

May 12, 2010, North Saint Paul
Interviewer – Randy Croce

LINDA: My name is Linda Olson and I am the oldest daughter of Delbert and Priscilla Olson. Delbert was the son of Oscar Olson. And Oscar's father, Zebulon, is the gentleman we are going to talk about today.

ELAINE: And I'm Elaine Olson Ekstedt. I'm the second daughter so...

LINDA: My sister.

ELAINE: Yep.

LINDA: We're the oldest of... Oldest two of seven.

ELAINE: Seven children. Lots of stories. Our grandmother was a teacher and a historian and a...

LINDA: Kept lots of stuff.

ELAINE: Lots of stuff. So we're standing here in the middle of an estate sale. Our dad died eight months ago. And tomorrow we will open the doors to a few hundred people and a, sell off a hundred and twenty years worth of tools and collectibles and...

LINDA: And who knows, some of this might have been used to build the capital building. I don't know.

ELAINE: Yeah we, we don't know. We don't know.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF ZEBULON?

ELAINE: Well our grandmother was a very a, as, as Linda mentioned, was a historian. And so she left a lot of notes with things attached. And this is one of her notes. And it says that we have a marble egg made by Grandpa Zebulon Olson when he set all the stones in the build, in building the Minnesota state capital building. It's the same marble as in the structure and pieces of it and some grey granite are around here, a one on the TV bottom stand in the bedroom. And I'm not quite sure where that one is, but we have the egg. This is the egg and grandma Olson had this on the buffet. When I was in my early 20s I worked at the state Capital Credit Union. And a, I wanted very much to display this egg on my desk. And grandma would not give it up. She had it displayed in her dining room on the buffet and she wasn't going to even let me borrow it so I could compare the marble to the state capital building. But we're fairly

confident that she was accurate in her um, in her history of this egg. Now the thing that we are fairly confident she was not accurate about is her insistence that he set all the stones. We have books and albums that my grandmother and my mother put together of family pictures. And in this picture a...

LINDA: This is Zebulon.

ELAINE: And...

LINDA: And on the back it says that this is Cass Gilbert sitting in the chair.

ELAINE: Um, it says on the back of this that the man in the special chair is Cass Gilbert, the architect.

LINDA: And the man standing on the extreme right is Zebulon Olson who set every stone in the entire building.

ELAINE: Now that's... That's the story. Um...

LINDA: Which is...

ELAINE: There's another picture here of a, the, a, the, the machine supposedly that was used to set the stones and supposedly Zebulon ran the machine. And this is a different building project, but that's the notation on the back of this one. And then there's another one here that says that says groundbreaking group for the state capital. And I'm going to try to scan that one and see if we can get it a little bit better.

LINDA: So we'll get you a copy of the...

CU OF PHOTO OF GROUNDBREAKING GROUP FOR STATE CAPITAL.

ELAINE HOLDS PIX

CU OF MARBLE EGG

ELAINE: As you can see it's not very big. It's like a small chicken egg in size.

LINDA: And what's... Why don't you tell the story of how grandma says he got there.

ELAINE: Okay. Grandma told me that um, he took a chip from the construction process and put it in his pocket and made the egg later so that he could not be accused of loafing on the job. He did not wanna be a, seen as a, using...

LINDA: Work time.

ELAINE: Yeah, city equipment for personal profit or whatever it was. But I assume that the chips must have been fairly guarded or something that there was some kind of perimeter security or something, otherwise these would be all over the place. But that's the story.

LINDA: Yeah. (laughs)

CU OF EGG WHILE ELAINE HOLDS

ELAINE: She kept emphasizing all the stones. She wrote it on everything she wrote. And I just don't know how that could be possible. (laughs) There were a whole bunch of people working on that building. So...

LINDA: Because generally grandma was a real stickler for accuracy.

ELAINE: She was, yeah.

LINDA: But until a... In her later years she had a little tendency toward exaggeration and we just tend to... I personally tend to think that this is an exaggeration. I don't see how it's possible. On the other hand, it could be.

ELAINE: (overlaps) Who knows.

LINDA: Who knows. We don't know.

**THE STORIES COME DIRECTLY FROM YOUR
GRANDMOTHER.**

LINDA: Our grandmother, and Zebulon was her father.

ELAINE: And this stone appeared in the family. It was probably... She... Grandma told me it was on the buffet in the Olson household, um, before she married Zebulon. I don't know.

LINDA: (overlaps) She met Oscar.

ELAINE: Oscar was Zebulon's son. And um, how Oscar got it, I don't know. And how... But grandma apparently got this through the mar, her marriage to Oscar. So... Even though Zebulon had other children besides Oscar, Oscar got the egg.

WHERE DID ZEBULON COME FROM?

