

# **How Carl Rahn Became a Grocer in Hartley, Iowa**

Written and Narrated by John Rahn

Carl started in business with his stepfather, William Seebode, in the town of Harris, Iowa in the 1920s. Together they had what was referred to as a General Merchandise store. In 1930, he married Ruth Murdock who had moved to Harris to teach in the school system. It was a policy at the time that once female teachers were married they could no longer be considered for a teaching position.

Carl and Ruth moved to Ocheyedan in 1930 and opened a small grocery store on Main Street. Later, they moved into a larger store on the main business corner next door to the Ocheyedan Savings Bank. They had two children, Patricia, born in 1932, who presently lives in Fordland, Missouri and son, John, born in 1936, who lives in Spencer.

After selling the store in Ocheyedan, Carl purchased the Kosta Market in Hartley in 1944 and moved his family. In researching the back copies of the Hartley Sentinel, it appears there were four grocery stores in Hartley: Kaplan's, Council Oak, Swanson's and the Kosta Market. Another grocery store was opened after WWII by Herman Fick and his brother.

Carl purchased the Fick market and moved his grocery store to the main business corner in Hartley where the United Community Bank is presently located. In 1949, he built a new building at the corner of Highway 18 and Central Avenue. Included in the front of the store was a small restaurant called Pete's Café. It was operated by Pete Christensen. Later the grocery store was expanded to take over the space occupied by Pete's and a new restaurant was built to the east and attached to the grocery building.

A review of the advertising placed by the grocery stores in the Hartley Sentinel during the years of the 50s indicates there was good competition. The market that had been Kaplan's had also operated under other names such as Thrifty and Riven Bros. The Council Oak Store went by the name of National. Both of these stores were located in downtown Hartley along with Bud's Market, owned by

Bud Johnson. It was the building Carl had sold when he moved to the highway. Oscar Swanson also operated a grocery store across from the old Methodist Church.

The slogan at the bottom of the grocery advertising Carl put in the Hartley Sentinel was “Carl Rahn Food Market Wants to See You.” The ad also included the statement “Locally owned if that means anything to you.”

Some of the people who worked for Carl over the years were Donald Treimer, Tom Hamilton, Eddie Popp Jr., Leonard Jurgens, Carroll Dass, Bob Putnam, Emma Hopfe, Iva Schumann, and I believe a Duley Wagner, although I might not have that name right. Duley might have been a brother to Red Wagner of Red’s Café.

In August of 1959, Carl sold the grocery store to Marion Koele and Russel Sauer. After that he and his wife operated the café that had once been leased to Pete Christensen. They also moved to Ames for a short period of time and operated the Silver Saddle Motel.

After they retired and moved back to Hartley, he and Ruth began to spend winters first in Florida and then in Arizona. Ruth died in 1969 and later Carl married Edna Fritz.

He died in 1993, at the time of his 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

### **Memories by Betty Taylor**

I grew up near Ocheyedon, Iowa, where Ruth Rahn was one of my able Sunday school teachers. There were three grocery stores in town, but my parents always bought their groceries at The House of Rahn.

During WWII, I had two brothers in the service, one in the states and the other in Africa and Italy. When my mother purchased items to pack boxes for her sons, Carl was certain to add a few items free of charge. Once he threw in a couple of boxes of F&F Cough Drops, with a note that said, “Horse Medicine from The House of Rahn.”

During the war, many items were rationed. Some customers had the habit of using most of their ration stamps, even for things they didn't need. Carl told my mother after things became more plentiful at the end of the war; one woman came in to buy a pound of coffee. When she handed the coffee stamp to Carl, he told her he didn't need it, as coffee was no longer rationed. The woman became a bit flustered; then countered by asking him to buy back some of the coffee she had purchased previously, as she had so much at home. He refused.

In his later years, Carl was known to keep wrapped candies in his pockets. He often handed it out with the comment, "Would you like to have a care package?" He also carried business cards. One side of the card read, "Carl Rahn, Broken-Down Old Store Keeper." On the other side were the words, "If you meet me and forget me, you have lost nothing. If you meet Jesus Christ and forget him, you have lost everything."

Those of us who knew Carl Rahn most assuredly have not forgotten him.