

Family operated well-drilling business
an Oral History

Henry/Harriet Albrecht, Interviewee
Of Ohio, Illinois

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Narrator's Name: HENRY AND HARRIET ALBRECHT
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Place of Interview: OHIO, ILLINOIS
Interviewer's Name: NORMA KRIEGER
For: STARVED ROCK LIBRARY SYSTEM ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Q: This is Norma Krieger speaking, and we are here in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Albrecht of Ohio -- rural Ohio. We are going to attempt to learn something this afternoon about the well drilling business, who the original well drillers were, who started the business in this area, where they lived, and we'll take it up to the present time. I think it would be well to start a little different way in that we are going to start with the present owner and operators of the Albrecht Well Drilling business and go back; then we will go back to the beginning and bring it up to the present time. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Albrecht will be the narrators.

Hello, Mrs. and -- Mr. and Mrs. Albrecht. How are you this afternoon?

A: Mrs.: We're very well, thank you. We just had our sixtieth anniversary the ninth of February.

Q: Well, how interesting. Well, thank you very much for inviting me into your home this afternoon and I'm -- this is a tape that is going to be made and kept in the library for anybody who might want to listen to it in the future.

Henry -- may I call you Henry and Harriet?

A: Mr.: Yes, please do so.

Q: After living beside you for so many years, I feel that I know you very well. Now, Henry (cuckoo clock cuckoos) -- well, there we have a cuckoo clock in the background. (laughs) That's interesting, Henry, who was the original well driller in your family? How far back does it really go?

A: Mr.: My father started out in the well work as he did in other kinds of work such as lumber sawing, _____ and one of the sidelines was well drilling.

Q: I see. What was his name? Let's acquaint the people with his name.

A: Mr.: Fred Albrecht.

Q: Fred Albrecht. (Mrs. tells Mr.: "Speak carefully.") Where did he live at that time, Henry?

A: Mr.: A mile and a half northwest of Ohio.

Q: A mile and a half northwest of Ohio.

A: Mr.: _____.

Q: In the road -- on the road that goes by the Dad Joe Tavern. I think we're all familiar with that. Now as I promised we will go back just for a moment and tell the people who the present operators are of the Albrecht well drilling business. Who is operating it now? I -- are you still very active in the work -- in the actual work?

A: Mr.: I'm active but we -- I turned the business over to my son. . .

Q: Over to. . .

A: Mr.: . . .we're fifty-fifty in the business.

Q: And I have noticed on your many well trucks and rigs that are going around the country it says -- can you tell us what it says on the side of the door?

A: Mrs.: Albrecht Well Drilling, Incorporated.

Q: I see. Okay. So then Dean is -- does actually most of the. . .

A: Mrs.: Planning.

Q: . . .the planning and the. . .

A: Mrs.: We have from eight to twelve operators that go on the well

drilling rigs and the trouble ~~shooters trucks~~.

Q: I see. Oh, I see. Okay. Then I notice in my travels around that I'm often running into Albrecht vehicles. How many exactly do you have that go out on the road now?

A: Mr.: We have four that's trouble shboters. Derrick's on the. . .

A: Mrs.: To pull wells.

A: Mr.: . . .well pulling or repairing. Then we have three drilling rigs -- rotary drilling rigs.

Q: That's what I wanted to know. Okay, now, this -- how -- what year was it ~~that~~ your father went into the business?

A: Mrs.: _____ . What date was that?

Q: I have down here 1896. What do -- what do I have that. . .

(inaudible whispers) and this was not, ~~as you stated here~~ earlier -- this was not his only business -- this was in connection with farming.

A: Mrs.: And lumber sawing.

A: Mr.: 1896 when he made a homemade derrick drilling outfit to put a hold on the home farm for the livestock and farm and which is fired by the horse power.

Q: And ~~did~~ you help your father as a child?

A: Mr.: I had the privilege of driving the horse power. (laughter)

Q: You had the privilege of driving the horse to furnish the power. Well, isn't that kind of true of all of the businesses in those days -- the families were all put to work. As I'm sure your own were as you were -- as they were growing up. Now would you tell us a little bit about the first well that your father drilled.

A: Mr.: The first well he drilled he made his own tower and derrick

and got the horse power for furnishing the power and went down with a two inch well somewhere around 150 or 160 feet where he struck some sand and he thought there was water in it and he tried it and it gave water and that did -- furnished the water for a good many years until we got later equipment up to date and a larger hose.

Q: Okay Henry, you worked along with your father for many years. When did you go out on your own as an independent well driller?

