love the community here?

CC: When I was walking more, I would walk around this area and go down by that First Congregational Church and back and enjoy the variety and the mixture again of housing. I liked that. And then I liked being able to go down on Main Street before that got developed when the Pillsbury Mill was still operating. And there were some old buildings there that later got redeveloped into stores, and that was fun—and restaurants. And I just liked walking along the river. I liked walking around Nicollet Island. I liked going for lunches at Nicollet Island Inn and

up around the Boom Island. I just enjoyed those walks around this area. And some of that might still be possible, though I'm not walking as much now that I have a walker. Some of that may still be here, but it's not the same as it was when it was kind of the old original part of the city.

BY: So now what are some of your things in the more recent past that you've enjoyed about living here, like maybe memories—like I remember a little while ago you talked about how someone—one of your neighbors kind of redid your kitchen and helped you with all of that kind of stuff. Maybe you could talk a little about that.

09:53

CC: Yeah. Well, I've been in this building since '83 and I remodeled in 2004. The man who was our caretaker but was also in woodworking, and I had him remodel my unit. And he did just a beautiful job with it. He was really an artist with more than just a woodworking person, a craftsman. I think he was an artist in the work that he did. But a part of that I can say one of the reasons I like staying here in this building, I like the diversity that this building offers me too. There are people here that have been here as long as I have been and, if people retired, people that are still working, students will rent or buy a unit in the building. And I like that mixture of people in the building getting to know that whole range of people in the building, which I don't think I'd find if I moved to some assisted living place. So, I have some good friends here.

And I've also been able to be involved in this building. I've been on the association board. I've helped develop our exercise room because I have a trainer that I work out with that comes twice a week and works out with me in the exercise room which I think is a very nice room. And I've helped develop a community garden for our building out back by our back parking lot. So, I've been able to have a little neighborhood here in the building too that I've enjoyed. That's one reason that I want to stay as long as I can. I have some nice friends here.

BY: So can you go maybe a little bit maybe more in depth into what made you decide to stay here? You've been mentioning that you really like the diversity in things. And maybe when you first got here and decided on the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood—just maybe a little bit more in-depth into that or if you have memories about when you made that decision all those years back.

CC: When I was at the University, I lived in Comstock Hall down by the river. And then when I graduated, I lived in like a boarding house that was a mix of students on 11th Avenue and 4th Street which was kind of in this area. And then when I rented, first of all, I rented in an apartment building on 8th Street—not this one that I'm living in now, but another one. And then when this building was built, I rented in here and then finally it converted to a condo. And I decided to buy a condo unit which I think was the best investment and a good experience for me, and a good decision that I made. Well, the other thing is that when I was working for Hennepin County as a social worker, I would drive all around the county and even into Ramsey County visiting clients in their own homes in the different neighborhoods in the different areas of the county. And when I looked around and saw what else there was in the county, I didn't want a

suburban area, maybe a place over by one of the lakes. But in the end, what I really wanted was to be in this area for all those different pieces that I found here. So, I kind of explored around when I was driving to all the different—throughout the county. And I thought, no, this is where I really would like to be. It's close to downtown. Most of the times my work was downtown. I was in offices downtown, so it was convenient for me to get to work too. That was easy. I guess it just kind of evolved.

BY: When did you first come to realize that it's changing so heavily? Do you remember when about you started to start disliking a lot of these changes?

CC: I think a big one is East Hennepin and 4th Street where U.S. Bank was where I do my banking. And we got the new mayor. I think it was Jacob Frey's idea that there needed to be more density on East Hennepin, and so now what we have is the banks relocated up to 1st Avenue which is okay—it's workable, but it's just a monstrosity—that building on 4th Street and East Hennepin. It just seems totally inappropriate. I drive by there, and I just cannot see how that fits into that particular spot. And I know up on 1st Avenue now there's some high-density apartments, but somehow, they seem okay up there. But I just cannot see in my mind that that building on 4th and East Hennepin is appropriate.

And then now on Central and 2nd—this is just amazing—it's a building going to be like the Carlyle Building which is across the river on 3rd and 1st Street North. It's going to be more than—the same developer, and it's going to be more than 40 storeys high on like two inches of land—tiny little piece of land there. And like I say, it's going to be right across the street from the Ard Godfrey House, this little two-room house or whatever it is that was original to the city. That just seems pretty amazing to me. And I just cannot imagine what kind of traffic—. And I know they say people are not driving as much. They'll be riding their bikes. But I don't—people don't ride their bikes much in the winter, I don't think, as much or walking as much. I think people still are going to be driving. And not only are they still going to be driving, but they have people that come to visit them that are driving, or there's still, I think, a need for parking. There will be increased traffic.

And there's more of that over on 2nd Street Southeast too. There's going to be some building over there. It just seems to be popping up all around now and then do not want it next door. I know people are opposing that are going to go to the council meeting and say why they do not want that to be built, but probably it's going to happen. It's probably going to get built.

BY: What do you think developments like that change about the neighborhood? What's kind of your reason for disliking that? Not to say that you're wrong, but what do you think the neighborhood maybe loses or is changed about it with things like that?

CC: Well, it will lose that personal feeling that I used to have that I could go for my walks, and I would see people that I knew that I could say hi to or talk with or visit with. I don't see how that can happen as much.

20:03

I can't see that it will have that kind of small neighborhood feeling for me. Maybe somewhat but I'm not walking like I used to walk. There still may be some of that, but I think that's going to get lost and just be too—. And it's just popping up all over throughout this area. I think it will lose that intimacy, and maybe that neighborhood involvement that I had will be not as easily accessible.

[End of Interview]

Total Interview Time: 0:21:06