

**Farm life in Clarion Township, Bureau County**  
*an Oral History*

Fred Herr, Interviewee  
Of LaMoille, Illinois

Interview Date: April 2, 1975

Oral History Tape Number: TC OH 9 HER

Tape Number: 9

Number of Transcribed Pages: 6

Subject(s) Covered: farming

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Narrator's Name: FRED HERR  
Tape Number: 1  
Date of Interview: APRIL 2, 1975  
Place of Interview:  
Interviewer's Name: DONALD R. NORRIS  
For: STARVED ROCK LIBRARY SYSTEM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Q: Can you see that, those are turning in there. Well, Mr. Herr. . .

A: No mister.

Q: Fred?

A: Yes.

Q: It's awful nice of you to let me come over and talk to you this afternoon. I'm Donald Norris from south of LaMoille. . .

A: Yes, I know where you are.

Q: And he says we're old friends, and that the way we want to talk about old times. Now is it all right for me to call you Fred?

A: Yes.

Q: Well Fred, tell everybody where you were born.

A: Right on the home place.

Q: In what township?

A: Clarion Township.

Q: Clarion Township in Bureau County?

A. Yes.

Q: Bureau County in Illinois?

A: Yes.

Q: Well, it's a real good farming area, isn't it?

A: I always thought it was as good as any place. Wonder why some are, when I come back home, I thought it was good enough for anybody.

Q: Well now, when you say that you came back home, where. . .

A: Home--back from Kansas city and Omaha, out to my brother-in-laws in Colorado.

Q: I see. Well now before we get too far, tell me your father and mother's name.

A: My father's name was the same as mine, Fred Herr.

Q: Fred Herr, H-E-R-R?

A: Yes. My mother's name was Katarina, what do you call, Kate.

Q: Now they came from Germany, I presume?

A: Yes. \_\_\_\_\_

Q: In what year?

A: I wouldn't know that.

Q: Sure you know.

A: I wouldn't know, before they were married.

Q: Married in America or. . .

A: They got married in America, south of the \_\_\_\_\_ on the east side of the road, my mother and her dad had a farm there.

Q: Well, how did your father get started farming?

A: I don't know. He was in the Civil War, ruined his health. That time they could hire a man, he went in Bill Horn's place. He was to give him two thousand dollars, but when he come back, when he come back he only give him one thousand.

Q: Is that so? A dirty trick.

A: Sure.

Q: Well, I should say. How many brothers and sisters--how big was your family?

A: Four boys and four girls.

Q: That's a nice, big family. And they all stayed home on the farm?

A: Well, I had a brother--when he was eighteen years old--he was a year older than I, and my sister who was younger--they had the scarlet fever and on Monday my younger sister was buried and my brother died

A: that night.

Q: Is that right, scarlet fever?

A: Yes.

Q: That was a bad illness, wasn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: Well, Fred, we want to get it down here for the record, the year you were born, can you tell us the day and the month?

A: February 26.

Q: What year?

A: You figure it out yourself.

Q: February 26, 18. . .

A: Did you say 1874?

Q: Yes, 1874. Now you say it.

A: 1874.

Q: You were born right on the farm, where you lived all your life then?

A: Yes. Not all my life, we lived in town after I quit farming.

My son-in-law is on the farm.

Q: But your early life, all your early life. . .

A: Yes.

Q: How big is your farm now?

A: Well, let's see. It was 132 acres on the east side of the road and 80 acres on the west side. Yes.

Q: All good level land, wonderful land.

A: Yes, you could work every corner.

Q: Well, then you had some cattle and hogs, and horses? No tractors?

A: Not right away. Before I quit farming I had a tractor.

Q: Did your father ever use oxen?

A: No. I heard him talk that \_\_\_\_\_ oxen to Chicago, delivered grain before his time.

Q: How many acres did your father have when he started farming?

A: Well, then 132 acres.

Q: And then the 80 acres across the road. . .

A: That I bought the first year I farmed for myself.

Q: Do you remember what you paid for it?

A: Let's see--\$150 an acre, then later I bought the home place for \$200.

Q: From your brother and sisters?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you really have a hard time paying for it? Do you remember that?

A: Not too hard, my missus--her mother died when she was a year and a half old, and then I think it was Henry Stembach--what do you call them. . .

Q: Executor.

A: Yes. I can remember. There was one boy and two girls and I guess each one got two thousand dollars and then her brother died and then they got his share when they were \_\_\_\_\_.

Q: These were your wife's family?

A: Yes. That was quite a little in them days.

Q: Now when you started farming you started with--you had some hogs and had some cattle?

A: Yes. I started with two hogs, I sold for two cents a pound. My first load of oats, I hauled them to Mendota to the \_\_\_\_\_ elevator, I get two cents a bushel. I had a hundred bushels on my wagon, they give me ten silver dollars.

Q: (laughter) Isn't that something?

A: \_\_\_\_\_ together once and didn't hardly clear us two cents.

Q: Do you remember, can you think what year that was?

A: No.

Q: Do you think it was in. . .

A: I wouldn't say for sure.

Q: Two cents for the hogs. . .

A: Yes.

Q: Now when did you start to go to school? How much education. . .

A: I didn't have too much. . .I didn't go to no high school. My dad wanted my older--my other brother--us to go down to the school but we wouldn't do it.

Q: You rather stay home on the farm?

A: Sure.

Q: But he worked you hard, I'll bet, didn't he?

A: Hard enough, of course there was always plenty. . . My oldest brother when he was a kid he got pneumonia, he got lung fever, and he never worked in the fields, had an open side as long as he lived, he lived till he was some twenty years old. He never worked in the field he helped the folks at home.

Q: In the house?

A: Yes. My dad wasn't too well a man neither.

Q: Well, you boys did the field work, and did the chores. . .

A: Yes.

Q: You picked the corn by hand and when you went out to pick corn well, let's see, when you went out to plant corn, how many acres a day?

A: I wouldn't know no more.

Q: Did you use a team and. . .

A: Yes.

Q: . . .you didn't plant by hand, you used a team and. . .

A: Yes, but my dad, I can remember my dad \_\_\_\_\_  
sowed oats by hand, had a sack hanging on him. . .

Q: How many acres a day?

A: I wouldn't know.

Q: Would he get ten acres a day or . . .

A: I don't know.

Q: Pretty tired at night from walking?

A: I guess, because he wasn't too strong.

Q: At what age do you think you were when you started to work in  
the field ?

A: Pretty young, I worked in the field more than my brother, a year  
older than I. I always like to drive horses and I--my other older brother  
we done the field work.

Q: And your health was always good?

A: Yes. Till I got that scarlet fever. I was just as sick as my  
beother and sisters were but they died \_\_\_\_\_ I guess they didn't  
think I'd pull through.

Q: But you made it?

A: Yes.

Q: The Lord really blessed you then, didn't He?

A: He sure did.

END OF SIDE ONE      END OF TAPE