A: Mr.: Well, I was just thinking here that Ed Hay, don't suppose you remember Mr. Hay -- Judge Hay they called him -- his son. . .

A: Mrs.: I don't remember.

A: Mr.: . . .he helped Dad for. . .

A: Mrs.: Well, you can't bring in all those. . .

A: Mr.: No, well, I couldn't, no.

Q: But when you were -- it was in when you were in your twenties. . .

A: Mr.: Yes, I was up in the twenties, yes.

Q: . . .that your father supplied you with your own rig.

A: Mr.: Yes.

Q: And did you say you had a brother who helped you with that?

A: Mrs.: A short time.

A: Mr.: A short time.

Q: Brother Albert.

A: Mr.: Yes.

Q: Now your father Fred Albrecht passed away in July of 1936 and you went out as an independent well driller at that time.

A: Mr.: That's right.

Q: I see. Approximately what were the -- what was the size of your

wells that you drilled at the very beginning?

A: Mr.: The most common well was a two inch well and later on they came into the two and a half and then finally I put in a well for the Bureau Township School which was a four inch and on the city wells there were eight inch ones.

Q: Oh, that's interesting. And about -- around how deep were they?

A: Mr.: Well. . .

Q: The obvious answer would be until you run into water (laughter) but that -- to most of us that wouldn't mean a thing.

A: Mrs.: You know in the course time over toward Walnut you have your sand points which sometimes only seventeen feet deep but up here we're much higher and this is on the terminal moraine, the wells are deeper. But as he says you know they'll take -- when Harold drilled a well over here -- four miles -- more than that -- maybe five -- and I happened to be there when they bring it in and there was that sand you'd put it here, rub a little bit, and it showed water. You had water sand.

Q: Around -- I have here 150 or 160 feet would have been the average at that time. Deep?

A: In certain areas.

Q: In certain areas.

A: Mr.: And of course later on some of the wells was down lower like now Harold Ackerman's and his father's then was 420 feet.

Q: Oh, I see. Well, as I said, the obvious answer would be (laughs) when they get to water. Now, I think one of the things that -- at this time are -- is most interesting is comparing prices of now and in the olden days as we refer to them. What did you charge when you first

started in the well drilling business to drill a well?

A: Mr.: Of course it much depended on the size hole you wanted.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Mr.: See now first the charges may be a dollar and a half for a two inch and a two and a half, it's two dollars and three is three dollars. And went kind of by the inch. Four inch, four dollars.

Q: I see.

A: Mr.: The city well eight inches, eight dollars and then of course it depended on the other equipment with it. That was just for the drilling.

Q: That was just for the drilling and then they put in their own pumping system in addition to this.

Were there any occasions when some farmer or some homeowner might need a water system and felt that he couldn't afford to have it done?

A: Mr.: Yes, there was some farmers felt that they could help a little on the work and defray the cost and put in some wells with that method where they could help and work part of the expense off, which helped them and helped me.

Q: Helped you, too. Yes, well, that all worked out fine.

Now, Henry, you mentioned to me about an incident in Mendota that you think would be well worth putting down on this tape. It had to do with the. . .

A: Mrs.: Repair.

Q: . . . repair of the Mendota city well. Could you tell us about that?

A: Mr.: Mendota city well was one of the toughest jobs I ever undertook and the American Well Works spent considerable time trying to repair the work of the well and finally they said it had to be a new well and then

they interviewed us _____ and we thought we could repair that well and they finally gave us the go-ahead job and so we worked for -- well, for months in getting that well repaired -- which we did -- and it's still working.

Q: I see. This was the city well.

A: Mr.: City well.

Q: In other words by making use of your experience, your ingenuity, and perseverance you were successful in getting the Mendota well repaired -- probably at a far more nominal fee than had they put in a new well -- a new water system.

A: Mr.: They saved -- that was \$2,000 difference.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Mr.: A saving. The thing was was interesting (PAUSE) we succeeded in getting the well repaired and to the depth of three -- three hundred feet plus and one hundred feet in St. Peter's sandstone which produced two hundred gallons per minute which was the required amount needed. Therefore, that was the finishing up job for that well. We got two hundred feet in St. Peter's sandstone -- a hundred feet.

Q: As I said before in my travels around the country I often meet Albrecht-marked vehicles. Approximately how far away did your work take you when you were active in the business -- before Dean came into it?

A: Mr.: Well, I had one job at Freeport which was some sixty miles repairing a well for the camp.

Q: I see.

A: Mrs.: Church camp.

Q: Well, that's quite a distance away that's what you say about sixty

miles away, isn't it? You cover quite a territory. There's one theory that has always been -- that you have, that has always been of interest to me and that is -- I think maybe you can word it better than I can. If I remember right when we were farming and we might call you to have some repair work done, the first thing that Mrs. Albrecht would ask -- she was the bookkeeper at that time, the telephone answerer, and the dispatcher, I imagine -- she would say, "Do you have any water at all," and if I would say, "No, we don't," she would say, "Do you have any animals depending on the water?" and I would say, "Yes," because at that time we did, and what was your idea on that, Mrs. Albrecht? You answer us on this.

A: Mrs.: Well, animals come before people. People can get out and find it; animals are penned in.

Q: That was always interesting to me. So really if you wanted the Albrecht well drillers or the repairment to come, you just tell them that you had a thirsty cow ~~(laughter)~~ and believe they'd be there in a hurry. (laughs)

A: Mr.: _____.

Q: So it didn't matter whether we could take a bath or get a drink or whatever but if we had animals that were suffering you could see the Albrecht well repairmen on the way.

A little later on this tape I'm going to bring Dean -- or interview Dean, the really active member of this corporation now and have him tell us a little bit about some of the more sophisticated type of work that he is doing and where he's doing it, and I understand that he has quite a reputation as a well driller. Should we ask his proud mother to tell us

about it?

A: Mrs.: I am glad to tell you, yes. They have to get a permit any-time they drill a well from the Geological Department at the University of Illinois and later they have to report a log of that well, which is very important for people that don't know about how a deep a well will be. And one time they didn't want to go quite as far and his wife asked the party that answered, "Can you suggest a driller for that territory?" The answer was, "Don't you know that you're married to one of the best drillers in the State of Illinois?"

Q: That was very interesting. I did not realize that every well that is drilled required a permit.

A: Mrs.: It didn't use to.

Q: It didn't use to.

A: Mrs.: But it is like other things the government has more and more requirements, the same as if you want to add a shed to your barn.

Q: Yes, I understand. And now you have to have a permit to drill a well.

A: Mrs.: Correct.

Q: @ see.

PAUSE

Q: Hello again, this is Norma Krieger speaking and there has been a lapse of approximately a month since our tape was started with Mr. and Mrs. Henry Albrecht. We were unable to complete the tape on that day and it has not been possible to get it finished since. I have a few notes here that I will try to bring you up to date on some very interesting facts. One of them I think Henry Albrecht mentioned, gas wells.

Often times they are drilling for water and they strike gas. Of course many times they are drilling for a gas, specifically for a gas well. If a greenish liquid shows up you may be sure that they have hit a gas well. Sometimes they will go on; they ask the owner of the land whether they want to proceed -- he wants them to proceed and go on for water or develop the gas well. And he has his choice. In the tape earlier, I promised that I would have Dean come in and speak with us for awhile. Due to the fact that on December 19, of 1974, they were hit by a very disastrous fire which completely destroyed their warehouse and office buildings, Dean felt that he was much too busy to come in and talk at that time. He was overseeing the building of the new warehouse. This is now July 15 and they have now, as of July 1, moved into their new warehouse. The office buildings are not completed yet. But they are into their warehouse.

Another point of interest concerns irrigation wells. This area is not considered to be an area where irrigation wells are a prime factor in raising our crops. We primarily depend on the rain. But more and more irrigation wells have been dug in this area. In 1965, Dean drilled the first irrigation well around here, which is still in operation. There has been extensive work done on irrigation wells since. And at this time he estimates that he has drilled over fifty irrigation wells. This has been within a radius of 130 miles. Dean did want us to know, too, that they are responsible for many, many of the village wells in the surrounding area.

In 1973, Dean and Ann, his wife, were delegates to Russia. They were sent by the Goodwheel -- Goodwill People to People delegation

sponsored by the National Water Well Association. They toured six European countries; the trip took three weeks, including Russia, and met with many, many people who are in the same business as they are, discussed various methods, and felt that they learned a lot as well as helping in the goodwill aspect of the trip.

We appreciate very much the time and effort the Albrechts have given in this history of well drilling. The fourth generation, Dean's sons, are now actively employed in the Albrecht Corporation, as it is now known. We thank them very much for inviting us into their home and office and the time that they have given us. We hope that we have added a bit of history, a bit of interest, in this oral history program. Thank you.

Janet Kankaala
Transcriptionist

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Mrs & Mrs Henry Albrecht
(INTERVIEWEE)

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Albrecht Home

DATE

June 1975

Mrs Mrs Henry C. Albrecht

(Interviewee)

(for _____)