more or less secure feeling.

Q. You had been gone six months?

A. Yes, six months.

Q. Was that when you lost Mrs. Mills?

A. No, I lost her, I guess the following February, the sixteenth.

Q. You and Mrs. Mills had been married for how many years?

A. Fifty-five years.

Q. Mr. Mills, not only for Sangamon State University but also for myself, I want to thank you for sharing all these wonderful memories with me. You've been so patient with me and I've learned so much.

A. I've enjoyed it immensely.

Q. I certainly have.

A. I've never done anything to be ashamed of, and I just enjoyed talking to you.

Q. I have too. Thank you.

A. No, we don't.

Q. How about to the 20 acres which is south?

A. We never take anything down there any more than a mower. We keep it in pasture.

Q. It's all in pasture?

A. It's all in pasture.

Q. Do you feel close to the land, Mr. Mills? Tell me that story about when you came home from the hospital.

A. (laughs) Well, to show you how close I feel to it, that's a good example.

Q. I think it is.

A. I lay down there in the hospital in the planting season and worried some; you can't help but worry. And the nurse come to me, and she said, "Mr. Mills, you've only got one thing to worry about, that's yourself." Which is nice words, soothing. (laughs) Anyhow, they brought me home the fifteenth of June.

Q. You were in a walker.

A. I was using a walker; it was the only way I could get around. And I naturally--it was about this time of the year--wanted to get out and see what the crops looked like. And the pickup truck was setting out here, and I hobbled out there to it. And the lady that was staying with me, Mrs. Clark, she was watching me pretty close. She followed me, and she said, "Where are you going?" "I'm going to ride around and look at the crops." She reached in and took the keys out of the truck. Well, you can imagine how high my fever went. (laughter) I never said a word to her. I think I sat down out there in the chair for a little bit, and she came on back in the house. So I hobbled on around back to the machine shed; there sat the tractor. I got up on the tractor and took off. And she had a fit; she got in her car and went out to the field and told Don where I was. And he said, "I know it, I seen him."

Q. She went out and told Donald where you were?

A. Yes, he said, "I know it, I seen him. He won't hurt himself." And I put that tractor in low gear, and you'd have had to walk awful slow to walk behind me. And it didn't hurt me one iota. I drove around and looked at the crops, and that give me a wonderful feeling to know that everything looked pretty good.

Q. That was the first time that you missed planting in your whole life, wasn't it?

A. That's right, the first time that I ever missed it. It gives you a

Q. How did you feel about the Watergate affair, to see a president resign?

A. I don't know anything about it, only what I read. But I think President Nixon was ill advised somewhere along the line. I don't think the man is that kind of a man. And I'll say this, I think he's the most thought of president that we ever had all over the world, not just America, but all over the world. And it was as much of a shock to them as it was to us.

Q. Did that give you a sad feeling?

A. Yes, it did. I sat in there and watched it on television the night he resigned, and I'll tell you, he's got more guts than any man I ever saw to stand up before television and give that speech he gave that night. That was history, Mrs. Berg.

Q. Yes, it was, Mr. Mills.

A. And he never broke down either.

Q. No, he didn't. Mr. Mills, you've lived here on this land for many, many years, and you've put crops in every year, and you've watched them grow, and you've harvested them. Have you ever thought about how you feel about it and how you feel about nature?

A. Well, I got a little pride about me; I'm proud of it.

Q. I think you should be.

A. I feel like I've accomplished something, and I've got something to leave to my kids. They're not going to be paupers if they got sense enough to take care of it. And that gives you a mighty good feeling.

Q. I'm sure it does. You have this farm, the farm we're on right now which is 160 acres, and you told me your mother left you . . .

A. My mother left me the 20 acres they bought when they first moved up here.

Q. So you have all together 180 acres?

A. One-hundred eighty acres.

Q. Does Donald live on part of this farm?

A. No, they live on another farm. His wife bought the 80 acres where they live, and then he or both of them bought another 80 acres over here. So they have got 160 acres.

Q. Does their land come up to yours?

A. No, it's about a mile apart.

Q. Do you have any problems moving equipment back and forth?

Q. Donald does most of the farming for you?

A. Yes, he does it all. I'm the helper; I help him.

Q. Then you have some arrangement with your harvest?

A. Yes, 50-50.

Q. Are you covered by Social Security?

A. Yes.

Q. But that hasn't always been the case has it that an independent farmer would be covered by Social Security?

A. No, it began in 1951.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the assassination of President Kennedy, how did you feel when you heard the news? It was on a Friday, I believe.

A. That's kind of a hard question to answer. Of course, we hate to hear of anybody being assassinated, especially our president, but there's a lot more to that then probably the public will ever know. I see this fellow that they claimed killed him is confessing right now as to what actually happened. Now, whether they'll print it or not, I don't know. I think that just started a day or two ago.

Q. I think that's right; you're right.

Q. The man who supposedly shot John Kennedy was killed just several days after.

A. Was that Oswald?

Q. Yes, Lee Harvey Oswald.

A. And this Sirhan, he's the one who shot Robert. Well, there's a lot of different feelings about that Kennedy assassination, Jack Kennedy. It wouldn't do to print it.

Q. It was a pretty terrible feeling, wasn't it, to see a sitting president . . .

A. Quite a shock to the nation as a whole to loose any president. And you know that's remarkable, when I was a kid, Mrs. Berg, I'd say fifteen, sixteen, along in there, if you heard anybody call a president a son-of-a-B, you got knocked on your can right there. And if you saw anybody do anything to the American flag, the same thing. Today they do everything, stomp the American flag in the ground and call the president any kind of a name they want to and get away with it. In other words, I'd say the morale is at its lowest point. I don't see how it could get much lower. Dignity is a forgotten word.

Q. We're getting away from that?

A. Getting away from the fat. And breeding stock like that--you'd be surprised what it does. They always kicked quite a bit on a heavy jowl on a hog, which is more or less a waste fat. Well, we went to breeding them jowls off of the hog, and every time that you'd breed the jowl off of the hog, you'd lose part of the ham. Now why, I can't tell you, but that invariably happened. You'd cross them and get shut of that jowl, and you would also lose that ham. And they want a nice round ham. So you have to be awful careful.

Q. Did you belong to a Duroc Association when you were breeding Durocs?

A. No, I didn't. I thought about it--I registered quite a few hogs--I never joined the association.

Q. About how many hogs would you raise in a season?

A. Oh, I'd say in the neighborhood of a hundred a year.

Q. Would you have them farrowing several times during the year?

A. Twice a year, spring and fall.

Q. How many do you have now?

A. I don't have any.

Q. How many does Donald have now?

A. I expect Don has 80, 90 head out there, spring pigs.

Q. Will he have another batch in the fall?

A. This fall, yes. And he set a record. He's got six white sows out here, and I think they've had three litters. Their first litter, they averaged about ten apiece. Last spring he got 64 pigs out of them six sows. Now, that's something very exceptional, 64 out of six sows.

Q. That's really something. How about steers is he raising any steers?

A. A few, he's got seven Angus cows.

Q. When did you retire, Mr. Mills?

A. 1967.

Q. Was that a hard decision to make?

A. Well, I haven't retired; I just slowed down. (laughter) It's still in my blood; it always will be. I'm not an active operator any more.

ambition to get a hose and get to washing them pigs. (laughter) We had a hurdle, oh, make it about, I think, six, eight feet square, I think it was six feet square. You get a pig in there; he couldn't get away from you. And Ruthie would get in there, and she'd take that hose, and she'd just scrub the devil out of them pigs. Of course, they was gentle. But that's the way they took care of them.

Q. The county fair is usually late June, early July . . .

A. Now I said county fair, that's a little bit misleanding; they do have a county fair at New Berlin. But this county fair that we was attending at that time was more or less a 4-H Fair that was showed at the fairgrounds just a week ahead of the State Fair.

Q. So they showed at the 4-H Fair . . . .

A. At the 4-H Fair and at the State Fair, that's right. And Donald, he showed two steers. We went south of Springfield and bought the first one. He fed it and showed it; he won first on him. And then the next year, a neighbor up here had a nice calf, and we went up and bought him. He fed him, and he was wilder than a deer. But he done pretty good and he showed him, and he won first on him.

Q. Did they have to practice handling them?

A. Yes, break them to lead. And that wild steer, he had horns, and I was afraid of him a little bit, but Donald wasn't scared of him. That calf would just hug you, just get as close to you when you was leading him, he was scared now. The last I seen of that steer--M. B. Summers took him to St. Louis to the stockyards after the show--and the last I seen of him, he was running down the alley just as hard as he could run.

Q. When the children won the grand champion on their hog, did that have to be sold?

A. Yes, they had to be sold. They were, you might say, right, they were ready to sell. There would be no point in bringing them home.

Q. Did they get a good price for them?

A. Yes, at the time, which wasn't very much. I think Donald got $135 for his four barrows, and I don't remember what Ruthie got, she might have got a little more than that, not too much, maybe $150.

Q. The difference in their ages, probably Donald sold his in the late 1930's?

A. Yes. The rules has changed quite a bit since they showed. Now then, they show those barrows on foot, and then they take them over to, I think it's Beardstown, and slaughter them. They bring the carcass back and show the carcass. And you'd be surprised the difference. They might judge him first on foot, and he'd be down fifth, sixth place in the carcass show, too much fat.

Illinois by the name of Professor Russell. And he came over and looked at a pen of hogs, and I said, "What do you think of them?" "Well," he said, "I think they're just awful good hogs. Now don't go extreme, the wrong way with that breed of hogs." Well, we've kind of followed that, and we've been pretty lucky with it. But we haven't had a red hog for years. Now I'll take that back, we've got a red male hog, or Don has. But I don't remember how we got out of the red hog business. Well, I kind of do too, we went to crossing those hogs, those Duroc gilts on a Hampshire male hog, and that seemed to give us a more meaty type of hog; got away from so much fat. Then when you do a cross like that--we had pure-bred, red hogs--do a cross like that and then save gilts out of that cross, then you got cross-bred hogs. That's the way we got away from them.

Q. Would the children select their specimen when it was small and raise it up?

A. Now you're getting technical. (laughter)

Q. Well, that was their project.

A. I know it was their project, and they was supposed to do it, but they relied on Dad.

Q. I think I would too. (laughter) I'm sure that was perfectly permissable.

A. In a way. But it was hardly fair to the child; they're starting life along about that age.

Q. About how old were they?

A. I think they had to be ten or twelve years old, and they should begin to rely a little bit on their own judgment.

Q. Would they select their animal when it was young?

A. No. We just picked out the best, or what we thought was the best. And that bunch of pigs that Donald showed, what made them so good, we picked those four barrows out--you show a pen of barrows which is three, and then you show a single barrow which can be one of those three. Well, he showed four barrows, and we fixed a place out there for them. And we had an old cow--we was in the dairy business at that time--a Holstein cow that gave eight or nine gallons of milk a day. We'd milk that milk from that cow and take it right out and give it to those hogs. That's what put the bloom on them.

Q. They got special treatment?

A. They did.

Q. Did he have to go out and brush them?

A. Oh my, yes, wash, soap, brush them, that was the height of their

A. He's probably got beans; he's got quite a bit of storage, and he's probably got beans.

Q. Maybe he's learned a lesson he won't forget.

A. Well, that's experience. Now whether he got them too deep or whether he didn't get them deep enough, I didn't talk to him myself, but he reports up to the elevator every morning like a lot of the other farmers. The elevator man told me yesterday that Dave's got Monday set to decide whether to tear them up or let them go.

Q. Is the elevator kind of a meeting place for all of you?

A. It is. (laughter) They got a coffee maker in there, and they all come in there and have coffee, and usually somebody will bring in a dozen donuts or sweet rolls or something. That's the congregation place; there's where you get the gossip.

Q. Find out what's new?

A. Yes.

Q. You have raised quite a few hogs here, haven't you?

A. Yes, I have.

Q. Your children were interested in showing them, can you tell me about that?

A. After they got old enough, they joined the 4-H Club. To be a 4-H member, you have to have a project of some kind. Well, being farmers, we had the hogs, and I loved them, and they did too. I said, "Why not show hogs, just enter hogs as your project." Well, of course, Don was first, and he did. And he was so lucky; he just cleaned the show in the county show and the State Fair both. Then when Ruth became old enough, she thought her brother done so good, she would try. She did, and the little devil done the same thing he did. She won the county and she won the State [Fair].

Q. That must have been a thrill for you too.

A. It was a thrill for me and Mother; she enjoyed that.

Q. What breed of hogs?

A. Durocs, that's red.

Q. How would they prepare their hog for show?

A. Well, it's kind of like judging seed corn, they kind of use a point system, confirmation and this, that and the other, hams, loins, Along about the time Ruthie showed hogs, they begin to kind of back away from these fat hogs. Fat was waste. People kind of quit using lard and they went to using vegerable oil, and they didn't want too much lard on these hogs. I got pretty well acquainted with a judge from the University of

Q. You would have been very hard pressed if he had to go.

A. I would have.

Q. Were there any government regulations issued during the war for you, were you told to raise certain crops or to raise as much as you could?

A. During the war?

Q. Yes.

A. There was no restrictions, as I recall, during the war, just produce all you could. That's the greatest weapon in the world is food. Since then, we have had quite a lot of experiences with allotments, one thing and another like that. They would allow you to raise so much corn and so much wheat. There never was an allotment, never has been up to now, on soybeans. Soybeans is a very fast growing crop. What I mean by that, usefulness, they make everything out of soybeans any more.

Q. When did you start raising soybeans?

A. Oh, I don't know, I'd say back in the--probably in the late 1930's, early 1940's.

There was one old man--now we'll add a little humor here--there was an old man up there south of Williamsville that grew the first soybeans that was grown in this neighborhood and he would stack them out in the field. He also raised a lot of hogs, and he just let the hogs run to them stacks until they ate the beans up, and the stack just fell over. And a lot of people--and he was pretty successful--a lot of people got to asking him when was the time to sow soybeans. And he was a little, old, sawed-off Irishman, and he kind of winked up one eye, and he says, "By God," he said, "when you can sleep in your shirt tail, that's the time to sow soybeans." (laughter) And he was so right, you don't want to plant soybeans in cold ground.

Q. You want to wait until it's warmer?

A. Until it's warm, and then they just come right up.

Q. We saw that right out here east of the house, didn't we?

A. Yes. Now take you half a mile east of here, he sowed them, and I don't know what happened, but he ain't got near half a stand. It's a shame; I don't know what he's going to do with them. He's got Monday set to decide. He says, "I'm going to let them stay until Monday, and if they don't look any better, I'm going to tear them up and plant them over."

Q. Would it be too late to plant them now?

A. Oh, no, but it's an expensive project. It would take six or seven hundred dollars worth of beans to replant that.

Q. And chances are he didn't save that much. He saved enough for one planting?

A. Oh yes, a lot of them. I pulled out a lot of people.

Q. Do you have your own gasoline here on the farm?

A. Yes. (tape turned off and on)

Q. Mr. Mills, do you remember December 7, 1941?

A. I do, the day we had Pearl Harbor.

Q. Do you remember how you felt about that?

A. Well, it was quite a shock for one reason. When they said they dropped a bomb right down the smoke stack of the Arizona, I had a very, very good friend on that boat.

Q. You did?

A. I did. And by the way, Mrs. Berg, they supposedly sunk that in Pearl Harbor, and as to my knowledge, they never raised it. But here, I guess it's been about 25 years ago now, Mother and I was in California; I know that I saw a boat tied up in San Diego Bay with Arizona across the bow of that boat.

Q. Maybe they built a new one.

A. They never name a boat after one that's sunk, never.

Q. I can't answer that.

A. Whether somebody did raise that boat for salvage . . .

Q. No, it's still there, Mr. Mills it's a memorial there in the bay. You can take a boat out to see it.

A. Do you know the boat is there?

Q. Well now, that's a good question.

A. I know I saw that boat in San Diego Bay.

Q. Did your friend lose his life that day?

A. Yes. It was a large boat, it wasn't dry docked, it was anchored there. Didn't look like it had been at sea for years, but it was there. And I come home and told some of the boys about it; [they] said it couldn't be. "Well," I said, "I know it is because I seen it."

Q. There must be some explanation for that. Did your son have to register for the draft?

A. Yes, he went to St. Louis and took his physical, and they turned him down.

And I called and hollered and carried on, and he didn't pay no attention to me, and I'll bet you, he tracked that quail for one-half a quarter, and here he come back carrying it. Now that's a thrill.

Q. I'll bet it was. What was his name?

A. Duke.

Q. Did you teach him to do that?

A. I did, and nature; he was a natural-born retriever.

Q. Did you have another bird dog after he died?

A. I had one of his pups--it [was] just as good as he was--and it got killed, I think in about 1920. That teacher that I told you taught over here by the name of Bill Hoek, it was a big sleet storm on, and he came to school in a car, and the dog was over there browsing around, and he run over him and killed him. I hated that worse than the world, but better been that than a kid.

Q. Have you ever trained anyone else's dog?

A. No, only mine.

Q. You and your brother-in-law used to hunt together, didn't you?

A. Yes, mine was a pointer, his was an English setter, and we had a lot of arguments about them two dogs. (laughter) She was a good dog, but she wasn't near as good as my dog. I'm not partial either. (laughs)

Q. You must have enjoyed that very much.

A. Oh my, I'll say we did.

Q. Mr. Mills, automobiles are something that most of us today take very much for granted, can you tell me about the first automobile your family got, and wasn't it a big event?

A. It was quite a thrill to the whole family. It was a 1916 Maxwell touring car. We took quite a lot of pride with the thing. I don't know how long it would have lasted if it had been properly taken care of. I was young and ambitious, and I beat it pretty hard sometimes. (laughs) I don't know how long the car lasted, but we finally traded it off--Dad did, Dad bought it, he gave $135 for it. And he traded it off to Ralph Lord for an Oakland. We drove it for several years, and then we got started in the Dodge line; and I don't know, we had four or five Dodges.

As I told you, my mother bought my youngest sister that old coupe to drive to school; and she did when the road was dry. And when it was muddy, I pulled her with my old mules.

Q. How about other people out here on the road, did you have to rescue a lot of people?

Q. That was quite an experience wasn't it?

A. It was, and I remember it was a real foggy, drizzly night, and we couldn't see nothing, but you could hear them horns--there was quite a drove of cattle--them horns was hitting one another and them cattle running toward us, now you had to do something. (laughs) We climbed a tree.

Q. What happened to your dog?

A. Well, he could get away from them. As soon as they scattered out, he come back to us. You know, that's quite a thrill, Mrs. Berg, to have a dog that's a good dog that you can take in the timber, turn him loose, sit down on a log and wait till he strikes a track or trees, one of the two. And we had a dog of that caliber. And if there wasn't anything on the ground, he'd hunt maybe for a half hour, and he'd come right back to us.

Q. So you'd know that you'd better move to another spot.

A. Yes, it was time to move.

Q. Would he just work within a certain radius of you?

A. He probably worked in circles, and if he found a track, why, he'd run it. If he didn't find a track, he'd just keep making circles.

Q. Once he treed his prey, then would he bark?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. But he was silent until then?

A. This one particular dog was; he was a game hog's dog. (laughs) A game hog, they go out for the coon, they don't go out for the sport. Well, this old dog in particular was a still trailer, and you never heard him bark untill he treed. The only way that you could tell that he was running the track, his old tail would just twist and wind and twist and wind. Sit down, it couldn't be long until old Nig done something. (laughs)

Q. From where you were sitting, was the dog usually visible?

A. Oh no, not at night.

Q. You always did the coon hunting at night?

A. Oh yes, fox hunting too.

Q. But your hunting with the bird dog was during the day, and that dog would be silent wouldn't he?

A. Oh yes, he wouldn't bark. And I remember one time--I'm speaking of a good dog now, I think he was the best dog that ever went to the field--I knocked a quail down, and I saw it go down; and that old dog come in, and he made a circle, and he took out going north just as hard as he could run.

Q. But you got your fair share of coon and quail.

A. I got my share of quail and pheasant. I'd kill about, in the neighborhood of fifty quail in a season. And by the way, they're wonderful eating. I'd just give anything for a mess of quail right today. I haven't had a quail in the--oh, I'll bet you, in the last ten years. I haven't been able to hunt. Didn't have no dog; I'd just as soon stay at the house as go hunting without a dog. That's what a dog is for, to do the hunting, you're to do the shooting. Donald, I never could get him interested--he liked to hunt--but I never could get him interested in a dog. He's killed very few quail. Once in awhile, he'd get one or two.

Q. Was your father interested?

A. Not too much. His father was--that would be my grandfather. He bred, raised and sold bird dogs, and I remember him telling me one time that he sold a female dog and shipped her . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

Q. Your grandfather shipped a dog to Chicago?

A. In about two weeks time, here come that dog trotting down the railroad track back home.

Q. How old was the dog?

A. I don't remember how old it was.

Q. Why, that's 250 miles.

A. I know it, but you cannot loose a dog, now.

Q. Not a bird dog.

A. No sir. (laughter) And they tell me that the philosophy or strategy or whatever you want to call it, a dog that's lost will start making circles and just go in circles, and they'll eventually run into something that they recognize; and once they do, here they come.

I might tell you about one experience we had coon hunting. There was a timber over here north of Sherman that was good hunting, and we went over there. The people that owned the place--it was a big timber pasture, and those dogs hit a coon track and away they went--and the fellow that owned the place was a cattle feeder, and he'd go to Texas and buy them long-horned steers. Them things was like a lot of being civilized, now I'm telling you. And when the dog got around them, of course, they'd take after that dog, and the dog would come right to us, and we had to climb a tree to get away from them long-horns. I expect we sat up in that tree for hours. Finally they scattered out and got away to where we got down and got to the fence and got out of there or we'd have got killed.

Q. So you kept both kinds of dogs?

A. Yes.

Q. How many did you have?

A. I only had the one bird dog, and I had as high as six hounds here, too many. (laughs)

Q. You just couldn't resist them, eh?

A. No, I enjoyed it.

Q. You were especially proud of that bird dog, weren't you?

A. Oh yes, I was. I raised that little thing. That's kind of a long story. Dad was road commissioner in this township, and he had a couple of fellows hired that worked for him, and they went on a trip out in Kansas. They saw this female dog; she looked pretty good, and they swiped her. And they brought her home with them, and she had pups. These boys told Dad, they said, "Now, John, if you want one, you can have it." And he got me my first bird dog, and I raised that little fellow up and I think he was about eighteen years old when he died. You know a dog's life, ratio between them and a human being?

Q. No.

A. One to nine.

Q. How long ago was that?

A. That was a long time ago; I was a young man.

Q. Today, for a dog to reach eighteen years of age is considered very old. Did you ever trade back and forth with your coon dogs?

A. Oh, we'd trade them and sell them and buy them. It was just kind of a hobby. (laughs)

Q. Sounds like it was something that you thoroughly enjoyed.

A. Yes, you can. You get wrapped up in them and you really enjoy it.

Q. Did you ever hunt ducks?

A. A lot of times and I never killed a duck in my life.

Q. You didn't?

A. I never did, and why I don't know, I'll bet I've shot at a million of them and I never did kill a duck.

Q. How about a goose?

A. Or a goose either.

100 to 200 men meet at a central location, and then they had trucks there would take them out around and then they would start driving and closing in. And when they got into a small circle, why the fox couldn't get out, he just run back and forth till somebody killed him, shotgun.

Q. You would meet at a central location, and with trucks be taken out into a big circle, what do you suppose the diameter of that circle would be?

A. Possibly two mile.

Q. Then you would begin to work your way into the circle?

A. Work your way back toward the center.

Q. Did you bring the dogs?

A. We wouldn't use no dogs. No, that was just a regular old man and fox shoot.

Q. You call it a fox drive?

A. Yes.

Q. Would you usually have that fox drive because there was a problem in the neighborhood?

A. Well, yes. They were bad on chickens and small animals such as pigs and lambs and that sort of stuff. They would kill them. They got to be a nuisance, and we began to have fox drives. I don't think we ever had a fizzle; we'd always get a few foxes, and we'd turn them over to some organization. We didn't want to fool around with them.

Q. Would you get some other things besides foxes?

A. No, that was all you was allowed to shoot at. You wasn't allowed to shoot a rabbit or a quail or a pheasant or nothing. If you did, you got bawled out. That's poor sportmanship.

Q. Did you do a lot of pheasant hunting?

A. Yes, I did a lot of pheasant hunting. A brother-in-law and I, we had an engagement with a man up at Fancy Priairie by the name of Walt Cole that we went every November 11, the day the season opened. And we'd go pheasant hunting there on the first day. Then after that, we'd just liable go anywhere anytime.

Q. Would you use the same dog for the coon hunt that you did . . .

A. Oh no, we had regular bird dogs. Hounds were either foxhounds or coonhounds. There's as much difference as a white person and a black person. (laughs)

Q. Each of you would have a dog?

A. Most generally, there was three of us that had the dogs. Maybe we'd have some company and maybe we wouldn't. It's quite a thrill, and it's almost unbelievable that you get acquainted with a dogs voice and we could tell whether my dog was leading or your dog was leading or somebody else's dog was leading. (laughs)

Q. What kind of dogs were they?

A. Foxhounds, coonhounds. A friend of mine had an awful good coon dog, but he was what they call a still trailer, and he never would say a word until the coon went up a tree, then he'd sit there and bark and bark and bark until we went to him. A foxhound, the sport you get out of them is just what I said, just listening to them dogs bawl and run, you never caught a fox. (laughter)

Q. But you would get the coon?

A. Sometimes, if he went in a hole, we didn't get him. If he went up a dead tree, chances are we didn't get him. Coon hides was worth a lot of money at that time, we'd get fifteen, eighteen dollars for a coon hide. Then the dang women, they quit wearing fur coats, and coon hides got down to fifty, seventy-five cents; wasn't worth skinning. (laughs)

Q. How high did they get?

A. Around eighteen, twenty dollars for a good black coon, the blacker the better.

Q. That was worth it then, wasn't it?

A. Yes, as far as money was concerned, but we wasn't out there for the money that was in it. We was out there for the sport.

Q. But it's nice if you can get something for it too. What did you consider a good season?

A. If we got ten, twelve, we done pretty good for a season.

Q. Are they good to eat?

A. Some people eats them; I never did try one. They say they are, and I don't see why they wouldn't be, they're about the cleanest animal that there is that runs loose. They wash every bit of food they eat. If you've ever noticed on television, a coon will sit down there on the rock or something and he'll wash the fish or whatever he catches before he eats it.

Q. That's true. Would you ever get foxes?

A. No, we never would get fox. We'd get some foxes; we'd have fox drives. We'd advertise that maybe for a couple of weeks and we'd have anywhere from

Q. Mr. Mills, you told me you served on the election board for a number of years, will you tell me about that?

A. I registered in 1919, and I don't know who appointed me on the election board now; but they did, and I sat on the election board for 51 years straight, the same precinct.

Q. In Barclay?

A. Yes.

Q. What were your duties on the election board?

A. Issue ballots and keep records of the voters and see that they were registered correctly and so forth. Then count the ballots and deliver the ballots back to the county court house. Now then, that's all been changed. They do that by computers; we used to do that by hand.

Q. You mean paper ballots?

A. Yes, we'd sit up there, oh, midnight, one, two o'clock in the morning counting those ballots. My job was reading them. The other clerks would tally.

Q. How big a precinct?

A. We had about 250 voters in this precinct. Now it's pretty close to 400.

Q. What kind of turnout would you get?

A. Usually, from 50 to 90 percent. Presidential election was the biggest turnout.

Q. That's fantastic when you can get 90 percent. I'm surprised that you had any time for hobbies as busy as you were, but you were interested in hunting, were't you?

A. I guess you'd call it kind of a sporting blood in you; I had it all my life, but I never had too much time to exercise it. Like hunting quail, those things are done by seasons, quail season used to come the fifteenth of November and out the fifteenth of December; you had 30 days. After that it was illegal to kill them. Coon hunting and fox hunting, you could run them all winter, and that was just more or less done for sport. You get wrapped up with a bunch of hounds, you like to get out in the timber and sit down on a log and sit there and smoke your old pipe and listen to them dogs run. It's a thrill, now.

Q. Would there be a group of you who would go out?

A. Usually four or five.

Q. Would you buy cartons in big lots?

A. We'd buy a hundred dozen at a time. I can tell you something that might turn your stomach. You know cockerels in a laying breed of chickens is not worth very much.

Q. A what?

A. Cockerel, male bird. When they were sexing these chickens, they run usually about half and half, about half cockerels and half pullets. Well, I've seen them have barrels of cockerel chickens, they just throw them in them barrels and kill them; take them out to the dump.

Q. Wouldn't they have been good to raise for broilers?

A. Yes, but they would consume just as much food as a heavier breed of chicken, and when you got done, you'd have a lot more chicken. So they didn't figure it was hardly worthwhile to fool with them.

Q. This was done by the hatchery?

A. Yes, Schafers done it.

Q. Business is business, right?

A. Yes. There again you can see it's not all profit. And they had flocks of chickens scattered around the country that they depended on for their breeding flocks, that they got their eggs from that they set, put in the incubator. They would test those flocks to see that they was clean of all kinds of disease, and then they would pick the cockerels to put with those hens to make the eggs fertile.

Q. Are chickens as susceptible to disease or to problems as say your dairy herd was?

A. Yes, I used to know the name of some of their diseases. We've got a gallon of sulmite, or part of a gallon of sulmite in the basement. How come we have it--it was a pretty expensive drug to buy locally from a veterinarian--this boy across the road here became a veterinarian, and he was a very good friend of ours. He happened to be home one time, and Mother asked him if he wouldn't get her a gallon of sulmite for her chickens. And he said, "Yes, I'll get you a gallon." So he went down to the wholesale drug place and got her a gallon of sulmite.

Q. What did she use that for?

A. I can't think of the name of it, but what it amounted to was bloody scours. There is a name for it, but I can't think of it.

Q. How did she administer this?

A. In the water, and it would clean them up. It would kill them if you didn't do something about it.

A. I don't know whether it's mismanagement or what, but they did. There's not too much profit in eggs. I was talking to the elevator man yesterday in regards to chickens. Most of the chickens, especially broilers, are raised in the south, Mississippi and Arkansas and down in there, and they've discovered that they can feed wheat and get along with it pretty good up to 50 percent of their ration. They can add 50 percent wheat and then the rest has to be corn for their broilers. Of course, that hurt the corn market, but it did help the wheat market a little. It takes a lot of supplement to bring that protein up to have a balanced feed.

Q. I'ts not always as easy as it looks, is it?

A. No, not by a long ways. Wiedlocher Feed Company[9] there in Springfield furnished feed for both of those places, and I'd like to know how much money they lost on each one of them. I know they lost plenty.

Q. What was the name of that company?

A. Wiedlocher. They manufacture--brand name is Hubbard Feed. I had a funny experience with them one time, and I fell out with them. Back in the war blackstrap molasses--that's made from cane, that's raw molasses--every once in awhile, especially in the dairy business, if a cow is producing heavy, it draws a lot of sugar out of her body and system. And they--I forgot what they call it, but the veterinarian said, "All in the world she needs is a gallon or two of blackstrap to raise that sugar content in her system." And I went down there and I asked them if they would sell me some blackstrap. "No, go to your veterinarian and get it." "Man," I said, "the veterinarian doesn't stock blackstrap molasses." And they wouldn't sell it to me. All I wanted was a couple of gallons, but they wouldn't sell it.

Q. Where did you finally get it?

A. I think I finally went over to Schafers and got it.[10]

Q. Schafers, that's another feed store?

A. Yes, right across the street you might say from them. And then I went to buying feed from Schafers, and I bought a lot of feed from Schafers.

Q. You had a lot of mouths to feed out here.

A. Yes, and I bought all of Mother's egg cartons at Schafers. We bought a lot of day-old chickens from Schafers. They run a big hatchery there for a long time.

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[9]Wiedlocher & Sons, Inc. was located at 426 North Second Street. [Ed.]

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[10]Schafers was located at 225 North First Street. [Ed.]

about eighteen weeks, eighteen to twenty weeks.

Q. About how old would you let one of your laying hens get before you would sell her off?

A. If they were good, we might keep them for two years, but no longer than that.

Q. Then what did you do with them?

A. Sell them.

Q. Would you use any of them yourself?

A. Oh, whenever we wanted one. (laughs) But there's a lot of difference in baking chickens and laying chickens. Laying chickens are bred to lay and baking hens are, I don't know just how to describe it, they're more of a meaty type chicken. They got wider breasts and bigger legs. A laying hen is more like a racehorse, slim built.

Q. It's in the breeding then?

A. Yes.

Q. What breed of chickens did you have?

A. White Leghorn. White Rocks are the broilers. There's a world of difference in them.

Q. When did Mrs. Mills go out of this buisness?

A. Just kind of gradually. I think she still sold a few eggs when I went to the hospital, or pretty close to it. I went to the hospital on December 10, 1974, I believe. I think maybe she was still fiddling around with a few eggs, not many. I would say around early 1970's, 1971 or 1972, she went out of the egg business.

Q. Raising chickens is something people aren't doing much of anymore on an individual basis, that is a family basis.

A. There's very few flocks of chickens on farms today, very few.

Q. Why is that?

A. There's a lot of work attached to taking care of them, and there's a lot of expense added to their feed. And too many young women that don't know anything about it that's got a job in town, working in town, they ain't got no time to fool with chickens; and they buy their eggs.

We had two laying flocks in this neighbohood, not too far from here, had sixteen, seventeen thousand hens in each one of them. And they had a lot of eggs, and they both went broke.

Q. Why?

eggs next Saturday?" That's the way she built up her business. Even the old colored fellow that run the elevator, he knew she was taking eggs upstairs and he got her to bring him a couple dozen eggs every Saturday. I'll tell you, she'd get out of that car on Sixth Street and she'd have two shopping bags that, I'll bet you, had 20, 25 dozen eggs in them.

Q. And she was such a little, tiny person.

A. Yes, today they wouldn't let you double park long enough to get out.

Q. What did you do while Mrs. Mills was at Westenberger's?

A. I told you.

Q. I want you to tell it again. (laughter)

A. Well, I'd find a parking place. Most generally, I'd go to the Coney Island place up there and get me a hot dog, and then I'd go back to the Strand Theater and watch a picture show all afternoon.

Q. Did you have a certain time that you two would meet?

A. Yes, usually about four or four-thirty, and she was always late.

Q. She probably looked forward to those Saturdays.

A. Sure she did.

Q. This was year in and year out?

A. Yes. And I said, "Mother, I wish I could learn you that you can wait, but I can't. When I come along, say Sixth and Washington [Streets] there, I got to keep moving." I said, "It wouldn't hurt you to stand there five or ten minutes because I can't stop." Oh, we didn't have no bad arguments about it; it might help for a week or two. (laughs)

Q. Then it was back the way it was before?

A. Yes.

Q. How did she replenish her laying hens?

A. She bought day-old chicks.

Q. Didn't you incubate some of them here?

A. My mother did, but my wife never did. That's pretty complicated and a lot of work attached to it, and she never did try to incubate any eggs. We raised quite a few chickens in the brooder house. It got to where they got to sexing chickens, and you could buy pullets, and they'd guarantee 95 percent to be pullets. We would raise them pullets and put them in the laying house. We'd leave them in the brooder house until they got about sixteen, seventeen weeks old. They usually started coming into production

Twenty-three ounces is considered a hen egg. Anything below that is a pullet egg until you get down into fourteen or fifteen ounces and that's peewees; they're not worth very much. And, of course, we kind of used the Dutchman's theory, the Dutchman never sold anything he could eat. If he couldn't sell it, he'd eat it. (laughter)

Q. So whichever kind wasn't selling, that's what the Mills' family had for breakfast?

A. Yes, we might have to cook two or three for breakfast, but that was just as good as one big one.

Q. If they were over a certain weight, those were extra large eggs and she sold those separately?

A. Yes.

Q. Did she deliver or did people come here to the farm?

A. Mostly deliver, a few came out after them, but she kind of had a habit I think, just wanted to go to town and browse around. (laughs)

Q. Did she do it on a particular day?

A. Saturday.

Q. In the meantime, where did she keep all these eggs?

A. In the cellar.

Q. Where it was cool.

A. Yes, cool. It's about 47, 48 degrees down there right now, I'll bet you. Well, I don't know, since we opened the furnace room whether it would be that cool or not.

Q. But at that time, the furnace room was separate?

A. There wasn't no furnace.

Q. That's right. Would she deliver some of the eggs directly to a household?

A. Yes.

Q. Did she sell any downtown?

A. She took a world of them to Westenberger's to clerks that worked in there that got ahold of them.[8] Well, she knew the girls to begin with, and they knew she had eggs. "Mrs. Mills, can't you bring me a couple dozen

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[8]Westenberger's, a dry goods store located at 206 South Sixth Street. [Ed.]

A. That's right. We've went through so many things together, good and bad. And it's just kind of hard to think about parting, but it's coming.

Q. For all of us.

A. That's right.

Q. Tell me about Mrs. Mills' egg business.

A. Well, she worked hard on that egg business.

Q. Did she take it over from your mother?

A. Probably, you might say that. Mother always had chickens. I call them both Mother. (laughs) And then Mom got interested in it, and she liked it, and she had a lot of egg customers, and she enjoyed it.

Q. How many chickens did she have?

A. Oh, she'd average 150 to 250 laying hens. Besides that, she'd raise a bunch of broiler to eat.

Q. For yourselves or to sell?

A. Yes, she didn't sell many broilers. We just raised them for our own use.

Q. She'd get over 100 eggs a day?

A. Oh, yes. A lot of times, she'd get 150 eggs a day.

Q. What did she do with them?

A. She brought them in here and sat down and washed and weighed and boxed every one of those eggs according to size.

Q. That was a lot of handling.

A. Yes, it was. And I made so much fun of her. She wouldn't get mad, but she wouldn't quit her pattern. I said, "Mother, as many of them things as you've handled you should be able to pick one up and look at it and tell which carton it goes in." But she wouldn't listen to me.

Q. She just went right on and weighed every one of them?

A. Yes.

Q. How did she divide them, you said she had three different places that she would put them in?

A. By weight. Twenty-three, twenty-six and thirty ounces per dozen.

Q. Did they test each can?

A. Yes, everyday. Well, I said yes, they do, they take a sample out of each can everyday, and then they have what they call a composite test. They'll put that in a glass tube and keep it for several days, and then they'll test the composite; that's what you're paid on.

Q. While you were in the dairy business, Mrs. Mills had a business too, didn't she, she had her egg business?

A. Well, she never milked a cow in her life. She never even tried to. No sir, she didn't; she never was around that dairy barn.

Q. How about Ruth?

A. Oh, she was around there a little, but I don't think Ruth ever tried to milk a cow. But Donald, he just went to it like a pig does to slop. (laughter) I remember the old cow that he learned to milk on, she stood right by the door. She'd give a barrel of milk, and she was just as gentle as a cat. He was just a little shaver about so high.

Q. How old would you say he was?

A. I'd say eight. And he'd sit down there and milk that old cow and sweat. He thought he was a big man. (laughs)

Q. Even at the age of eight, he was help to you, wasn't he?

A. Oh yes. You know, Mrs. Berg, it's hard to believe how long we've been together.

Q. I was just going to ask you about the relationship between you and your son. You're very, very close, aren't you?

A. Very close and very, very, few people are that close.

Q. Do you find that you sort of look at a problem and each of you independently come up with the same solution?

A. We never had an argument in our lives.

Q. He just likes to kid you about those ten-dollar beans.

A. Yes. (laughs) But I love him, and yet today he wants Dad's advice. I sometimes think maybe that's not good; Dad ain't going to be here too much longer.

Q. We hope that's not true, Mr. Mills.

A. And then he's going to have to go on his own.

Q. He wants the benefit of your experience.

A. When we started shipping milk, I shipped to Illinois Dairy, we got $1.75 a hundred; that's twelve gallons of milk. Milk weighs eight pounds to the gallon or a little better. And I shipped there for, I don't know, I guess twelve, fifteen years, and I fell out with the plant manager. And there was an old fellow running a little dairy in Sherman; he wanted my milk awful bad. And I said, "All right, you can have it." And I started letting him have the milk, and we fell out in a couple of years. Then I. A. Madden was running Producer's Dairy in Springfield; he wanted my milk.[7] He said, "Bring her on in; we'll take it." And I finished up my career with the Producer's Dairy.

Q. Would you mind telling me what you fell out about, was it something about the business?

A. Well, at the Illinois Dairy, he was just like a milk inspector, Carl White was his name, he said the milk was dirty. And I said, "Carl, I've been shipping here for fifteen years. Did it take you fifteen years to find out that milk was dirty?" You can't argue with a person like that; they got the club over your head. And he said, "We just can't take it in that shape." "That's all right," I said, "I'll quit." And then over at Sherman, I think he said the milk was sour. I don't remember just what we fell out about, but anyhow I wasn't very enthused with him. And we went to shipping to the Producer's, and we never had a bit of trouble from then on.

Q. Did the price you received go up in relation to the prices you had to pay?

A. Oh, yes. It fluctuated at that time. Milk yet today is based on a three-five butterfat test. That's what they call standard. Say milk was worth $2.00 a hundred for three-five milk, and if it went above that, say three-seven, three-eight, you'd possibly get $2.50. And if it went below three-five, you'd probably get $1.60, $1.50. It fluctuated; it still does today on the same basis. Today milk is worth about $11 a hundred for three-five.

I know one time we was growling about a little more money for our milk--and Mr. Madden was a pretty nice old fellow that run the dairy--and it went right back to labor trouble just the same as things are today. He said, "Boys, if you gave us that milk, it would still cost the consumer ten cents a quart. It costs us that much to process it and deliver it."

Q. How about here for your own household, did you use the milk that . . .

A. Oh yes. And if we wanted a little whipped cream, we kind of fudged a little. (laughter) I raised a lot of cane about that, you let a can of milk--ten gallons of milk--set overnight and the cream is thick on it. It doesn't take much of a dipper full out of there to get all the whipped cream you wanted, but look out, it will show up on your test too.

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[7]Producers Dairy Company was located at 200 North Ninth Street. [Ed.]

if it hadn't been for milking cows I'd have never got through the University of Illinois." He said, "I took care of that dairy herd over there for four years." He understood what the dairy business was all about. And then we had another one by the name of McElroy. He was ornery; you couldn't satisfy him. And they finally got to where they wanted you to have a pan between the milk barn and milk house with a disinfectant solution in it that you walked through back and forth. Well, we never did that.

Q. Was that a requirement when you were still in the business?

A. No, it was just becoming enforceable about the time we quit. It is today.

Q. One of your neighbors had quite an experience with that, didn't he?

A. Yes, that was with McElroy. He got his pan about so deep full of stuff.

Q. About four inches deep?

A. Yes, and McElroy was shying around it and looking into the milk house, and Fitchen, he just grabbed him by the back of the neck and he says, "You just walk through that; I do." And he, [McElroy] suspended him for two weeks.

Q. Didn't you tell me that Mr. McElroy didn't have boots on?

A. No, he just had low-cut shoes on.

Q. He didn't appreciate the humor of the situation. (laughter)

A. He evidently didn't.

Q. That was quite a hardship to be suspended for two weeks, wasn't it?

A. It was.

Q. What did he do with the milk?

A. He gave it to hogs. He couldn't tell the cows to hold it for two weeks. (laughs)

Q. I didn't know if he had any opportunity to sell it someplace else during those two weeks.

A. No, he didn't bootleg it, no way; he just took her out and dumped her to the hogs. And I don't remember what time of year it was, it could have been that it was a time of year when they had a surplus and they didn't care whether they got any milk or not. Now, if it had been a time of year when there was a shortage of milk, he'd have never been suspended. You know, supply and demand had a great effect on things.

Q. What about the price that you received for the milk?

Q. What type of things did you have to do?

A. You had to paint all the inside of the cow barn, and you had to keep it clean and keep the floor limed--the floor was just as white as that paper--and the walls was painted. Same way with the milk house, we have a milk cooler--still out there--you had the keep that milk house just as clean as you would a room in your own house. That's one thing that kind of discouraged us, it didn't make any difference what you done, them inspectors would always want something else, want something else done. The last thing we fell out about that helped me decide to quite, they come out here and they was going to inspect the water. I said, "You go ahead and inspect it if you want, but I'll tell you right now, I'm not going to do nothing with it. It suits us." And he was going to have me dump a gallon of clorox in it, I believe. I've seen that in water and I said, "You ain't going to put that in my well." And they didn't. And just such things as that brought on and brought on and . . .

Q. After all, you were drinking the same water.

A. Why sure, yes.

Q. You've never had any trouble with that well?

A. No, the water is awful hard, awful hard, but we've got a world of it, and thank God for that. So many people hasn't got any.

Q. How did you clean those milk cans?

A. They cleaned them at the dairy. When they brought the can back, it was ready to put milk in.

Q. Was it sealed in some way?

A. Yes, it had a mushroom top that went down on it inside and then over the top, regular mushroom top is what it was.

Q. They would pick the milk up once a day?

A. Yes, everyday.

Q. After you got the milk, you put it in the can and then placed it in the cooler?

A. Put it in the cooler and cooled it, and then the milkman picked it up.

Q. What about things like washing your feet off, your shoes off, or your hands, things like that?

A. Well, cleanliness was the bible. But we quit before they got too far along with that. We was clean enough, as far as that's concerned, but as I say, those inpectors, it kind of went to their head, especially some of them. Paul Hanger was a prince of a man. And he told me, he said, "Win,

A. If they settle, we didn't like a cow to calf more than once a year. We had a little trouble of getting a cow to settle with that artificial breeding, and that's no good. When you're in the dairy business, you like for cows to come fresh kind of uniform, keep your milk supply pretty uniform. And if one misses, it will throw you all out of kilter. That's one of the differences between natural service and artificial. Natural service, they don't miss very often.

Q. Because your milk cows would calf every year, would you have a surplus of those animals?

A. We sold a lot of them for veal calves.

Q. Did you ever go ahead and feed some of them out?

A. Some of them, yes. And we saved a lot of them for replacements, for heifers, we saved a lot of heifers, go right in the milking line.

Q. How long were you in that business?

A. Forty-one years.

Q. Do you remember when you stopped?

A. I don't know if I do or not.

Q. Has it been quite awhile ago?

A. It has. It's been at least twenty years ago.

Q. I remember your telling me that when you first stopped the dairy business . . .

A. I thought we'd starve because we got our milk check every two weeks, but we survived. (laughs)

Q. That was a big decision to make, wasn't it?

A. Yes.

Q. Did it just get to be too much for you?

A. Yes, and then Don got wild ideas and wanted to get married, and I knew I couldn't do it by myself, so we just decided to quit.

Q. What about government restrictions, Mr. Mills, did you have to meet certain requirements?

A. That Grade A specification, yes, you did.

Q. Was that the federal government or the state government?

A. State.

Q. Was that something like a refrigerator?

A. Something, yes, similar. It had an ice bank in it. It was a water cooler, but nevertheless, the coils was always covered with ice.

Q. Did you milk by hand?

A. Part of the time. We finally bought a de Laval Milk Machine. And by the way, it's out there; I'll sell it to you pretty cheap. (laughter) If you'd put new tubes on it, it's just as good as new. We never did use it very much; we didn't like it.

Q. Is that right?

A. No, there's two reasons. Don and I could milk cows faster than that milk machine could milk them.

END OF TAPE

Q. Mr. Mills, we were talking about the dairy business and the fact that you bought a milking machine that you and Donald didn't like.

A. Well, we bought it, and we used it possibly a year, and the motor burned out on it. I had an argument with the people that I bought it from to get a new motor, but finally they replaced it; and, of course, in the meantime we had to milk by hand. The dairy business is something that's got to be tended to twice every day; and, I don't know, we just didn't think too much of it. I'll tell you, they're good; I guess they're better today than they was then because them days you put a milk machine on a cow's udder and you leave it on too long, you could suck blood out of her. And it would cause mastitis, and we just discarded it, quit using it.

Q. You found with the two of you that you could adequately handle it?

A. Yes.

Q. What breed of cows did you have?

A. Mostly Holstein.

Q. Did you do your own breeding here on the farm?

A. Part of it, and then we did some artificial insemination.

Q. How did you find out about that?

A. Well, we helped organize the association. They had to go around and get enough members to hire a technician, and then we used it. And you call him, he'd come.

Q. How often do you have to breed a milk cow?

Q. Were these people who just moved from farm to farm and shelled corn?

A. Yes, they're mounted on a truck anymore, most of them. They're propelled by power takeoff.

Q. I see. You told me you do have a hand sheller in the barn.

A. I got one out at the barn.

Q. Mr. Mills, a good part of your career you spent as a dairy farmer?

A. That's right.

Q. How did you happen to get into that business?

A. That started back there when times was hard and nobody had any money. Anything you could sell to get some money out of you were in for . . . We got started shipping a little milk. We had what they call a milk stand over here at the corner. There was a beautiful big elm tree that stood there that shaded that whole corner. We went together and built a milk stand there. The whole neighborhood would bring their milk in there of a morning, and then the milk hauler would come there and pick it up and take it to Springfield. We started shipping milk to the Illinois Dairy.[6] It was there on Fourth Street. Fred Schuster was the manager, and Mary Reilly was the office clerk. Carl White was the plant manager, and he was tough.

Q. Did you start out small?

A. Yes, we ended up small comparative to what they are today. We started out, I think, shipping ten gallon and the most we ever shipped was fifty gallon a day.

Q. How many cows would that be?

A. We usually aimed to milk about ten cows.

Q. When you took it to the station up the road, did you put it in big cans?

A. Ten-gallon cans.

Q. Did the man pick up those cans and take them in and did they leave other cans for you, empties?

A. Sometimes we had two sets of cans, sometimes he'd bring the cans back.

Q. The same day?

A. Yes. That went on for several years, and finally we got a milk hauler that came right to the house here and picked it up. We had a milk cooler, and he'd take it right out of the milk cooler.

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[6]Illinois Dairy was located at 326 North Fourth Street. [Ed.]

you paid your rent. And when you left it, you could also sell that house and sell your lease if you could get somebody to buy it. That was in their policy. They just wanted so much cash rent off of that land. But there for years one of the things that was in their lease was that at least 25 percent of the land had to be a legume. But they raised the rent on that land and just turned them loose, they raise anything and everything.

Q. Is that right? Do you mean each individual farmer had to hold back 25 percent of his acreage . . .

A. That's the way it used to be.

Q. Now it's no more?

A. Now then they don't.

Q. Is most of that land farmed by tenants?

A. Yes, most of it. There's one of the Scullys living over there just west of Buffalo. I don't know which one, I never met him, but he's one of the Scullys and he farms. I don't know how many thousands of acres over there himself. He feeds a lot of cattle. They got two or three of these big blue Harvestores that they store grass silage, corn silage in them.

Q. Keep it right there on the farm?

A. Yes.

Q. How do you store the corn that you feed here on this farm?

A. We store at the elevator.

Q. Don't you keep some to feed your . . .

A. Not any more. [It's] stored at the elevator. They got what they call a grain bank up there. You can put it in the grain bank and go get it any time you want it.

Q. So that has eliminated your having to keep it here on the farm?

A. Yes.

Q. You told me at one time you did store it here on the farm . . .

A. Oh yes.

Q. In the ear. Did you feed it by the ear?

A. Yes, a lot of it. If we had more than we could feed we had shellers come in in the wintertime and shell it out.

Q. Now did someone from the Department of Agriculture come out and--or did they tell you how to do that sort of thing?

A. No, they taught it to me in there.

Q. You, in turn, brought this information . . .

A. I went out to the farm and laid them out for the farmer. They're supposed to be built in a saucer shape. They don't want to be flat, they're supposed to be built in a saucer shape. And you got to take a lot of things into consideration when you're building a waterway. The first thing you take into consideration is the watershed, how much water actually travels down that waterway. You got to use your own judgement and a little horse sense. The least a waterway could be was a rod wide which is sixteen feet, and then from there on up, the more the watershed, the wider the waterway.

Q. These watersheds, this is the natural drainage of the land?

A. Yes.

Q. That's a pretty good thing to have. Another thing I wanted to ask you about was the Soil Bank, a government policy that come out in 1956, whereby farmers were paid not to plant anything.

A. That's right.

Q. What did you think about that?

A. Well, as I've said before, we can produce more than we can consume, and the world market wouldn't consume and couldn't consume it. So what's the use of producing it. They come out with that Soil Bank, and that Soil Bank conserved the soil. They just left a lot if it idle. Most of it locally was seeded in a legume. That put organic matter back in the soil, and we're reaping the harvest off of that today.

Q. Is there much of that going on today?

A. Not today, no. This Scully outfit--that's English owned--they own thousands of acres of land from Mechanicsburg to Lincoln. It's all good land. One of the things in their policy was 25 percent of that land had to be in a legume every year. They tell me now that they've opened the door.

Q. They're planting all of it?

A. They're planting all of it in grain which is not a good thing, but they're doing it.

Q. Don't they also raise stock?

A. No, not very many of them. Them Scully leases they call them, it's a funny deal. It was a cash rent deal. You paid so much cash rent for it, and it was yours, and you bought the house, and it was yours as long as

A. Yes, I guess it is. They haven't come up with some cancer causing chemical that I know of. But it's all dangerous stuff to handle.

Q. Yes, it has to be used with a great deal of caution and respect.

A. Yes, and you're supposed—if you do it according to Hoyle--you're supposed to use a mask and rubber gloves and all that sort of stuff. We're in too big a hurry to go to all that trouble.

Q. But you said this year you had your crops custom treated.

A. That's right.

Q. Did they come in with machinery?

A. Truck.

Q. It went right down the rows?

A. No, they got a big boom on each side, they take 60 foot at a throw. They can cover a lot of acres in a little while.

Q. Another thing, when I came out this evening, I asked you about a strip of land that runs through the field and you told me that was a conservation water ditch?

A. A waterway, a grass waterway.

Q. How did you happen to leave that, or did someone come out and recommend that you leave that waterway?

A. When I was working for AAA, Mrs. Berg, I laid them out all over the country. And I'll admit, there was a lot of money throwed away, and there was a lot of soil saved. And I think the soil saved outweighed the waste of money because, I'll tell you, you take a stream of water going down through the field there at a pretty good lick washes a lot of soil away. That's the purpose of a grass waterway. I expect that we've got at least two mile of waterways on this farm.

Q. So in other words the stand of grass holds the earth in place despite the fact that the water is moving across it?

A. That's right.

Q. You told me the water going through this grass waterway goes to Little Wolf Creek?

A. Into the river.

Q. In turn, that drains into the Sangamon River?

A. That's right.

scare came along, they made those fellows put that corn in an oven and heat it for so long to be sure to kill the corn borers that might be in it. That kind of tickled us because that heat spoiled the luster of that corn, but they still beat us. (laughter) Eddie Lutz and Pete Lutz, you couldn't beat them fellows showing corn. They come from Sullivan, Indiana. They discovered later on that that was useless because the trains coming from the east into Chicago Union Station, especially in the rain, they found them corn borers stuck all over that train. As soon as the train stopped and set awhile, corn borers flew off. So, that was useless. Then they went to spraying for them.

The cycle of a cornborer is a moth, and they will lay their eggs in a stalk of corn which is going on right--not now but it will in July. Those eggs will hatch out into the form of a worm, and then they'll bore into the corn stalk. Of course, that weakens the corn stalk and causes a lot of stalk damage; corn will fall over. They've done a lot of spraying with different chemicals. They got them pretty well under control. You don't hear too much about them anymore. But I've seen quite a few corn borer moths this summer. They're a little white butterfly is what they are about, oh, that big.

Q. About an inch and one-half?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you sprayed for them or are you going to?

A. I never did, no. When they're really working, you can go out along a corn field this time of night and let you car lights shine down through the rows and that's just alive with those little butterflies in there.

Q. Does that worry you, Mr. Mills?

A. Not too much, it can damage the corn quite a lot, but they've made a wonderful improvement in this machinery that downed corn don't bother them too much anymore. That used to be a headache.

Q. You mean the machine can get down there and get it?

A. Get it and once it gets ahold of it, it goes through.

Q. What about controlling weeds?

A. Well, they're still working on them. There's dozens of different companies advertising chemicals, and they're all the best. Now there can't be but one best. We've been using Lasso and Sencar, and we seem to have pretty good luck with that.

Q. When you use those chemicals, does that save having to go in and cultivate again?

A. A two-row. Fact of the matter is, the first one we had was a Case Snapper. It didn't shuck it; it just jerked it off of the stalk. Then the next one was a one-row New Idea. It would even pull the silks off of it; it was just as clean as it could be.

Q. Would it also shuck the corn?

A. Yes, it was really shucked clean. Then we bought a two-row New Idea which we still got. Then we went from that to the combine.

Q. Do you remember when you got the combine?

A. No, I couldn't tell you.

Q. Was that a real big investment?

A. It is nowadays. I suppose it was figured pretty big back then because money wasn't as plentiful then as it is now, but now then $30,000, $40,000 for a piece of equipment sounds awful big to me. The combine we've got is three years old, and we give $16,000 for it. I can get more money for that today then we give for it. I expect that same combine today would sell for at least $20,000.

Q. Do you and your son work on that piece of equipment yourselves?

A. No, we haven't done much work on that kind of equipment.

Q. You told me you could still work on that tractor.

A. Sure, we could work on that combine too if we were like we was twenty years ago. But I'm not, and he wouldn't tackle it by himself, I know.

Q. If you have a breakdown, does someone come out to the farm?

A. Most generally. We have service over here, Brickler Farm Service. They come right out on the farm and do most anything.

Q. What kind of changes have you seen as far as insect and disease control are concerned?

A. Quite a lot.

Q. Has that information come to you through the Farm Bureau?

A. That's right. It seems like there has been a lot of new insects and diseases developed in the last ten years that we never heard of before. They claim they are brought in here by different ways. I remember when I was showing corn, the big scare was corn borer, and it started in the east, Ohio, and then it moved into Indiana. We couldn't beat them fellows in Indiana showing corn. They growed perfect corn. But when that corn borer

Q. That was in 1936?

A. Yes. We was just beginning to work out of the hard times. Business was slow. The inducement that they put out at that time to sell a tractor, they would give you the choice of a cultivator, a plow or a disc, whichever one of the three you wanted. Well, I had the disc, and I had the plow, so I took the cultivator. I still got it yet today.

Q. You told me you've kept all these old pieces of equipment.

A. Yes, I got a lot of horse-drawn equipment out there.

Q. You do? Do you ever kind of wish you could hook a mule up to it and try it again? (laughter)

A. (narrator nods) When I'm gone, Mrs. Berg, you want to attend the sale, it will be a mess, I'm telling you.

Q. You mentioned once that Donald has one of these tractors too.

A. He has. He's got one of them.

Q. You also mentioned that you and Donald could have worked on that tractor blindfolded.

A. I think we could.

Q. That was something that was brand new to you when you got it.

A. Mine was, his wasn't.

Q. How did you learn that? Did they teach you how to service it or . . .

A. No, we just was mechanically minded enough ourselves that we would tackle anything like that. We never thought about taking anything like that to a shop to get it worked on. We worked on it ourselves. We'd been around the shops, and we knowed how they did it; so we got our tools, and we done it.

Q. You said you started out with a one-row corn picker?

A. That's right.

Q. Was it horse-drawn?

A. No, it was tractor-drawn.

Q. That's when you picked the corn by the ear?

A. That's right.

Q. Later you went to . . .

Q. The plow, would that have been just one blade going down?

A. No, it was two. A gang plow needs two.

Q. Two horses?

A. No, four. You could either use four or five. I've plowed many a day with five, three in back and two in front. Fact of the matter is, I like to work them that way.

Q. You told me, Mr. Mills, that you saved back a couple of mules just to plant corn.

A. That's right.

Q. Even after you had a tractor?

A. That's right.

Q. Why did you do that?

A. I don't know why. It kind of gets in your blood, I guess, and I hated to give up the old mules. I didn't think I could afford a tractor planter, which I finally overcome it.

Q. When you finally sold those mules, where did you sell them?

A. The killers.

Q. Were they old by then?

A. Yes, they were old. That had done their job. They went to the killers.

Q. What was the first tractor that you had?

A. It was a 1936 Farmall International, still got it.

Q. That's the one you still have? (laughter)

A. I still got it. (laughs)

Q. Can you still use it?

A. Yes, it will run. We use it, not too often, it's got a scoop on it. About all we use it for anymore is when we haul manure. We use the scoop.

Q. That was really something in those days, wasn't it?

A. Yes. A fellow told me this winter he saw one of those old things sell at a public sale last winter for $500.

Q. Is that right?

A. Yes, and the fellow told him, he said, "It won't run." Somebody wanted it for an antique. I give $635 for that tractor new.

Q. Do you still plant Pioneer corn?

A. Yes.

Q. They made a believer out of you?

A. Well, seeing is believing.

Q. It surely is. You believed in it if you sold it for all those years.

A. I made a practice of selling the numbers of corn that did good for me. If they did good for me, I had confidence in it enough that I could sell it to you. But if it was something new, I wouldn't recommend it to you until it had been tried.

Q. In this particular area?

A. Yes. I talked to a plant breeder, Mrs. Berg, and that's a very, very, deep subject. You get a scientist to talking and you want to shut up and let him do the talking and you do the listening. He said they start thousands of strains of corn that come up with nothing. Once in awhile, they hit a good one. He told me--don't ask me how I don't know, that's a secret in being a scientist--they crossed a grain of corn with a blade of grass, and they come up with a pod about like a pea. It had some little pimples on it, grains. They crossed that back on corn, and the next one they got was a golfball [size] that was full of seeds. And they crossed that thing back and forth on corn until they developed a strain of corn. That's plant breeding.

Q. Have you found this increase in productivity in other grains?

A. There hasn't been as much increase in soybeans particularly as there has been in corn simply because they can't breed soybeans like they do corn. Wheat has increased quite a bit in production.

Q. You don't raise wheat?

A. Not very much. We had some year before last, [but] we haven't had any wheat to speak of for a long time.

Q. You stick to corn and soybeans?

A. Corn and beans, yes.

Q. What about the equipment that you used, when you were a young man and you were using horses and mules, what kind of equipment did you use?

A. They had equipment for horse-drawn, there was horse-drawn equipment is what it was.

Q. Was that the gang plow?

A. That was the gang plow, cultivator, just all kinds of equipment that was horse-drawn equipment.

was the top yielder, 168 bushel of dried corn. They took us to Jim and Babe's Steak House.

Q. In Springfield?

A. Yes, which I didn't think much of. (laughs)

Q. Was the steak good though?

A. Yes.

Q. That's good. Did you keep a pretty close record of the yield that your customers got from the corn you sold?

A. Not too close, only by mouth. I didn't keep no record on it. They always told me if they had a good crop, and they always told me if they didn't have a good crop. (laughs)

Q. I'll bet they did.

A. This hybrid corn, it all goes by numbers. This particular number we had out here was 3376, which was a very popular number. I think the corn that he raised out there was 3334.

They're continuously changing the breeding of this corn striving for sturdier stalks, more resistant to insects, yield and standability. They've got a lot of things to take into consideration when they are breeding corn. After they develop a strain of corn, they test that for seven years before they put it on the market. That sounds like a long time, but they raise two crops a year. They'll raise one here and one in Florida and one in Argentina.

Q. I see. So they are able to double up then?

A. Yes. You know what a bad number corn would do to their reputation if they let it get out.

Q. Have you ever had a yield close to the 198 bushel yield you had before?

A. I never had that before.

Q. How about since, have you ever had it since?

A. Yes, I think I've had it since, but it wasn't in a test plot. That was a test plot for the company whereby we had sixteen different samples planted right side by side. They had to be harvested separately, taken to the elevator and weighed and tested separately. My supervisor was here, and he took the data on all of it. In fact, he rode the combine to find out the standability and the ear dropage, all that stuff was taken into consideration. They had a pretty complete picture as to what a number corn would do. And they had those test plots not only here but all over the State of Illinois. They would get those figures together, and that was a pretty good way to prove out a strain of corn.

the name of George Ebby called on me and wanted to know if I would be interested in a dealership. We talked around awhile, and I said, "I don't know, I might give it a whirl. I can always quit." He said, "All right." He wrote up a contract, and I've got the contract in there yet. (points to bedroom) We went along fine, and I won all kinds of prizes from the company, everything, tools, set of lamps there in the living room and I don't know what all. He was a fine fellow, but he liked his liquor. We would have two or three meetings a year, and he always wanted to have them out at the--there on Wabash Avenue, I forget the name of the place. Anyway, they had a bar in there and he was at the bar more than he was at the meetings. Maybe he'd be able to talk, and maybe he wouldn't. He was a good supervisor; that's what they called them, DSM'S. The company wouldn't fire him [but] finally--I don't know just what happened to him--he quit or something.

Then they got another fellow by the name of Alva Lamb who was a prince of a man. He took quite a liking to me, and we got along fine. I planted two test plots for him, right out here east of the house, at different times. The nearest I ever come to raising 200 bushel of corn to the acre was in one of those test plots. I raised 198 bushel to the acre.

Q. Do you remember what year that was?

A. No, I don't think I can in particular.

Q. I just wondered, was that a year that the weather was just real great?

A. It was [a] perfect year.

Q. Even today, that would be fantastic, wouldn't it?

A. Well, not too fantastic, Mrs. Berg, there's a lot of corn anymore that's making 180, 190 bushel to the acre. There was corn in the neighborhood last year that did it.

Q. Is that right?

A. Yes.

Q. And last year wasn't considered a particularly good year.

A. No, it wasn't; but it was spotty. We were, so happened to be in an area right here where we didn't have no rain all summer. Five miles from here they had a wonderful crop. That fellow that I mentioned that raised 168 bushel to the acre, I'll bet his corn was all better than that last year. And he lives out east of Williamsville about five mile.

Q. That particular case was a man who was the first one to raise that much. Was he one of your customers?

A. He was one of my customers. They offered a steak dinner for the man and his wife plus me and my wife for the highest yield in the area. He

A. We had regulations to go by--this is what they called their central division--and the regulations on our corn, it had to be ten inches long. That was a must; it had to be. It could be a little longer, but it couldn't be no shorter. That's a hard job to do to find a ten-inch corn that's anyways near perfect, and that one single ear was almost perfect. I got acquainted with a lot of people all over the country, Indiana, Ohio, Nebraska, North Dakota, and I ran across a fellow up there [who] was in the northern division that showed 8 1/2 inch corn. He said, "Could you pick me out a good ten-ear sample of 8 1/2 inch corn?" I said, "Yes, I can get you a good one 8 1/2 inches." So I did and took it up the next year and showed it to him. They was showing corn the same reason we was; they was selling seed corn. If they could say they won a prize at the International Fat Stock Show, that meant a boost in their business. So I showed him my ten ears. "Gosh," he says, "that looks good." I said, "Well, I don't think there's any question but what you could win with that in your region, but I can't show it." So he says, "What do you want for it?" I studied, and I said, "Well, I want $5 an ear for that ten ears of corn." He studied a little while, and he says, "I'm going to buy it." (laughter) It's a little on the crocked side. He said, "Come back here." We was in the grandstand there where they held the International Show, and they had a little cubbyhole there of some kind. He says, "Come back in here." He began to unbutton his clothes, and he had a money belt on. He got in there and got me out $50.00 and give me for that ten ears of corn. And he showed it, and he won with it. Yes, sir, he won first place with that ten ears of corn.

Q. That was a real boost of business then, wasn't it?

A. They'd have thrown us both out of the show if they knew what happened. (laughter) But I knew it was going on; you could see it every day. That's show business.

Q. Was that during the time that you were a dealer for Pioneer or did that come later?

A. No, that was before. I never showed any Pioneer corn because there was no uniformity to it. You couldn't get two ears that looks anyways near alike. I tried it, but you can't.

Q. When you were a dealer for Pioneer, did you raise some of the seed corn here on the farm?

A. No.

Q. It was raised some place else?

A. They raised their seed plot, it was over at Morton and over at Champaign, that's two of Pioneer's plants.

Q. Where were most of your customers?

A. I had the territory here of two townships, Fancy Creek and Williams. They were locally around here. I started from nothing and I worked that up to about, I think around 700 bushel a year, which was quite a boost. You wanted to know how I come to get to be a dealer. I guess they had heard I was pretty much interested in seed corn, good corn. There was a man by

Q. My goodness, that ear of corn sure got around, didn't it?

A. It did.

Q. I'll bet that was a thrill.

A. It was.

Q. Tell me, when you harvested, how did you determine that this was an ear of corn that should be shown?

A. In judging anything uniformity--they judge it by points--uniformity usually catches the eye ahead of anything. If it's uniform, that looks good, that's 50 points right there. Then they start digging in for different characteristics: indentations, fill out over the ends of the ears and the color. They take all those things into consideration.

I was very well acquainted with the corn judges, Professor Hackelman and Claude Chapman, from the University of Illinois. They were very good friends of mine. I showed corn every year at the International Fat Stock Show for, oh I guess, ten years. I come within that much (points to tip of index finger) of winning first up there on a ten-ear sample. They were judging the corn, and I was there, and Professor Hackelman come to me and he says, "Win, one of those ears has got deplodia." He took me and showed me, and it did have. He says, "I've either got to throw that sample out or put it way down tenth or fifteenth place." "Well," I said, "just throw her out of the show." Which he did.

Deplodia is a disease. Corn at that time was judged on quality for seed, which we did sell quite a bit of seed. An ear that's got deplodia is no good. It will have a rotten streak right across the kernel just like that.

Q. Toward the lower end of the kernel?

A. Yes. Now then, we were allowed to take out two kernels for inspection, and we usually tried to pull those two kernels as near the center of the ear as possible. They usually either took out two kernels when they was judging above or below where we took them out. He happened to take out the two kernels above where I pulled them, and those two kernels had that rotten streak right across the kernel.

Q. That was a disappointment, wasn't it?

A. Yes, that was a disappointment. And he had me up in second place.

Q. Did you do something to the ears?

A. Oh, yes, we polished them and polished them. I've spent hours after hours after hours after days after days getting that corn fixed. I'll tell you another experience I had; you can either record it or let it go.

Q. We want to hear it.

Q. Tell me about that.

A. The first corn show I ever went to was, I think, 1929 in Hannibal, Missouri. I had the grand-champion, single ear. It was a National Corn Show in Hannibal, Missouri. It was a beautiful ear of corn.

Q. That must have been a thrill.

A. It was. They had a big banquet and presented me with a trophy. The rules of that show, everything that we showed, they paid pretty good prizes. I remember particularly the first prize on that single ear of corn was $25.00. That was a lot of money for a single ear of corn.

Q. It sure was.

A. They would sell all the corn that was entered in that show. Well, it was kind of a racket. They expected the exhibitor to buy that corn back so they wouldn't be out no prize money, and the exhibitor would get his corn back. (laughter) But it didn't work; I told them, I said, "No, I don't want the ear of corn, go ahead and sell it." They did, they sold it, and it brought $25.00.

There was a man in Indiana bought it, Indiana is quite a corn country, and they show corn over there all winter long. This happened in Hannibal, Missouri, along early in the fall. He bought that ear of corn and took it home with him. It so happened he was back in this area the next spring selling fertilizer, and I said, "Say, what shape is that ear of corn in; is it good enough to show again?" "Oh," he says, "I think it would be." I said, "I'd like to have that ear of corn back; what will you take for it?" He says, "What will you give?" (laughter) I said, "I'll give you $5.00 if you'll ship it back to me." He said, "All right, I'll do it." So I gave him a five dollar bill, and in about two weeks I got a notice from the express office I had a package there. I went and got it, and it was that ear of corn. Well, I showed that ear of corn at the Illinois State Fair, and I won first and grand champion on it at the State Fair.

Q. That would be the next year? (laughter)

A. You catch on fast.

Q. You surely do know a bargain, Mr. Mills.

A. I sent that ear of corn--they had another National Corn Show, International Corn Show, in Regina, Canada--and I sent that ear of corn in a ten-ear-corn sample to Regina, Canada, and showed it. I won ninth place on that ten-ear sample up there. They sent me a check for forty-eight, forty-nine dollars, and I took it up to the bank, and I says, "Is this thing worth anything?" He says, "I don't know, we'll have to send it in and see." They only discounted it two or three dollars.

I got that ear of corn back on a Friday and the Fair opened up on Saturday, and I showed that ear of corn again at the fair in a ten-ear sample, and I won first, champion and grand champion.

it's a write-off bill on the income tax. (laughs) Why burden yourself with something, that stuff is dangerous.

Q. Do you have to have special equipment to use it?

A. We have got the spray and we can spray it. Of course, these people at the elevators sprayed custom spraying, and they've got sprayers mounted on big trucks--they've got two of them. Boy, they can cover a lot of acres in a little while, but that costs.

Q. What kind of changes have you seen in the way you plant crops? You started out as a young man using horses and mules, and I know you have some very sophisticated equipment today, so you've seen a lot of changes.

A. I have.

Q. When did you begin depending more on mechanized equipment?

A. When they introduced hybrid corn. That's when we seen the big change in the productivity of corn. Henry Wallace is the man that invented hybrid corn for my way. When I started selling Pioneer corn, it was, oh let's see, 1952 when I started selling corn.

Q. This was as a dealer for Pioneer brand?

A. Yes, and people were skeptical of it for two reasons. You can't keep it for seed. The old corn we used to raise is what they call the old-type Reed Yellow Dent. That's the corn I showed; it was beautiful corn.

Q. What was that name again?

A. Reed Yellow Dent.

END SIDE ONE

A. People were a little skeptical of hybrid corn because it can't be kept for seed. It won't do too bad the first year, but after that, it's just liable to go all to pieces. So they didn't take no chances, they just either bought hybrid corn or planted the old-type corn. Hybrid corn out-yielded the old-type corn, and it was so much more sturdy and vigorous than the old-type corn, they just quit it entirely. They went straight to hybrid corn. It would outproduce the old-type corn.

Q. About how much?

A. I'd say anywhere from thirty-five to fifty bushel to the acre.

Q. You mentioned that you showed corn?

A. I did.

them abreast or we worked them in tandem, anyway that suited the job.

Q. You had a certain way to do it for a certain job?

A. Yes.

Q. What would be your first job in the spring?

A. The first job back them days was breaking stalks, raking them and cleaning the ground. That's a lot different from today; you wouldn't think of burning a stalk today. They raked those and burned them. Nowadays, they got this heavy equipment you can go out in a cornstalk field and just cut that thing all to pieces. You would be surprised how it has changed the organic matter in the soil by leaving that residue on the soil and plowing it under. Back them days, they cleaned it off as clean as this table; there was just no organic matter in it.

Q. About what time did that become the thing to do to plow it back into the soil rather than to burn it off?

A. I'd say in the 1920's, along in there.

Q. Was this information that came to you from the university?

A. Yes.

Q. Would that come through some local organization?

A. The local Farm Bureau. The same thing exists today; the farm adviser talks on the radio pretty near every day. Him or his assistant gives you the growing conditions, diseases and what not that's happened to the growing crop. It's valuable information.

Q. They not only tell you what's going on, but they help you with a remedy to correct a situation that develops?

A. That's right. I don't know, there's been an awful lot of spraying with chemicals and different things, and I just wonder how EPA is going to take that. You know yourself, they've got anymore to where everything, even the clothes you wear, cause cancer. So I don't know if they will outlaw these chemicals or not. If they do, I'll tell you, it will be quite a slap in the farmer's face. They've got chemicals that will do almost anything you want to do, kill weeds. It's a funny thing about that, them chemicals, some of them you can spray corn with. After all corn belongs to the grass family. There is another chemical that will kill corn, but you can spray soybeans with it.

Q. You certainly have to know the right thing to use then, don't you?

A. That's right.

Q. Do you do your own spraying on the farm?

A. Sometimes we do. This year we hired it all done custom. After all,

Q. It's much more scientific today?

A. Oh, my yes. Back in the horse and buggy days, there wasn't no such thing as field harvesting. We have a corn crib out here and one out at the barn, and sometimes that wouldn't hold it. We picked it in the ear and stored it in the ear. It would stay until the following winter, and then we'd get a sheller to come in and shell it out for us and then take it to the elevator. That's the two different methods of farming, now and back then.

Q. Different equipment?

A. Yes, today a combine is used for harvesting everything: corn, wheat, oats, beans and everything. There are a few localities that are still using corn pickers, cribbing it in the ear.

Q. You mean in this area?

A. Not around this area, no.

Q. Are there some places where it is being picked by the ear in Illinois?

A. Yes. I don't know what the Amish settlement is doing over around Arcola and Arthur whether they pick by picker or combine. They are a very peculiar tribe of people.

Q. Yes, they are. Let's talk something about the farming. When you were a young man, you farmed with draft animals, didn't you?

A. Yes.

Q. How many did you have?

A. From ten to twelve head.

Q. Horses or mules?

A. Both.

Q. How much pasture did you have to have for them.

A. Oh, we had about twenty acres in permanent pasture. [During] work season, they didn't get too much pasture. We kept them up and fed them dry feed. If we put them out on pasture, they couldn't stand the heat.

Q. How did you work them, if you had ten to twelve head, did you alternate the ones that you used?

A. There was always some of them bunged up somewhere, and they always had a few extras. They always bred their mares, and they raised the colts; and, of course, that made extra horses. We'd break those colts when they were three years old. You just had a surplus around, a so-called surplus. As to how we worked them, we worked them anyway we needed them. We worked

A. I called him yesterday, one of the elevators, yesterday after the market had closed. I'd heard what it had done, went up four cents yesterday. Fact of the matter, I had called the other one first, and I said, "What are you bidding on corn today?" He said, "Two dollars and twenty-eight cents." But I said, "I don't want to sell." (laughs) So I called the other elevator and I said, "What are you bidding on corn today?" "Two dollars and twenty-eight cents," he said. I said, "You couldn't make that $2.30, it would be a lot easier figuring?" He said, "I'm afraid not." "Well," I said, "I'm just going to sell you 1088 bushel." Now he had to get shut of that corn or take a chance on the market being down today. So he called some broker; he didn't keep that corn ten minutes.

Q. You really have to be on the ball, don't you?

A. That's plainly speaking, you do. (laughter) I was up there one time, Mrs. Berg, and sold some corn or some beans, one, and things were pretty quiet, seemingly. And after he got done talking to me, he turned right round to pick up the telephone to call the broker, and they went down six cents. He lost six cents a bushel there in less than five minutes.

Q. His is a pretty precarious job, isn't it?

A. You got to be on the ball. And by the same token, it will happen the other way. It could have gone up six cents above what he gave me. But it'll average out pretty evenly. He may loose on one, but he'll make on the next one.

Q. I observed a situation the last two years, Mr. Mills, where corn has been laying on the ground in piles around an elevator.

A. They was out of storage space for it. And you know, it's remarkable how that grain will keep out in the weather that way. It seems like it forms a coating and sticks together. You see it's in a cone-shaped pile, and it will stick together and shed water just like a roof. Now you don't want to walk on that corn and make holes in it. Keep kids off of it. If you don't, it will rot. That leaves the water right in it. It may lay there for a month or two. They eventually clean it up when they get room to handle it.

Q. Years ago, how did you determine when it was time to harvest your corn?

A. Well, nowadays you go entirely on the moisture content.

Q. How do you determine the moisture content?

A. They have moisture testers; we have one of our own. You know, you always strive to sell number two corn, and number two corn is allowed to have 15.5 percent moisture. If you have more than that, you're docked. If it has less than that, you're losing money. So you strive to strike as near around 15.5 percent as you can. If you put corn in the elevator at 20 percent moisture, which we do a lot of times up as high as 25 percent moisture, they've all got dryers. They dry that corn down to 15.5 percent, and you stand the shrink. They charge you about, I think, three and one-half cents, four cents a bushel to dry it.

He likes to rub it in a little. (laughter)

Q. I'll bet he does.

A. It's a game of chance.

Q. I'm sure it is. Will you always dispose of last years crop before you harvest the current year?

A. No. I formed a habit, why I couldn't tell you, of holding my crop over. Now the stuff that I'm selling now was produced last year. I never was taught to sell anything before I had it. You can call the elevator and sell this crop of beans right out here for $7.56 a bushel. But, they buy bushels. They'd say, "How many acres you got; what do you estimate they'll make." Thirty bushels, sixty acres, eighteen-hundred bushels, they'd mark you down sold eighteen-hundred bushels of beans. And now you better have them. If you haven't got them, you got to come up with something, money or the beans, one.

Q. If you don't have them you have to buy then?

A. That's right. If they're $10.00 a bushel, that's your hard luck.

Q. You are participating in a market today that your father would be unfamiliar with then?

A. Yes, that's right. Although seems like we're closer to the market today on account of radio and television and what not, and we pay closer attention to it. Them days, they didn't get to town too often. Of course, they had the telephone and newspaper, but that didn't keep you up to date.

Q. Today our opportunity to observe what's going on is instantaneous with radio and television which it wasn't back when he was selling.

A. That's right. I don't know who set the rules and regulations of the Board of Trade in Chicago--that's the grain center of the world, the market center--but somebody come up with the rule that soybeans can break as much as thirty cents a day, up or down. If they do that three days in a row, then they drop back to twenty cents a day, up or down. And that's dangerous, I'll tell you, if you're playing the board straight. They went up sixteen cents today.

Q. They did? Do you get that report in the morning or at noon?

A. At noon, twelve o'clock, the market closes at one o'clock, opens at nine and closes at one.

Q. Do you deal through the elevator or do you deal through a broker?

A. No, we deal with the elevator, and he deals with the broker.

Q. So you have several people involved then.

produced pretty good and pretty good market for them, and today they're the best crop we got by far. Hell, they're hovering around ten dollars a bushel all the time.

Q. How much of your farm today is in soybeans?

A. I'd say about 50 percent.

Q. You're 50 percent soybeans and 50 percent corn?

A. Yes, close to that. That is in this area. Now in some areas, it will run more to soybeans and less corn or more corn and less soybeans. I heard a fellow say the other night from the south, he normally has 2500 acres of cotton; he's planting it all to soybeans.

Q. Oh my, 2500 acres.

A. Well, their yield down there is not nothing to compare with ours, so it might not be as bad as it sounds.

Q. The corn you raise on the farm, at least some of that you keep to feed, don't you?

A. Oh yes.

Q. What about the soybeans?

A. We don't keep many soybeans, in fact, we don't keep none but our seed.

Q. You keep some of your crop for the seed for next year?

A. Yes, we haven't got the storage; we usually store them in the elevators. They've got plenty of storage, and we put them in there and pay storage on them.

Q. Then do you watch the market?

A. Yes, try to. (laughter)

Q. I heard someone compare that to being in Las Vegas.

A. Well, there ain't much difference.

Q. Do you listen to it every day?

A. Everyday at noon. Corn was up four cents yesterday, and I sold 1088 bushel. Today it was up one-half cent.

Q. You were pretty shrewd, weren't you? (laughter)

A. I'm not going to tell you about the beans. Last fall we got them in the elevator, and I sold them, sold my part of them for $7.35 which I considered, and still do, as a good price for beans. Well, Donald hung on to his, and he hasn't sold any for less than $10.00, that up to $10.10.

Q. When you say the bins, we're talking about the surplus grain that was stored?

A. Yes, there wasn't many farms, there's a few more farms today, quite a few more farms today that has farm storage than there was back then. They depended on those bin sites for storage. When they had the sales and sold those bins, there was a lot of farms, well, the bins went to some farm somewhere. You know how they moved them?

Q. No.

A. Helicopter. They just hover down over that bin, throw a rope or something around it and just raise up with it and fly across country wherever you wanted it, and they just set it down on the ground just as easy as you set a basket down.

Q. What were those bins made of?

A. Galvanized steel.

Q. Were they put into concrete or something to hold them fast?

A. Some of them. The ones that was put out on the farm, I'm pretty sure was put in concrete, the most of them. But around these bin sites, I don't think they were set in concrete; they were set on concrete blocks.

Q. I see.

A. I never heard of one of them blowing away or blowing over.

Q. When was it that you stopped working for AAA?

A. Gosh, I don't know when it was. I worked for them for about twenty-six years, Mrs. Berg. I started in 1932, that would be about 1948, wouldn't it?

Q. Yes it would.

A. About 1948.

Q. Are you still told today how much of your acreage should be planted?

A. Well, no, not too much. They are thinking about it pretty strongly right now. They are coming back with the allotment system because we're producing more than we can possibly consume. There's no storage. Now the Secretary of Agriculture, Bergland, he's considering some more government storage. I don't know what kind or anything about it, but demand increased all over the world for our foodstuff. I'll tell you, soybeans is a wonderful crop. They make so many different things out of soybeans, and they claim they've just scratched the surface.

Q. This is a crop that you said wasn't raised very much in the early 1930's.

A. No, it wasn't. But it got ahold and people like them, and they

A. Entitled you to the support price.

Q. What time of the year, Mr. Mills, would the county committee tell you how much you could plant?

A. Not giving you a short answer, but in plenty of time to make your plans.

Q. That's the point I wanted to make.

A. Yes, they give your allotment in plenty of time to make your plans for the year.

Q. When would you go out?

A. They usually sent us out to measure them crops along in August, last of July, first of August. And I didn't find too much trouble with overplanting. I found one, and he was my enemy for a long time. But I said, "Bob, it's not my fault, it's the job that I got to do, and I've just got to turn it in that you have got five acres too much corn." Which I did. He come to me a year or so after that, and he said, "You was right." He farmed four or five farms. He said, "I got those different allotments mixed up." So I said, "Bob, I'm awful glad to hear you say that, and I'm awful sorry that it happened, but it's no fault of mine."

Q. You had a feeling about the job that you had to do?

A. Well sure, there's only one way to do anything, and that's honestly. And after all, I was working for the government, the United States government. They send people to jail, to the penitentiary, if you defraud the government.

Q. That's right.

A. And I never had nobody to try to bribe me.

Q. That's good.

A. Yes sir, I didn't.

Q. Did the situation on the farms improve with the allotments and the support prices?

A. Well, yes, it put more money in the hands of people. Now, you know, you seen these bin sites spring up all over the country in your time. Of course, they've done away with them now, and they wish they had them back. They would store that grain in there and the government would pay them the support price. And I can't tell you what the support price was, but it was quite a bit above the market price which the farmer would have had to take if he had took it to the elevator. It [the grain] stayed in those bins. I think it was a good thing, but yet it gave the Secretary of Agriculture quite a leverage over the market. He had millions of bushels of grain to dispose of, and he had quite a temptation now to accept bribes and what not. Some say they did; I don't know myself.

allowed to raise so many hogs; and if you had anymore than that, there was a penalty attached to it.

Q. Do you remember what that penalty was?

A. No, I don't, Mrs. Berg.

Q. Well, tell us that story about the man who had too many hogs when you came back for the second count. You would count more than one time, wouldn't you?

A. Yes, twice.

Q. At what intervals?

A. Well, we usually counted in October and December. And it was perfectly permissible for him to have more hogs if he'd have had some farrowed or if he had bought some. And if he had bought some, I wanted to see his receipt where he paid for them. That would clear him and if he had some farrowed, why, that was proof enough itself that they was farrowed after the first of October.

Q. You would be able to determine that by the size of them?

A. Yes.

Q. So what happened in this particular case? You went out in October, and you counted his hogs, and then you went back in December and what did you find?

A. Something not very pleasant. There was nine or ten more in December than there was in October which was permissible if he had farrowed some or bought some, but he hadn't done either one. And I asked him what happened, and he wouldn't answer me; he wouldn't say nothing. Well, all I could do was turn in what I found. And they juggled it around some way and didn't penalize him; I don't know how, but they did.

Q. Didn't you have another case where a man had thirty too many hogs?

A. That's right, and I stood there and watched him knock them thirty pigs in the head, nice a pigs as you ever saw in your life. I went in there late in the evening the day before and counted them, and I said, "George, you got too many hogs." He says, "I know it." I said, "What are you going to do with them?" He says, "We're going to kill them in the morning." I says, "No, we're not going to kill them; maybe you are, but I'm not." And I went back the next morning and stood there and watched him and his son-in-law kill thirty.

Q. So he preferred to do that rather than pay the penalty?

A. That's right.

Q. You were allotted so much acreage to plant and then did that entitle you . . .

A. No, seasonal. The county committee knew how many farms there was in the county, and we used to have meetings to set up [the] productivity of each farm. Now this township, as long as I've lived here there is very few farms in this township that I didn't know something about as far as productivity was concerned. And I've argued with them fellows worse than the state legislature. (laughs) I think we have one of the most productive farms, if not the most productive farm up there south of Williamsville that was in the county. That's awful good land around Williamsville. Well, there was a 240 acre farm up there with 160 acres of it all in bluegrass pasture. And I made my argument stick too, for several years it was the highest producing farm in the county--including the use of fertilizer and one thing and another, it's common anymore.

Q. You mean to have that much of the land in pasture?

A. Yes.

Q. That was a great percentage of that farm.

A. Oh my, yes, they only farmed eighty acres of the two-hundred forty acres.

Q. Did they change the portion of the land that was planted in corn from time to time?

A. No, that was in pasture there for years and years; he had cattle on it. And there was a lot of stories that went on about the old man; he was an old bachelor. His sister owned the 80 [acres] and he farmed the devil out of it; but he owned the 160 [acres], (laughs) so he didn't farm it too much.

Q. He kept his cattle on that 160 [acres]?

A. Yes.

Q. You determined the productivity of the farms on a township basis, so in other words, all your work was done in Williams Township?

A. Well, don't misunderstand me, each farm had to stand on its own feet, soil type, productivity and, oh, what do I want to call it--there was soil type, oh, I'll think of it maybe after while.

Q. Okay.

A. But we had to take that into consideration in setting the productivity on these farms, and then turn those figures over to the county committee. And they had a record of it, and then in turn the county committee would set up allotments for these farms of corn and wheat, mostly. We wasn't raising enough beans at that time to have any effect on it. But every farm had an allotment of corn and wheat, and if you overplanted your allotment, you was penalized pretty heavily.

And along this same time, I told you the other night when you was out here, we had that hog counting deal. And it run along the same line, you was

when I got over there, there was a WPA truck delivering groceries backed up to the store porch, that building that's still standing there where it says apartments, there used to be a big porch on that. And they were giving away better food than that man that run that store had, And what was quite noticeable--you know people today has forgot the word pride, you don't see much pride anymore--but back [in] them days older folks had too much pride to go up there and accept that foodstuff. They sent little six, eight-year-old kids with their little wagons; they'd go up there and get that food give to them for nothing. They haven't forgot that today.

Q. You mean the children haven't forgotten, I'll bet they haven't.

A. I can remember when it was considered quite a disgrace to be on--being cared for by the county--and that was the feeling among the older generation; they had that pride in them that they didn't want to receive that foodstuff for nothing. But those kids did, and they're men and women today, and they still expect that today.

Q. There are many of them that do.

A. That's right.

Q. Something else that started in those years was the AAA, the Agricultural Administration Agency, and you worked for that agency, didn't you?

A. Oh, yes. I worked for them for twenty-five, twenty-six years. That started in 1932, I think 1932. And it's quite a long story. They tried to control production through allotments, and it was nationwide. They first started out electing local committees in your township, a township committee. And then they would, in turn, elect a county committee, and then the county committee would elect a state committee. That's the way the administration part of it went. Well, they elected me on the committee, the township committee, and I worked with that outfit, oh, for twenty-five, twenty-six years.

At one time I think I had measured more farms than any man in Sangamon County. Now, a township is six miles square. This township so happens to be six by seven [miles]. There's forty-two sections in this township, and I measured this township twice by myself, every farm in it.

Q. Now, did you receive a salary for this?

A. What would you consider a salary? (laughs)

Q. Well, you know, money or just the honor. (laughter)

A. Surveyor's time comes pretty high. Yes, I was paid for every minute that I worked for them. At that time, we were drawing three dollars a day.

Q. Was it year around?

you might start a fight, steal, anything. So I think that was the main reason it was started, and it did a lot of good; but it cost a world of money.

Q. Were there any WPA projects around this area?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. What were some of them?

A. Oh, they'd dig out hedgerow, an old hedge, which you would normally pull it out with heavy machinery, they dug it out by hand. Trucks would bring out, oh, thirty, forty men, shovels and axes, and they just turned into it and dug it out. We had them clean up about forty rod here on this place.

Q. This was a hedgerow?

A. Yes, and that went on all over the county.

Q. How about any road work?

A. Not too much road work. It was mostly on farms. It was all on the conservation line, cleaning out hedgerows and things like that.

Q. Did someone come to you and get your permission to do that?

A. Yes, they had a supervisor or foreman or something that kind of went around and lined up these different projects. And they had one over here north of Barclay. You know how a creek will grow up with trees and stuff like that; they cleaned that whole creek out for, oh I guess, a mile or two, which involved a lot of work.

Q. The people who did this work, were they from the local area?

A. Oh, they were from everywhere. A lot of them out of the city of Springfield.

Q. I see.

A. Farmers, they've always got plenty to do. They don't get much for what they do sometimes, but they've always got a job. But city people that depends on factory work and that sort of stuff, they just didn't have nothing to do and no money to do it with.

Q. It was a very sad situation.

A. Yes. And I remember, Mrs. Berg, we had threshers here--when we used to thresh with the old thresing machine, why, the women would have from thirty to forty men for dinner--to run a threshing machine. Well, they needed something from the store--I saw this with my own eyes--and they sent me to Sherman to get it, and I don't know, it was bread or something. Anyhow,

A. Yes, in a way, although I was too young to really understand war. I registered for the army, but I never was called, and I think that was in 1918. Wasn't that World War I, 1918 and 1917?

Q. Yes.

A. Armistice signed in 1918 wasn't it, November 11?

Q. Yes.

A. And to say it in a few words, I don't believe in war.

Q. You think we can settle our problems some other way?

A. There should be a way to settle it without killing thousands of young men.

Q. Did it affect the price of farm products, do you remember?

A. Not at that time, no. You probably heard or read about the boom and bust, well, 1928, 1929 were extremely good years, everything was high; and boom, she hit the bottom. And I'll tell you, in 1930, 1931 and 1932, there wasn't anything worth anything. I know the stock market, people lost millions of dollars there overnight, and they would jump out of hotel windows and commit suicide and just carried on at a terrible rate because they had lost their fortunes.

Q. And, of course, those were the Depression years?

A. Yes.

Q. How did it affect your life here on the farm?

A. Well, as I say, nobody had any money. Hogs was worth about two cents a pound, cattle worth three or four [cents], corn was worth ten cents a bushel, wheat thirty, thirty-five cents a bushel. Well, you know that ain't very much money.

Q. It certainly isn't.

A. But we begin to pick up and work out of it. That's when the WPA projects was popular.

Q. Right. Franklin Roosevelt came in 1933, and he initiated some programs to help. WPA in 1935 was one of them. (tape turned off and on)

Q. I want to ask you what you thought of programs like WPA during the Depression?

A. Well, it was pretty near a case of having to do something to get people to work to keep down trouble. You know, when you get hungry,

A. Yes.

Q. Where did Ruth and Donald go to school?

A. Sangamo Center and Williamsville High School. Here she comes . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

Q. Mr. Mills, can you remember prohibition?

A. I can. (laughter)

Q. Tell me about it, was it a popular law?

A. Popular law?

Q. How did people accept prohibition?

A. Well, the old saying holds true, if you want liquor, you're going to find it. Now prohibition was passed to try to do away with the saloons and stop so much drunkeness. Well, it didn't; it scattered it out. All over the country, there were stills everywhere, and you could buy pretty cheap liqor in all these little towns, especially around the mines. And it seemed to be among the foreign element that run the stills.

Q. Was it secretive, did you have to know someone if you wanted to buy liquor?

A. Well, a little. You had to know somebody that knowed somebody to tell you where to get it. But I think that was a good law when they passed that for several reasons. They give the law some authority to control it, and they also received a revenue off of it. Now, I don't think today they've got near tax enough on liquor.

Q. I guess, of course, there are some people who think there is. So you don't think there is enough tax on liquor today?

A. No, I don't.

Q. What was the general feeling when prohibition was repealed?

A. Well, the people that didn't believe in it, of course, liked it, and people that was making it and selling it didn't like it. There was tremendous profit in that stuff.

Q. Oh, I'm sure there was. What was your reaction to World War I?

A. In what way do you mean?

Q. Well, how did you feel about it, did you keep up with what was going on through the newspaper?

Q. That must have been a big adjustment for Mrs. Mills?

A. Yes sir, she didn't know one iota about a farm, but, boy, she took to it.

Q. Well, I think you mentioned to me after your mother broke her leg, your wife became the doctor's assistant; she helped deliver babies in the neighborhood.

A. No, not my wife.

Q. No?

A. Oh, she helped deliver a few, but not to the extent that my mother did.

Q. Not like your mother did. Was Dr. Shearl still around then?

A. Yes.

Q. Now, you have two children, when was your oldest, Donald, born?

A. July 30.[5]

Q. What year?

A. My God, don't pin me down, now.

Q. Okay, we can figure that out. (laughter) He's how much older than Ruth?

A. Six years. He's six years older than Ruth, and Dorothy is six years older than Donald.

Q. My goodness, so in twelve years, you had those three younguns running around here. I wanted to ask you, too, were your two children born here at the house?

A. Yes, Ruthie was born right here on that bed.

Q. She was born in the east bedroom, and Donald was born . . .

A. In the south bedroom.

Q. Did Dr. Shearl deliver . . .

A. He delivered both of them.

Q. With your mother's help?

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[5]1921. [Ed.]

Q. I'll bet.

A. And they split those out by hand.

Q. Well, that must have been a job to get a great big tree like that down.

A. It was. Today it wouldn't be no job, but them days, they had hand saws, cross cut saws they called them. Two men, one on each end, they'd cut them trees that way.

Q. Was there anything else that you were able to sell to the mines, I mean that became part of the economy?

A. They bought quite a bit of feed, corn and oats and hay. See, they had mules down in the mine to pull that coal with. And, of course, they stayed down there, and they were fed down there, and you could sell corn and oats and hay to the mine.

Q. Do you remember about when they went out of business?

A. As to time, I can't recollect. There hasn't been a mine operating around here for, I'd say, at least twenty-five years. They were closed up before that.

Q. Mr. Mills, where did you meet Mrs. Mills?

A. On a blind date.

Q. I'll be darned. (laughter) When were you two married?

A. In St. Louis.

Q. And the year?

A. Well, we run off.

Q. You did? (laughter) Was your dad alive then?

A. Yes.

Q. Where did you come as newlyweds, did you move back home here?

A. Yes, we came back home after we run out of money.

Q. Oh, how long were you gone?

A. Barely a day and a night. (laughter)

Q. Had she been born on a farm, did she know anything about farming?

A. No, not one iota.

A. Yes, my uncle.

Q. That's just about a mile . . .

A. That's just about a mile and one-half down the road here. That was an awful nice timber. And he made that up into mine props. Do you know what a mine prop is?

Q. This is for proping the tunnel underground.

A. They'd send them in the mine and keep the ceiling proped up, try to, to keep it safe for them to work. And we hauled props, oh, I don't know, it took two, three, four years to clean that timber up and make it up into props. And we'd do that work in the wintertime when there wasn't nothing else to do on the farm; we'd haul props. I know there was three or four of us go down there and haul props. And if you worked real hard, you could make three trips a day. We hauled them to that mine that was south of Sherman. And we hauled from eighty to one hundred to a load, and we got, I think it was two cents apiece for hauling them.

Q. How big were they?

A. Well, they won't take anything under four inches. They check them in. When you go in there with a load of props, the top boss will come around with a chalk, and he'll look them over and check every one that they'll take. And he marks the ones he won't take. We got on to that.

Q. How long were they?

A. Five foot and seven inches, I think. In other words a coal mine had a clearance of five [feet] seven [inches] down there.

Q. Which meant they had to stoop to get through then?

A. That's right.

Q. What kind of wood was that?

A. Mostly white oak and black oak.

Q. Were there any real big trees?

A. Oh, yes. Right over here, remember crossing a little creek between here and Sherman?

Q. Yes.

A. There used to be a tree stood on the south side of the road there. Today it would be worth, no telling how much money. It was a white oak tree, and I imagine it was fifty, sixty feet up to the first limb. And it was about five feet through at the base. And that was cut down and made into props. I wouldn't begin to tell you how many it made, but it made a lot of them.

1951.

Q. How did you feel about that, did you have a real special feeling about being able to buy this land that you had worked for so many years?

A. Well, I might answer that question by asking one. Did you ever go in debt?

Q. Yes. (laughter)

A. Well, I did when I bought the farm, and I can tell you, it gives you a mighty good feeling when you get it paid off.

Q. Did you get help from the government?

A. Yes, I borrowed my money from the Federal Land Bank.

Q. Did you have any difficulty . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

Q. Mr. Mills, we were talking about the farm. At one time you mentioned that when you were a child, there were ponds here on the farm, but now they're aren't. What happened?

A. Let them fill up, they'll erode and fill up themselves.

Q. So there are no ponds on this farm now?

A. No ponds on this farm, no.

Q. How about timber?

A. There is no timber on this farm now.

Q. Was there?

A. I imagine that it was all timber years and years ago.

Q. If you remember your first recollection when you were a child, were there any sections of the farm that had timber on them?

A. Not this farm, but I can remember some huge timbers not too far from here, a mile or two. And, of course, they moved a saw mill in, sawed them up into lumber and cleared them off, and now they are farming them.

Q. You were telling me about an interesting situation with the timber that was at Birch Lake. At one time, didn't a relative of yours go in and take that timber down?

Q. Does the owner participate in the purchase of seed?

A. There is all kinds of arrangements. And it's getting so bad anymore; it's pitiful. They tell me some of these landlords is wanting the tenant to pay part of the taxes too. So there's all kinds of stipulations in a land lease.

Q. Well, to your knowledge, your father's arrangement with Mr. Jones was 50-50.

A. Fifty-fifty, each got one-half of the crops. We had to put their one-half in the elevator.

Q. Where?

A. At Sherman or Williamsville.

Q. What would happen with your half?

A. Sometimes we fed it and sometimes we had more than we could feed, and we'd sell it.

Q. Where did you sell it?

A. Same place, Williamsville or Sherman.

Q. When your father passed away, you became the man of the house then?

A. Well, so called, yes. (laughter)

Q. With the help of your mother?

A. Yes, with the help of Mom, that's true.

Q. She was quite a business woman, wasn't she?

A. Yes, she was.

Q. By that time, was Samuel Jones still living?

A. No, he has passed away before that. They had one daughter, Mabel, and she married a man by the name of Cook, John Cook. And they lived in Springfield all their lives. And he was our landlord at that time.

Q. In later years you bought the farm yourself?

A. I bought the farm from Mrs. Cook.

Q. John Cook had passed away.

A. John Cook died before she did, and I bought the farm from her.

Q. What year was that?

Q. I can't solve that mystery for us, Mr. Mills, I don't know either. (laughter) How large is this farm?

A. One-hundred sixty [acres], one-half mile square.

Q. When your father came here, how did he happen to come here?

A. Well, he worked for the people that owned it by the month on the farm.

Q. Who owned the farm?

A. Sam Jones.

Q. Was he from Williamsville?

A. Springfield, he was the president of the Marine Bank.

Q. Oh, that's right, and his brother had a farm over near . . .

A. Williamsville.

Q. Okay, you told me about him before. Now your dad worked by the month, was he paid by the month?

A. Yes.

Q. Would he realize any profit from the crops?

A. No, not when he was working by the month. He just got so much every month.

Q. But he lived in this house?

A. Yes.

Q. Did that relationship or did that business set up change as time went on.

A. Yes, when he was working by the month, he didn't live here. He lived down there on the hill by old Moonlight Gardens. Do you know where old Moonlight Gardens used to be?

A. Yes.

A. It's right north of where that new mall went in out there. That's where he worked by the month for Sam Jones. And Sam Jones owned this farm, and Dad bought this twenty [acres] down here and moved up there and lived there one year. And Mr. Jones says,"I want to rent you that farm up there, John." And so he did, and we've been here ever since.

Q. What kind of an arrangement do you have when you rent a farm?

A. Usually 50-50.

A. That was a lot of money, fifty dollars.

Q. You're darned right, so you took good care of that equipment?

A. That's right.

Q. Was that something that you had to be real careful about, taking care of your equipment?

A. That was a must with my dad.

Q. And he instilled that feeling in you?

A. That's right.

Q. You knew how much work that fifty dollars represented.

A. Oh, I'd say at least two-hundred fifty, maybe three-hundred dollars. There is a settlement that still makes harness, race horse harness. And my brother-in-law was a race horse man. And that settlement is over here around Arcola, them Amish.

Q. Oh, Arthur, Illinois?

A. Yes. They still make them harness, and I think about three-hundred fifty, four-hundred dollars for a set of harness for one horse. And that harness is made out of leather, and leather is made of of cow hides.

Q. Now that would be tanned, that leather would be from a tannery?

A. Yes, and speaking of leather, you'd say you got a pair of leather shoes, very little leather in it, it's all synthetic stuff.

Q. You mean today?

A. Yes, I don't know what becomes of hides anymore. There is more hides than there ever were, and they are not worth anything. If you butcher a beef--when we used to butcher our own beef--why, we had no use for the hide, and we'd take it to town; and there was a place in there where you could sell them and the same today. And about six cents a pound is all you can get for them. And a hide will figure out just about ten pounds per hundred of live weight. If the animal weighed seven hundred pounds that hide would weigh about seventy pounds.

Q. And you would only get about six cents a pound?

A. Yes, that's all we got for them. And you know if they went into shoes, they shouldn't be as high priced as they are today.

Q. Well, you're right.

A. I don't know what they do with it. They must use it for something.

Q. I think I've seen that. Do you have any?

A. Yes, I got some.

Q. Oh, you've got some stashed away. (laughter)

A. I don't know, they must be three or four collars hanging out in the barn, and I just sold the last set of harness I had a year ago last winter. I knew I had them, and they were good harness when I quit using them. And he wanted to know what I'd take for them, and I said, "Well, I'll take twenty-five dollars for them." And he bought them, and I been wanting to talk to him to see if he got them cleaned up and softened up.

Q. With age, had they gotten kind of stiff?

A. Yes, dried out.

Q. When you were using them, did you put something on them to keep them soft.

A. Oh yes, every year, neat's-foot oil.

Q. Neat's-foot, is that a brand name?

A. No. I used to know what neat's-foot oil was made out of, but I've forgotten. I don't know if it's animal fat, I believe it is. I believe it's made out of sheep.

Q. Would you warm it up and put it on or how did you put it on?

A. Well, it stayed liquid all the time. We'd usually wash the harness, you know they get dry and hard and salty from the horses' sweating, and we'd usually wash the harness and let them dry and then soak them in that oil.

Q. So a good harness would last you a number of years?

A. Oh, yes, they'd last pretty near a lifetime if they was taken care of. You'd have to repair them. I know when I was a kid, I told you about that fellow running the shoe store at Williamsville, he also run a harness shop there, and he had a big case on each side of his wall that would have six or eight sets of new harness hanging in there all the time. He made them. And when I was a kid, I just loved to go in there and watch him making them harness.

Q. Were they expensive, Mr. Mills?

A. Well, I guess you'd say yes and no. If you could buy them today for what they cost then, they'd be real cheap. But if you paid then what you'd have to pay today, they'd be real expensive. As well as I can remember fifty dollars would buy a good set of harness.

Q. Well, back in those days, that was an investment.

Q. You have a beautiful, big barn out here, Mr. Mills.

A. I don't call it beautiful.

Q. You don't?

A. No.

Q. Well, because it probably represents a lot of hard work to you, but it is a huge big barn.

A. It stood there a lot of years.

Q. Have you any idea how old it is?

A. It's older, as old anyhow as the house. It's over one hundred years old.

Q. Could you describe some of the construction of that barn?

A. Well, the frame of the barn is all hewed material. And they must have had some huge trees when that barn was built, and good lumber, timber, because the sills in that barn, let's see, there's one, two, three, six, eight, there's eight timbers in that barn. Some of them are twelve-by-twelve and some of them are eight-by-eight. It's the full length of that barn with no splice in them. Now, that took some trees to get that.

Q. It sure did. What is the length of that barn?

A. Forty-eight feet.

Q. What kind of wood?

A. White oak. The frame, and I imagine the majority of the siding on it is the original siding, too, is white pine. Now we've put on some in my lifetime, and it needs some more now, but I don't suppose I'll ever do it. But it was originally white pine. And they tell me there is contractors that would side that barn with new siding to get that old siding for interior decorating.

Q. Have you actually had someone approach you?

A. No, I haven't, but I've been told it could be done. You been in eating places where they are pretty antiquey. And they can take that old siding and clean it up a little, not too much, and varnish it, and now it makes something pretty nice.

Q. Oh, it's beautiful, I've seen some of it. I never thought that was how they got it though.

A. That's how they got it. And another thing the antique people are after is old horse collars. You know they always had to put a collar on a horse, then put the harness on. And they tell me they take them old collars, clean them up, and I don't know what all they do to them, and put a mirror in them. And they say they're beautiful; I've never saw one.

Q. Yes. How large did you make it, the little building?

A. The toilet, I think it was four-by six.

Q. You told me that you put a sidewalk in to one of them.

A. Yes, we put a concrete walk out to it.

Q. Did you put anything into the pit?

A. Usually, they put lime. As far as I can remember, that was all they ever used was slack lime. And then we always had it cleaned every year. There was people that did that kind of work.

Q. So with that type of service available, you didn't have to build a new one too frequently?

A. No, we dug the hole and lined it, and it would last for a long, long time. Now we did build two houses, and they wouldn't have had to been if they'd been taken care of, kept painted and one thing and another. But they didn't, and so they just deteriorated.

Q. What was that hole lined with?

A. Lumber.

Q. Was that treated in any way?

A. No, not at that time.

Q. When the men did come out to clean it, did they ever have to replace some of the wood?

A. No, not that I ever remember of. That would just last indefinitely in there.

Q. Well, do you look back on that with a certain amount of nostalgia, Mr. Mills, or are you just real happy that that part of your existence is over?

A. I'm real happy that that's behind me. (laughter) As I told you in that paper I wrote, you go out there in the wintertime, and the seat [would] be covered with snow, and you brushed the snow off and sat down, and you didn't stay long. (laughter)

Q. I'll bet you didn't.

A. Ruthie lived through some of that.

Q. I know she did. I've heard her talking about that because electricity came after she was in high school, or was she out of high school?

A. She wasn't out of high school I'm sure. I don't know what year we got that electricity, but I'd say we've had it between thirty and forty years.

A. Yes.

Q. Oh, good. (laughter)

A. When we butchered and rendered that lard, we always had a lot of cracklings. And by the way, are they good to eat. (laughs)

Q. I've heard about that.

A. And Mother would keep them cracklings, and I couldn't tell you the recipe. It took so many pounds of cracklings and so many cans of lye, and they boiled it so long and, by God, it made soap. And what I mean, it was soap.

Q. Really did the job.

A. