

Life on a farm and farming
an Oral History

William Bieser, Interviewee
Of Mendota, Illinois

Interview Date: May 6, 1975

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Narrator's Name: WILLIAM BIESER
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Place of Interview: MENDOTA LUTHERAN HOME
Interviewer's Name: MRS. VICTOR WEDEMEYER
For: STARVED ROCK LIBRARY SYSTEM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Q: This is an interview with Bill Bieser at the Mendota Lutheran Home, Mendota, Illinois. Today is Tuesday, May 6, 1975 and my name is Ruth Wedemeyer. Mr. Bieser, you've been a farmer all your life, is that right?

A: That's right.

Q: When did you retire from farming?

A: About ten years ago.

Q: Now where was your farm located?

A: Oh, at the east of Mendota.

Q: Near Welland?

A: Well, it's half way between Mendota and Welland.

Q: I see. Did the road on which your farm is have a name?

A: Well no, not that I know of.

Q: What route was it on?

A: Route one.

Q: Route one. And this is farmed by your son now?

A: Yes.

Q: But he doesn't live on it?

A: He doesn't live there.

Q: How many acres?

A: Well it is 180, 160. But the railroad takes out six acres.

Milwaukee Railroad runs through it.

Q: So you saw the trains go past every day while you were living there?

A: Yes, they used to keep me awake, but. ..

Q: (laughs) Did you get used to them?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Were you born on that farm?

A: Yes, yes I was.

Q: I know you came from a large family, how many brother and sisters did you have?

A: I had, there was fourteen altogether.

Q: Fourteen, and you were in the middle?

A: Well, I was the third to the last.

Q: Third to the last. Now okay, was a 160 acre farm able to support a family at that time?

A: Well, I guess it did--was.

Q: Would it be able to do that now, or would you need more acreage now?

A: Oh, you've got to have more acreage now.

Q: Do you have. . .

A: Your machinery is so much higher.

Q: Do you have any idea how much acreage it would take now to. . .

A: Well you've got to have three or four hundred acres.

Q: Three or four hundred acres. Can I ask you what year you were born?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. . .

A: 189. . .1882.

Q: 1882, and what's your birthday?

A: July 24.

Q: July 24, hmmm, okay, ^{can} and you tell something about what a typical day on the farm would have been like when you were a little boy? What did you do when you first got up in the morning?

A: Well, we never had--played very much. We always had something to do when we got big enough.

Q: What were some of the first chores that you had when you were a little guy?

A: I can't remember.

Q: Anything that was there to do?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have a wood stove? to heat your house?

A: Yes, all old-fashioned stuff.

Q: Did you have trees on your farm to supply the wood?

A: Oh yes, we had a lot of maple trees.

Q: And is that(cuckoo clocks strikes) what you burned?

A: (cuckoo clocks still striking)Oh, we burned wood and coal. Do you hear that?

Q: (cuckoo continues) I hear that, I hear the cuckoo. I like a cuckoo clock.(laughs) At Christmas time did you cut your own Christmas tree on the farm, then?

A: No, we didn't.

Q: Did you usually have a tree at Christmas?

A: I don't think we did, in the early days.

Q: Yes, not everybody did then, I know. Did you go to school when you were a boy?

A: Yes, I went to country school.

Q: That was a one room schoolhouse?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you walk to school?

A: Lots of times."

Q: How far?

A: Well, it was a mile and a half around the road, And if we went down the railroad it cut off some.

Q: I see, Did you usually go down the railroad?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have to watch out for trains?

A: Oh, there wasn't too many trains, one going up and one coming down.

Q: I see. Now, what were some of the crops that you raised on the farm ?

A: Well, we raised all the oats, corn, we tried some wheat and barley, Didn't do so good, wheat and barley.

Q: I see. The corn and oats, . . .

A: The corn and oats was our main crop.

Q: Did you have any stock?

A: Yes, we had stock--cows-- I milked a lot of cows.

Q: Milk cows too, and beef cows as well?

A: Yes.

Q: So then did you grow most of the food you ate on the farm?

A: Yes, we had a big garden.

Q: Fruit trees, too?

A: Yes.

Q: Your mother did a lot of canning then?

A: Yes, she was busy all the time.

Q: Did you always feel that you had good meals and plenty to eat?

A: Yes (laughs).

Q: Did she make some dishes ~~that you~~ then that you don't get now?
Some kinds of food that you don't get now?

A: Oh I suppose she did, yes.

Q: Do you miss any of the kinds of food that. . .

A: No, not anymore.

Q: Okay. You say that you milked cows, now that was done twice a day?

A: Yes, morning and night.

Q: What time did you have to get up in order to do that?

A: Oh, five o'clock.

Q: Ohhh, (laughs) did you go right out and milk first or have breakfast?

A: Oh, yes., we did other things first and then we had breakfast.

Q: And then you had breakfast. That's different from the way we live now I guess. Did you plow your fields with a horse and plow?

A: I did.

Q: Did you walk behind the plow then?

A: Walking plow.

Q: How many horses did you have to. . .

A: I started out with six.

Q: And they took turns then pulling the machinery? that you used. .

A: Yes.

Q: Did you ride horseback on them to get to places?

A: No.

Q: They were purely work animals?

A: That's right.

Q: How did you get to town?

A: Well, we'd had a buggy, drove the horses. And then after we got an automobile.

Q: I see. Do you remember when you got your automobile?

A: In 1913.

Q: And you learned to drive it right away?

A: Yes, I drove it right out of this town.

Q: How about that. Did you have to have a driver's license at that time?

A: No.

Q: Did you eventually have to get a driver's license?

A: Oh yes, I don't know what year it was in.

Q: What year did you take over the farm?

A: 1905.

Q: Okay now, there were fourteen of you, were there other brothers to. . .

A: Yes.

Q: Did several of you take over the farm or did you. . .

A: No, I'm the only one. . I was the only farmer out of the bunch.

Q: I see. And then of your children just one son took over the farm eventually too, right?

A: I had three sons. Two of the farm by themselves.

Q: I see. And one of them now runs your farm too?

A: Yes.

Q: And lives on, I think you said his aunt's farm., is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you use fertilizer?

A: Not much.

Q: Mostly the cow manure and that kind of thing?

A: Yes, and they didn't know nothing about fertilizer. In them days.

Q: Later on did you use commercial. . .

A: Yes. My son uses a lot now.

Q: Does the commercial fertilizer do a better job do you think?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Your yield is better? per acre?

A: A whole lot.

Q: Did you have sheep on your farm too?

A: Yes, I raised sheep.

Q: Did you have to shear them or did. . .

A: I had them sheared.

Q: Did you use the wool yourselves then?

A: No.

Q: You were able to sell that?

A: Yes.

Q: Where did you go when you were a young boy growing up, or where did you parents take their produce to sell?

A: Mostly in Mendota here.

Q: Was Mendota the main shopping center for you then?

A: Yes.

Q: How often did you get to come into town?

A: Oh, about every Saturday night.

Q: To do a little playing around?

A: Yes.

Q: And shopping?

A: Yes, and getting some groceries.

Q: What kind of groceries did you have to buy since you raised. . .

A: Well, we all bought a beef roast for dinner.

Q: For Sunday dinner?

A: For Sunday dinner. and then all the. . .we raised a lot of our own potatoes, cabbage. . .

Q: I see. Now you raised some grain on your farm, did you take that to mills here to be ground, like your oats or. . .

A: No, we sold it at the elevator.

Q: Now we all know that weather is very important in farming, do you think that the weather has changed any during the years?

A: Oh, it's changed a lot.

Q: How do you think it has changed?

A: Well, I don't know. We always got along by hand, you know. Now you've got to go with the big stuff. big machinery. You've got to do more in a day.

Q: Now, then you used to?

A: Yes.

Q: You think it was more relaxing then when you were younger and managing the farm?

A: Oh, I think so, kinda.

Q: Did it become more difficult in the years before you retired, do you think?

A: Well, it got pretty hard, after you're older(laughs).

Q: By that time you had, I imagine, a tractor and other machines rather than the horses?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have horses up until the time you retired?

A: No, we got a tractor in 1935.

Q: 1935. Did you like running the tractor better than walking behind the horses?

A: Yes. I sure did.

Q: What kind of a tractor did you have?

A: We had, oh what. . .a John Deere.

Q: What did you do with the horses, did you sell them. . .

A: I traded the horses for a tractor. I didn't have money enough, so I had to give them a note.

Q: Did farmers in your day do a lot of trading like that?

A: No, not too much.

Q: Not necessarily, . .

A: Oh, we worked together a little you know, through threshing or shelling corn or something like that.

Q: Did you have big parties on the days you shelled corn or threshed?

A: Oh, we had a little beer.

Q: (laughs) And the women cooked a lot of meals for you?

A: Oh yes, that was the main thing on the day.

Q: Nothing wrong with your appetite?

A: Oh no (laughs) we all had good appetites.

Q: That's good. That's a healthy thing, isn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you think it was fun to be threshing and shelling corn with people?

A: Well, it got to be heavy toward the last.

Q: It was a lot of work, too wasn't it?

A: Yes, then combines come in you know, and we didn't do that no more.

Q: No more parties, no more getting together with neighbors helping one another.

A: No.

Q: When the combines came in did several of you own a combine together, or did one person own it?

A: No, I think my boys did. I think there was three of them bought one combine.

Q: It had to be shared usually because of the expense and so forth?

A: Yes, they worked together a little.

Q: Do they still work together some?

A: No, one of them is retired _____, He lives in town here.

Q: Were their other events like butchering, for example, when you got together, when neighbors would get together and do something together?

A: Well, I always butchered my own meat.

Q: Did you do that at a particular time of year, or could you do it. . .

A: Yes, we'd do it in the winter time, you know, towards spring.

Q: Can you tell us why you did it in the winter?

A: Well, it was handier, you know.

Q: You weren't busy on the fields then?

A: No, yes.

Q: Was it easier to keep the meat too by doing it in the colder weather?

A: Oh, we put it in brine, you know. Then we took it out about six weeks and then we smoked it.

Q: Did you have a smoke house?

A: Yes, I had a smoke house.

Q: What kind of wood did you burn in there?

A: Well, I burned mostly apple wood.

Q: And that does a good job of smoking. Did the meats keep well, the smoked meats?

A: Well, we kept it up in the granary, up above.

Q: Where it was dry?

A: Yes, and put it in sacks, you know, paper sacks.

Q: Did the little animals, like mice, ever get at that kind of thing?

A: No that was cured and dried. No, the mice wouldn't bother it.

Q: If it's cure dried the mice won't get at it?

A: No.

Q: Did you make sausages . . .

A: Yes. . .

Q: . . .and hams and all that kind of thing?

A: All kinds.

Q: Can beef be smoked, you usually think of pork as being smoked, can you smoke beef?

A: We used to make some smoked beef.

Q: Did you ever can any of your meats?

A: Yes, I used to can some of it.

Q: What kind of meats can you can? All of them, or. . .

A: All of them. All the sausages. . .

Q: Did you make things like sauerkraut?

A: Yes.

Q: All kinds of things.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you by any chance have a root cellar?

A: No.

Q: How did you store things like apples and cabbages and things?

A: Oh, we had a regular cellar, you know, a dirt floor in it.

Q: And it was cold?

A: Cool, you know.

Q: Could you, did you keep those vegetables most of the winter?

A: Yes, in the cellar.

Q: So you had food all year long?

A: All year long.

Q: But it was hard work to get it ready, wasn't it?

A: (laughs) Yes.

Q: Did you remember any particular storms that did any damage to your farm?

A: Well, I had a hail storm.

Q: Did that destroy any of your crops?

A: Well, it come early and we had to replant it, but it didn't spoil the whole crops.

Q: But did you get a crop in eventually despite the hail or. . .

A: No.

Q: That really was a hardship.

A: Well, I had it insured.

Q: Did you always have insurance on your farm or did that come into being later.

A: That come later.

Q: Did you have insurance against hail, and rain--thunderstorms, electrical storms?

A: _____ and hail.

Q: That really was a fine thing when the insurance came in so that you wouldn't have all of your livelihood. . . Was fire ever a danger on a farm?

A: Well, I didn't have any so. . . There was some around, lightning had struck a [^]bran across the road.

Q: And, if, in case of a fire did the neighbors all get together to help put it out or did you have fire. . .

A: We just let it burn.

Q: You just let it burn, couldn't. . .

A: Couldn't put it out.

Q: Couldn't get to it?

A: Didn't have the tools.

Q: Did you have, did your water come from a well? . .

A: Yes.

Q: . . .on the farm?

A: I had a dug well and I had a deep well, I had two.

Q: Did you have pimps in the house or outside?

A: Outside.

Q: Eventually when you left the farm did you have indoor plumbing?

A: Yes.

Q: Now I know that you were married too, do you remember when you were married?

A: Yes, sure.

Q: Okay, what year were you married?

A: I'll have to think.

Q: Okay.

A: 1909.

Q: 1909, that was . . .

A: April 15.

Q: Oh boy, you even remember the date, good for you.

A: Yes (laughs).

Q: Some husbands don't remember that. . .

A: I'll never forget that.

Q: That was a few years after you took over the farm, on your own then?

A: Yes..

Q: How many children did you have, then?

A: I had eleven.

Q: And your children attended country school too, or. . .

A: Yes.

Q: . . .did they. Did any of them come into town for school, eventually?

A: No, they all graduated. . .they went to high school.

Q: High school, here, but went to college. . .

A: They all went to high school.

Q: But they went to country school, the same one you did?

A: No, I think they started--I think ours closed, at that time.

Q: Do you think country school are a good thing to have, or do you think the kids have more advantages now. . .

A: Oh yes.

Q: More advantages.

A: They learn more

Q: Did your wife every have any quilting parties?

A: Oh yes, she belonged to a club, I don't know what theyall done,

Q: Sewing projects and that kind of thing?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you ever have a barn raising or any kind of a building project that the neighbors got together?

A: No.

Q: Where did you get information about farming that you needed? Did they have county farm agents at that time?

A: I worked on the farm, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ I learned. . .

Q: That's how you learned. You learned from your father?

A: No, I went out to my cousin two years and then I worked for another neighbor two years.

Q: Was that ~~XXXX~~ a valuable experience to work for somebody else?

A: Yes, I learned a lot.

Q: Now your farming was at first what they say diversified, you had a lot of different products, like your grains and vegetables, and fruits and different animals and so forth, did you specialize more the longer you had the farm?

A: No, I just run the straight line.

Q: A little bit of everything?

A: Yes.

Q: Did a creek run through your property at all? Did you have a little creek or a little... .

A: Yes. a spring creek. Spring water that runs all year around.

Q: That's lucky, isn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: Did it ever flood?

A: Oh yes, it did the first years. I straightened it out a lot, it don't flood so much any more. It's got a way to get out.

Q: You had your own flood control. . .

A: Yes.

Q: . . .your own system, then. I think we need you in Mendota now.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you ever travel outside of the county, or outside of the state?

A: I was out in California two weeks.

Q: You have a son or. . .

A: A niece lives out there..

Q: How long ago was that?

A: I guess that was half of my life in 1933. I was only out there two weeks, in March.

Q: Did you enjoy seeing different parts of the country?

A: Oh yes, we went all over. She had a good neighbor there and she'd take around every day someplace else.

Q: Did you , were you interested in looking at farms in the country that you passed through?

A: No.

Q: No? You just went to see the scenery.

A: I never had enough money to look into a farm.

Q: Do you remember holidays at your house when you were a little boy?
Did you have a lot of holidays?

A: Oh, I guess we did.

Q: How did you celebrate a birthday?

A: Oh I don't know much, it's been so long ago.

Q: Do you remember any presents that you received, any favorite presents that you received?

A: Not too many.

Q: People were not as wealthy then as they are now and didn't celebrate quite as much, did they?

A: No.

Q: Did you celebrate Christmas?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Do you have a family get-together usually?

A: Yes, we have. . .

Q: You still do. . .

A: We get together every birthday and for Christmas, that is my family.

Q: Your family. All your children, and your grand-children?

A: Yes.

Q: Where do you get together? There are quite a few of you?

A: Oh, we go out to _____ and then we go out to the farms, where they live.

Q: Do you think that the get-togethers are as much fun as they used to be?

A: They ain't for me. (laughs)

Q: Do you think that farming is a good life?

A: Well, I would recommend it.

Q: You enjoy it, doing it?

A: Yes.

Q: And evidently your son enjoys doing it?

A: Yes.

Q: And do you have any grandsons who seem to be interested in farming?

A: Well, I have a few, they're both some _____

Q: So for some it still seems to be a good kind of life?

A: Yes.

Q: Now you mentioned before that it takes more acreage now ~~than~~ in order to provide a living for the same size family that it would have in the days when you were growing up, is the, the whole farm operation is a ~~much~~ much more expensive thing now than I suppose it used to be?

A: Yes, a whole lot.

Q: It would be difficult to buy your own farm now do you think?

A: According to this price.

Q: Do farmers think differently about things now than they used to?

A: Well, I don't think they get enough for their crops, for one thing, according to the price of machinery.

Q: So the price we're paying in the store does not go back to the farmer?

A: No.

Q: And it gets stuck somewhere in the middle?

A: Yes(laughs).

Q: The farm machinery is a very expensive item, isn't it?

A: Yes, it is.

Q: And each farmer almost needs to have the machinery to operate his farm?

A: Yes, he does if he keep in line.

Q: Do young people who might be interested in farming have any chance to buy a farm?

A: I doubt it.

Q: Because of the price?

A: Yes.

Q: That's too bad, isn't it?

A: This land price is way out of style, I wouldn't know.

Q: Are the fertilizers now, we talked before about the ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ fertilizers, producing better crops, are the seeds better now too?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Are they improved over what you had?

A: Yes., We got better seed corn and everything is more, I'd call it, I don't what I'd call it.

Q: Did you, were you able, one man, to take care of a farm of 160 acres ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ in your day or did you have hired men or other helpers?

A: I had hired men.

Q: Were these men usually, who were natives of Mendota or did they come from other places, too?

A: One come from Pennsylvania.

Q: Do they have hired men still today?

A: Well, not too many.

Q: There are some tenant farmers, I suppose, in this area, but not just hired men?

A: Yes, they got this big machinery, they can do it alone, you know.

Q: And with the lights now, they can even go out in the field at night?

A: Yes, long days.

Q: That's right, with daylight savings time, you mean?

A: Yes.

Q: Farmers have always been interested in politics it seems, or at least I hear them talking a lot about it, why do you suppose, . . .

A: In my day they wasn't so much.

Q: What things did you talk about when you got together with other farmers?

A: We didn't have much to talk.

Q: Did you talk about your crops?

A: Oh, I suppose some.

Q: And the weather?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember any tornados that passed through?

A: Not close to me, I think there was one that went through the south end of town here _____, Ladd, I believe.

Q: But not that it did any damage?

A: No, not on our farm.

Q: Do farmers now have milk cows in this area?

A: ~~Refy~~ few.

Q: What made the change from milk to beef cattle?

A: I wouldn't know, too much work, I guess.

Q: The milk cows are more work than. . .

A: More work.

Q: In what way are they more work?

A: Well, you have milk them, of course now they have machines to do it. You gotta get into it big or your lost.

Q: Did you ever use a milking machine or did you do your. . .

A: No, I did it all by hand, I milked ~~nine~~ ^{nine} cows morning and night.

Q: Is that, was that a typical number of cows, milk cows to have at that time?

A: Probably a good man's work, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ and hour,
An hour's work.

Q: Did that, an hour's work twice a day, did you put your cows out to
pasture then?

A: Oh yes.

Q: During the day? Did you feed them anything in the summer time besides
the grass?

A: No.

Q: And then in winter I suppose you had to supplement?

A: Yes, hay and grain.

Q: Were they able to be outdoors in the winter?

A: If the weather was good, you know. If it wasn't too cold or stormy.

Q: Did you have a dog that helped you herd the cows?

A: Well, I had several dogs, but I never had a good one.

Q: Never had a good one?(laughs) It takes a special kind to help. . .

A: Well you gotta train them when they're little I guess, and I never
had the way to do it.

Q: So you took care of the cows by yourself then?

A: Yes.

Q: Would nine cows at that time supply enough milk and so forth for
your family and then you could also sell some?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Did the dairy send trucks around to pick up the milk?

A: They had a milk man who picked it up.

Q: And you put them in those big cans that the antique dealers are. . .

A: Ten gallon cans.

Q: What, in what way did you cool the milk?

A: I had a tank in the well.

Q: With good cold well water. Did you have to stir the milk in order to cool it? You just set it in the tanks?

A: No. Then they come early in the morning, you know.

Q: Shortly after you had milked?

A: Yes.

Q: And the milk then at night, you would just leave set in the tanks?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know where the milk was taken? To Chicago?

A: Well we had a cheese factory here, in Mendota.

Q: That's right. And you able to sell your dairy products there.

Did you ever make any cheese and butter at home?

A: Oh, my mother did, you know, when I was young.

Q: Did that taste good?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Do you get butter now or do you eat mostly oleo?

A: Well I get butter.

Q: Do you like oleo? Did you ever learn to like it?

A: No, I never did.

Q: Did you like to drink milk?

A: Well, I liked milk, yes.

Q: I've talked to so many farmers who don't seem to like milk even though they have ^tir on their farms. Did your wife ever make butter?

A: Yes.

Q: Was that a lengthy process, did it take a long time to do that?

A: Sometimes, it all depended on what temperature agreed with us.

Q: Is it supposed to be cold when you start to. . .

A: It's got to be the right temperature and it'll turn right away, you know.

Q: So it's a trick you have to learn in order to make it?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you make cottage cheese and other kinds of cheese?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Where did you learn to do that kind of thing, or where did your wife and mother learn to do that?

A: Well, I suppose from their own folks.

Q: It was passed down from parent to child. . .

A: Yes, one way.

Q: Now I don't suppose that they make cheese and butter any more on the farms?

A: I don't think so. They don't even milk the cows. They come to town to buy their milk.

Q: Do they still butcher on the farm?

A: Yes, my boy does.

Q: Oh, that sounds, my mouth is watering.(laughter) Can sausage be eaten fresh or does it always have to be smoked. Does it have to be aged or smoked?

A: Well, you know you've got to fry pork sausage. You have to fry it.

Q: ~~Pork~~ is one of those things you have to be a little careful cooking, isn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have chickens on your farm too?

A: Yes, we had chickens.

Q: Does you son still have chickens?

A: No.

Q: That too has become unprofitable hasn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: How many chickens would you have had. . .

A: Oh, I'd say around a hundred. We'd sell eggs, take them to the grocery store, trade them for groceries..

Q: Did you raise your own chicks from the egg, let them hatch in the egg?

A: No, we bought them at a hatchery.

Q: And then what care did you have to take with them in order to hatch them, or in order to. . .

A: Well you had to have a regular house and keep it warm, you know,

A: brooder they call it. .

Q: And how long would a chicken have to stay in a brooder?

A: Well, till he got big enough to fly. (laughter)

Q: Now when you're out in the country you see chickens running loose, do they stay around the farm pretty much, or did they... .

A: They did them days, but I guess you won't find them around the farm no more.

Q: They don't raise too many chickens anymore. They mostly raise them in big building, a big operation I guess. But they did stay around the farm, they knew where their food was, I suppose?

A: Yes.

Q: What was Sunday on a farm? Did you keep on working or. . .

A: No, we generally kept our Sundays.

Q: You usually went to church on Sunday?

A: Yes.

Q: Did that mean Saturday night bath? (laughter) That you always hear about?

A: Yes.

Q: Did your women cook on Sundays? You still had your. . .you mentioned

A: Oh yes, roast beef.

Q: What did you eat with the roast beef on a Sunday?

A: Oh sometimes we'd have _____ balls.

Q: Oh, that's potato balls, right?

A: Yes, potato balls.

Q: Were they like a dumpling or. . .

A: Yes.

Q: And then you put gravy on them?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have a lot of vegetables that you ate?

A: Oh, we had all kinds of them.

Q: Did you have desserts a lot?

A: No.

Q: Did you have an ice cream freezer by any chance?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have to take turns turning the handle?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Was that considered pretty much of a treat or did you have that often?

A: Oh, it was quite a chore. (laughter)

Q: You ended up with only a little bit after lots of work. (laughter)

Did you have any means for keeping anything like ice cream?

A: Well we did have an ice box .

Q: With chunks of ice? Where did you get the ice from?

A: Well, they had a man here in town.

Q: Years ago how was ice kept? They must have cut it from a lake or a pond or something in the wintertime and how did they keep it?

A: They had a house and that , they used a lot of sawdust to cover it .

Q: And that served as an insulator to keep it cold?

A: Yes. They packed it close together, you know,

Q: When you were a little boy did you have an ice box that early?

A: Not then, after I got married.

Q: And then eventually then did you get a refrigerator? Is that nicer than the ice box?

A: Oh yes.(laughter)

Q: Not so many puddles on the floor anyway. (laughter)Do you have any things ~~MINING~~ that you remember doing on the farm that you'd like to talk about? that I haven't covered?

A: Nothing particular, I guess not.

Q: On a Sunday afternoon, now, when you weren't working on the farm what kind of things did you do to amuse yourself?

A: Well, we generally just took it easy.

Q: You were glad to rest?

A: Glad to rest, maybe take a nap.

Q: What did children do on the farm?

A: Oh, they played. They were outside all the time.

Q: What kind of games did they play?

A: I wouldn't know, really.

Q: You had your own baseball time just about right at home, did they ever play any games of baseball?

A: Well, I guess so, yes.

Q: Did your children enjoy riding the horses or anything like that?

A: No, they wasn't much interested in horses.

Q: Did you have a lot of cats on your farm?

A: Oh, quite a few.

Q: Are there any other animals that you had that I didn't ask about?

A: I don't think so.

Q: Did you ever have any unusual pets, I don't suppose usually you do on a farm?

A: I never had any.

Q: Did you ever have any goats?

A: No.

Q: Now we talked about your having sheep before, did you eat mutton too, lamb?

A: No, no, we never butchered any.

Q: Just had them for the wool?

A: We sold the lambs.

Q: Did you sell some of your cows for meat?

A: Oh, yes, one in awhile I'd have, one got too fat you know, I'd have to sell her.

Q: Not enough milk anymore, you'd have to . . .do something with her, I suppose?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have beef cows at the time too?

A: They were mostly mixed.

Q: And then eventually you went to all beef cows, is that right?

A: No. I stayed with the cows until I quit milking.

Q: What kind of clothing did farmers wear?

A: Well, mostly overalls. . .

Q: With the bibs on?

A: Yes, with bibs and a jacket.

Q: What did you wear in the wintertime to keep warm?

A: A big fur coat when I was, we used to haul corn in the wintertime, with the horses and I had a nice warm, big fur coat.

Q: What kind of a hat?

A: Oh, a fur cap.

Q: And then in the summer, I suppose, you wore a straw hat of some kind?

A: A straw hat, yes.

Q: Did that keep you cool?

A: Well, not too cool. (laughter)

Q: You know bib overalls are popular now again among the young people.

A: Yes, yes. I notice the women are wearing them. (laughter)

Q: You were right in style.

A: (laughs) Yes.

Q: What kind of shoes did you wear, boots?

A: Well, I had all kinds, slippers and shoes, big clodhoppers, I'd call them.

Q: Did you have to take off your shoes before you came into the house?

A: Not walays, if they were clean, you didn't.

Q: Did you have a summer kitchen on your farm?

A: Yes.

Q: Was that a separate building?

A: Yes.

Q: And it kept the, most of the activity and the dirt and the mess and everything outside of the house then?

A: Yes.

Q: Does that seem like a good idea?

A: Yes. You put your tools in there, you know, garden tools, lawn mowers, and stuff. I got mine out there yet, pretty neat^R run down. The wind's going to blow it down soon.

Q: You're just going to let it die down by itself?

A: Yes.

Q: I notice a lot of farm buildings particularly houses are empty now, is that a common thing? To just let them fall apart?

A: I guess. They do now.

Q: To expensive to remodel?

A: Yes. They , it cuts down the insurance a lot.

Q: It seems a shame to just have them deteriorate like that. . .

A: They ain't worth nothing, you know, just wore out.

Q: Is your house occupied right now?

A: They got a renter.

Q: That's good, it's kinda a sad thing to see a house that you've live in . . .

A: Yes, they keep it up pretty well.

Q: How many rooms did your house have?

A: Five.

Q: Upstairs and downstairs?

A: Two upstairs and three downstairs.

Q: Big rooms with high ceilings?

A: Yes.

Q: Were your houses cool in the summertime, the lower floors?

A: Yes, we had a dining room with a door on each side. The wind could get through it.

Q: You didn't need the fans and air-conditioning.

A: We didn't know what a fan was. We didn't have any electricity until later years.

Q: Do you remember about when you put electricity in?

A: I couldn't tell you.

Q: Did you enjoy the electricity once it was in, did you enjoy using. . .

A: Oh yes. I had to wait a long time. I lived a half mile from the main line, you know, and they wouldn't come over to me.

Q: Did you get plumbing and electricity at about the same time?

A: Yes, yes, I think.

Q: How do you feel about the newer inventions, do you think it's a good thing we have things like electricity and farm machinery. Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?

A: Well, I think they do. You see, we're getting bigger all the time. More people. You've got to have more machinery, better machinery.

Q: Do you think that since farmers are very important now because we are getting more people in the population, and we're getting bigger, and we're concerned about feeding them do you think that farmers are going to be able to increase the yield per acre more and more and more?

A: Well, I think we have enough here, but we mustn't give too much away, to foreign countries. We gotta help them too.

Q: Do you think we reach a limit where we can't get any more out of an acre of ground?

A: I think so.

Q: Do you think we're pretty well at the limit?

A: Yes. This land is getting old you know, it's getting wore out.

Q: Did you use crop rotation when you were on the farm, you changed the crops each year?

A: I always raised a lot of hay and then I'd plow that down one year and get the hay off .

Q: And then what might you plant the next year?

A: Corn on it . On the sod ground, we'd call it.

Q: And then the next year would plant hay again or would you plant corn?

A: I planted on a different piece . I'd change it around every year. Rotate it.

Q: Did you have any hills, or up and downs, on your farm or was it pretty flat?

A: It's pretty rolling.

Q: Did you ever have to use what they call contour plowing?

A: No.

Q: Not that rolling.

A: One place I'd do it.

Q: Did you ever plant any crops to hold the soil in place?

A: No, we did leave a grassway there.

Q: Did you plant trees for a windbreak?

A: No, we had them already planted. They were on the north side of the house. The big maple trees are still there.

Q: Hard maple they must be?

A: No, they're soft maple.

Q: Well, they're lasted a long time, haven't they?

A: Yes. There's some hard maple across the road, but they cut them all off.

Q: Did you used to grow berries by any chance? Strawberries and raspberries, and that kind of thing?

A: Oh yes.

Q: They don't, farmers don't grow raspberries much any more. Did you have any ?

A: No.

Q: They must be too much work for the. . . money you get out of them.

A: They don't grow any apple trees now, they don't _____ nothing.

Q: They're quite ~~specialized now~~ specialized now.

A: We had everything, grapes, you know, gooseberries, currants, . .

Q: Did you eat them raw or did you. . .

A: . . .pick them right off the branch, gooseberries.

Q: That's one thing I'm not familiar. . .

A: Peaches, we had a big peach crop. A lot of peach trees, they all wore out now, they're all gone.

Q: Were they those small, real sweet. . .

A: Yellow peaches. And then we had some white ones.

Q: And you canned?

A: We canned and sold a few. But they give out.

Q: How did you replenish soil when you needed to, we were talking about ground wearing out. Did you ever leave a field unplanted for a while, in order for the. . .

A: We didn't. For a while there, the government paid us for it, idle.

Q: And how long would you leave it fallow?

A: One year. And then maybe the next, a different piece.

Q: Did you think that helped, did you get a better crop then afterwards?

A: Well, it helped that time, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ and of course price, you know.

Q: Did you think it made the land richer?

A: No, it didn't help the land much. You know, we sowed oats on it and the wind would cut it off. We didn't get no crop on it at that time. It would be idle a year, you might say.

Q: How much of your land did you have planted? How much of the 160 acres?

A: Well, we planted all. . .

Q: All of it except where the buildings. . .

A: All but the twenty acres in pasture. And the railroad takes out six acres.

Q: Were there any wild plants that you would pick and use, like did you ever use dandelion greens, for instance?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Cooked or. . .

A: No.

Q: . . .fresh greens, like a salad?

A: Yes.

Q: That sounds good.

A: Yes.

Q: Were there any other wild plants that you used at that time that we don't know about any more?

A: No, I don't think there was.

Q: Can you think of any other things that were important to your way of life as a farmer that people might like to know about?

A: Well, I don't know. I guess not.

Q: Do you enjoy living in town now?

A: Oh yes.

Q: What are the advantages of living in town, things that you can do that . . .

A: You get lot of rest.

Q: Lot of rest(laughs). Do you see more people in town or. . .

A: No, I live here in this home and I don't out. I can't walk too far no more .

Q: So you see fewer people then?

A: I was over on the bus yesterday. I went to the bank and I was wore out when I got back.

Q: Did you sleep well last night then?

A: No, I couldn't sleep at all. (laughs)

Q: Too excited after your excursion (laughs).

A: Yes. (laughs) Getting over town.

Q: Yesterday was a beautiful day in which to be out. . .

A: Oh, it was so hot over there.

Q: Was it hot? Oh, downtown, with the cement. Did you have cement sidewalk on your farm?

A: Yes.

Q: You did put in some. What kind of a road leads up to your place, is it a blacktop?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you get out in the wintertime?

A: Well, sometimes we didn't.

Q: Did that cause trouble?

A: No, not too much, we just wait until they got the road open.

Q: You were more self sufficient then?

A: We all took care of that in advance.

Q: Did you ever have trouble getting out to milk the cows in a bad snowstorm?

A: No, I generally got there. They were in the barn all night.

Q: And your house was close enough to the barn, so that the . . .

A: Yes.

Q: . . . it didn't cause a problem.

A: The road _____ get blocked in off the road, for a whole week sometimes.

Q: Did you mind that?

A: Well, we had to take it.

Q: Do you think that when you were a farmer _____

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

Q: _____ ~~more~~ more satisfied to accept different kinds of weather, or different situations than they are now? You couldn't do as much about, like getting out in a snowstorm, as we can now.

A: No, no, we didn't have the machinery.

Q: Do you think that before you had machinery things were more peaceful or didn't that make any difference?

A: Oh, I don't think that made any difference.

Q: It's how you accept life whichever you have?

A: I think they were more friendly years ago then they are now.
You know you don't see your neighbor often.

Q: That's true. We're more rushed doing other things.

A: Yes. More help _____ more.

Q: Do you know do they still have anything like quilting parties
or anything like that? out on the farms?

A: I wouldn't know.

Q: I just wondered if they just might them or not. Did you always
get your harvests in on time or did the weather sometimes prevent
you from getting the harvest?

A: No, I never lost any, otherwise only that one time.

Q: Did you, you mentioned before that you took your grain into the feed
mill. . .

A: Elevator.

Q: . . .elevator, that was it, excuse me. And they processed it, did
you bring some of that back home to use yourself, or did you sell. . .

A: Well, we used to have some stuff ground up, you know, for the milk
cows., and the hogs. . .

Q: Like your oats and. . .

A: . . .we'd take it and have it ground and _____
what we had to sell, you know.

Q: Did you keep those things then in your granary? In the barn
that was where you'd have kept that?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have problems with bugs and mice and things like that?

I know we do sometimes, nowadays, in flour that we get?

A: Oh, there was quite a few rats there at one time, but they kinda left by themselves, I guess. The cats probably cleaned them out.

Q: So you had kinda a natural thing there going with the cats taking care of your problem.

A: I used to trap them too.

Q: What kind of a trap do you--catch a rat in?

A: Oh, it was an old steel trap.

Q: Did you make it yourself?

A: No, you bought them.

Q: Did you do most of the repairs on the farm yourself?

A: What I could do.

Q: And then the rest you had to have hired, done?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have time for doing that mostly, like in the wintertime, did you have. . .

A: Oh yes, I liked to work.

Q: Did you make any of your own equipment like harnesses or did you buy that mostly?

A: No, we'd patch them up ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ whenever we could.

Q: Was that a wintertime job usually?

A: That was the job I didn't like (laughter) grease a harness, in the spring getting it ready.

Q: What kind of grease did you use?

A: Linseed oil.

Q: That was something that you had bought in town?

A: Yes. I just hated that job.

Q: Why did you not like it?

A: I don't know.

Q: Well everybody is entitled not to like some jobs.(laughter)

I don't like to clean an oven. (laughter) Did you wife cook on a wood stove?

A: Yes.

Q: And then eventually then did you get another type of cooking unit?

A: Well, after I got electricity you know, . .

Q: Then you got an electric. . .stove. Did. . .

A: No, I got a gas stove. Didn't have an electric stove.

Q: Did the wood stove make the kitchen awfully hot?

A: Sometimes, you know.

Q: In summer did she have to keep the fire going, pretty much all time, in order to do the cooking?

A: Oh, no, just at mealtime or getting the meal ready.

Q: Was your water heated in the wood stove, ~~XXXXXX~~ at that time too, in a tank on the side?

A: Yes, we had it.

Q: On washday, how did you heat the water for the clothes?

A: In the boiler.

Q: On top of the stove?

A: On top of the stove, with a copper boiler.

Q: I remember those. Did you make your own soap?

A: Well, I think she did, some.

Q: Was that a process usually done outside?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Over an open fire?

A: Yes.

Q: Now you didn't have a wash machine, I don't imagine. Did you have an old-fashioned scrub board there for awhile?

A: I suppose.

Q: And then eventually when you got electricity, then . . .

A: Oh yes, we had a washer machine, we probably wore out two or three of them.

Q: I guess with that many people you would. How much care did the animals require in the wintertime, now the cows had to be milked of course, did they need any exercise particularly, your cows and horses? in the winter?

A: Well, we turned them out when we could, when the weather was so. When the weather was stormy we'd keep them in the barn.

Q: Did you have a sleigh, to use with the horses? in the winter?

A: Oh yes.

Q: With bells on?

A: Yes, I think we had a string of bells.

Q: How many people could sit in the sleigh?

A: Oh, about probably ten.

Q: How many horses would you need to pull. . .

A: Just a team, two.

Q: Big horses?

A: Well, I did have what you called a driving team, small team.

Q: And that same team would pull the buggy then? In the finer weather?

A: Yes.

Q: How large was the buggy? How many people. . .

A: Well, I had a double seater at one time, with fringe on top.

Q: Oh, the surrey with the fringe on top. (laughter) You called it a buggy or did you call it a surrey?

A: Surrey.

Q: Did you need to have a wagon also for hauling your produce?

A: Yes.

Q: What was that like?

A: Well, it'd be the box _____ when we'd haul grain, you know, and we'd take the top off and just have the bottom.

Q: And then there'd be a seat in the front for you to drive the horses?

A: Yes, that was separate though, a spring seat you called it.

Q: Did you have any problem driving your horses or did you have very obedient animals?

A: Oh, we broke them. We used to break one every spring, before they left the field.

Q: And how did you go about doing that?

A: Just hitch them up and drive them around, on the road, to a wagon.

Q: And then eventually you'd add a load. . .

A: _____

Q: Did you ever use the terms ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ gee and haw?

A: Oh, not so much.

Q: Just ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ whoa and giddap?

A: Whoa and giddap, _____ over that.

Q: What color. . .

Q: By pulling the reins, you would maneuver them? What were your horses' names?

A: Oh, I had all names. They all had a name, but you know I can't name one of them.

Q: Did you name cows too, or not?

A: No.

Q: That's funny, that, you ~~XXXXXX~~ know you usually think of naming horses and dogs, but not cows and not even cats. Did you change your farming methods through the years, the way in which you did things? Did you change that? Other than switching to machinery from horses, did you change the way you planted things? The way you took care. . .

A: Well, toward last we did. We used to plant corn with two horses, you know, in two rows.

Q: Two rows at a time?

A: Yes.

Q: And then later how many rows could you plant at a time?

A: Well, we got bigger machinery, got a four ~~row~~ planter and pulled it with a tractor.

Q: So you could plant a lot more in a lot less time. When you plowed with horses, it was up to you to make the rows straight by the way you led the horses, is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you make straight rows?

A: No. (laughter) I was lucky to finish up straight.

Q: You couldn't use the strings we use in a small garden to line it up, could you?

A: No. We had a marker, you know, they'd straddle that, the horses.

A: They watch it pretty close themselves, you know.

Q: You got a lot of exercise. . .

A: Well, we rode, we rode.

Q: You rode on a. . .

A: A planter.

Q: On a planter. Did you ever have a plow that you walked behind?

A: Oh yes. Broke sod with it, single row.

Q: Did you break a lot of sod in your day?

A: Not too much, just what I had of my own.

Q: Is that a difficult job?

A: Not too bad. You've got to have the right kind of plow.

Q: Do you use, did you use a different plow for sod than you did. . .

A: Yes. You have to have a longer _____ bar to lay it over, right. You couldn't throw it over, you know.

Q: Does a vegetable grow better in newly plowed ground or in ground that's been worked for a number of years?

A: Well, I think it's got to be worked for vegetables.

Q: And made finer?

A: Yes.

Q: How about grain, does the same thing. . .

A: Some can go in pretty rough. You work it after it's in.

Q: Did you plant, like your oats and so forth in rows, too, or just scatter?

A: No, we had a seeder eleven foot wide.

Q: And that just spread it out?

A: Well, it fell out of the bottom, you know. The auger drove from the wheels.

Q: And this was after you had a tractor?

A: Before. Then I had a _____ gague seeder, they called. Off of

Q: wagon _____. You pulled a wagon, that throw about twelve rows at a shot. Had a whirler on it.

Q: If it whirler it, didn't it broadcast it?

A: Yes.

Q: It didn't make just individual rows?

A: No. That was for grain, small grain.

Q: Is grain still planted, broadcast? Or is it planted in rows now?

A: They have a seeder that they pull behind a wagon. Well, they've got

Q: To spread it. Did you ever have a problem with too dry weather?

Where it was so dry that a crop. . .

A: Yes, we had several years of that. Corn burned up, ~~XXXXXX~~

~~XXXX~~ and one year chinch bugs got in it. Didn't raise any corn.

Q: Not any, you didn't get a crop at all that year. That was pretty disasterous, wasn't it?

A: Yes. No rain, you know.

Q: Do the chinch bugs come when there is no rain?

A: Well, it was a tough year, it was so dry you know. I don't know where they come from or where they went.

Q: But they were there?

A: They were there.

Q: Did that mean then, that was before days of insurance I suppose?

A: Yes.

Q: And do they insurance against chinch bugs now?

A: I don't think so.

Q: That would be pretty disasterous for your way of life then, wouldn't it?

A: Yes. (cuckoo clock sounds) At that time it was.

Q: Did that affect the food you had to eat on the table during the next winter then?

A: Oh sure.

Q: Did you have other crops that did well so that...

A: I had a few soy beans that year, and they didn't like soy beans, the bugs. Went right through that to the corn field.

Q: So you were able to get your soy beans?

A: Well, I got a few, well wasn't too big that year.

Q: What were soy beans used for? They have...

A: Oh, they got so many uses for it now.

Q: Now they have a lot. We've even had salted soy beans, instead of peanuts which are very good. Did you, when you grew soy beans, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ did you take that to the eleavator also?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you use any yourselves at home?

A: No.

Q: Do soy beans put back nitrogen into the soil like other beans?

A: Oh, they take a lot of it out, like corn.

Q: Do you alternate soy beans and corn, is that a way of doing it?

A: Yes. I dind't raise too many in my time, but now they raise about half and half.

Q: Half and half with the corn?

A: Yes.

Q: Were there any other bugs other than chinch bugs that ever got after the. . .

A: Oh, it was, I don't know what they called them. It was more like a worm, eat the _____ of the corn, and the corn drop off in the field, on the ground.

Q: Did that ever destroy a crop for you?

A: Well, no. _____

Q: How about corn smut? Was that a. . .

A: Well, that don't bother much around here. There is a little, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ though.

Q: But not enough to be concerned about. Do you ever know of a time when locust swept through this part of the country, or did they ever?

A: No.

Q: That's good. (laughter)

A: I know we've had them.

Q: But not where they've destroyed a crop. That's hard to believe, though, that they can do that, but I guess they do. Do you have any other things that you can think of that I've missed?

A: Oh, I don't know. I guess not.

Q: Did you take your animals to the blacksmith to ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ have horse shoes put on, or did you do that yourself?

A: Yes, I had a team shod every winter. Kept them in the barn.

Q: The blacksmith came to you?

A: No, I took them to town.

Q: Was there a blacksmith in Mendota at that time?

A: Yes, they had two, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ three of them at least.

Q: If an animal became sick what did you do, nurse him yourself?

A: I called the veterinarian.

Q: You have a veterinarian in town?

A: Yes.

Q: What were some of the common things that bothered animals?

A: Well, sometimes they'd get a colic, they'd lay down and roll.

And you'd have to get some medicine for it.

Q: Would that affect all the animals, sheep, cows, horses?

A: No, just the ones that would get it, you know. It wouldn't go through the whole thing.

Q: Was that a cow that would get colic usually?

A: No, a horse.

Q:
END OF TAPE