ELAINE: Zebulon and Augusta came from Kristianstad, Sweden. Um, and I have some of their Bibles and things that have their names in them. A, they... I don't... I don't know all of the history yet. I haven't pulled it all together. It's kind of spread all over the place right now, but we do have albums for every one of them. We have a lot of written material.

LINDA: Mother and grandmother a, worked together. Mom was a professional secretary in World War II and grandmother, after she retired a, made it her life's project to document the history of everything. And um, sh, we have boxes of papers and three-ring notebooks and a, an entire closets full of full old photos.

ELAINE: And ask it.. Actually it wasn't Augusta. Zebulan was married to Iva Caroline. This was... This was Oscar's parents. Alice's parents were John and Augusta Lindstrom. And a...

LINDA: And John and Augusta came from Kristianstad. So I...

ELAINE: They also came from Sweden. Yeah.

LINDA: So I don't know for sure about the city, but I'm sure we could go back and find out.

ELAINE: But our father was a 100% a, Swedish descendent of Swedish immigrants.

LINDA: Right. Um, Alice and Oscar were only married um, for about 10 years.

ELAINE: No.

LINDA: Not that long?

ELAINE: Four or five.

LINDA: Um they... They divorced early on and, and a, when our father was about three years old. And so that... Zebulon's side of the family

was sort of removed. So we don't know as much about that side as we do about the John and Augusta Lindstrom side.

ELAINE: The Lindstrom side is um... You're standing in John Lindstrom's barn right now. A, the back of the barn that he built, he kept horses in here. This was his farm. He bought this land um, between Casey Lake Park and White Bear Avenue...

LINDA: Um, so John and Zebulon would have been in the same generation, but um, because Oscar and Alice were not married very long, I don't think there was a lot of interaction between Zebulon and John after the divorce.

ELAINE: There was a lot of animosity. It was very hard for grandma to be a divorced woman in the...

LINDA: With three kids...

ELAINE: ...20s. Um, she kept the name Olson. She was very proud of being an Olson, but there was a lot of resentment. Um... And um, I think it was very difficult for her. She chose never to remarry. She threw her energies into her family and her teaching career.

LINDA: Emm hmm.

WHAT DIFFERENT JOBS DID ZEBULON HAVE?

ELAINE: Um, let me read this from the book.

(I'll take those)

ELAINE READS: "Zebulon Olson was a self-educated man, having no schooling and on his own at age 17. He set all the stones in the Minnesota State Capital Building. He had complete control of the machine and was paid \$2.00 gold pieces for the work. He was a drinker, and although in his later years he spent a year with Allis... Alice and Oscar, he finally left and went downhill as an alcoholic dying of stomach trouble." So that's Zebulon. A, we have one picture of him here as a younger man. Don't know how that will work with the plastic on it. A...

CU OF ZEBULON PIX.

ELAINE: Oscar actually went on and, and remarried also. So there was another step-family there.

LINDA: Are you done with this?

ELAINE: Um, the Zebulon Olson home was 862 Magnolia Avenue.

LINDA: And the Lindstrom home was at Magnolia, just a few doors away. And that is how the Lindstroms and the Olsons got together.

ELAINE: A, Zebulon and Ida Caroline had Signa... They had a, how many kids? Hildegard, Swan, Cigna...

LINDA: Signe...

ELAINE: Cigne, Oscar and Arnold were their children. Um, pictures of their friends. There's a picture of Zebulon Olson at the Mississippi River, a setting the stones in one of the locks. I don't know which lock that is. That was pretty small.

CU OF PIX OF LOCK (FORD LOCK & DAM NO. 1)

ELAINE: So there were a lot of builders in the family. In fact all of these houses, the three houses here in a row were built by John Lindstrom. So... Um, there are some pictures here of family and kids and pictures of Oscar. Um... That's about it for... I, I have some books in the back with Swan Olson's name on them. Um...

LINDA: I'll take those. Yeah I wanna scan those.

LINDA: Oscar Zeb... Here's a family picture. I don't know if you'll be able to get this one. Oscar and Zebulon, Arnold, Ida, Gertie, Cigna, Signe, Joel, Swan took the picture. This one down here.

DO YOU FEEL IT'S REMARKABLE TO HAVE A CONNECTION TO SOMEONE WHO WORKED ON THE STATE CAPITAL?

ELAINE: Well it was the story. It was the egg.

LINDA: The egg is the thing that...

ELAINE: This is...

LINDA: You know when you have a memento or something...

ELAINE: This is the connection.

LINDA: ...that has a story that goes with it and someone keeps telling the story generation after generation, then...

ELAINE: And we keep ask... I... I kept asking... I keep asking for it, and it's like, no I can't. I can't have it. We have to share this because this is shared history.

LINDA: Yeah... And we, we actually have a system. We're, we're making family trunks and family suitcases. And we're... Because we are all having kind of fund cleaning things out and memories and associations, so there is a John and Alice Lindstrom trunk.

*** END OF TAPE ***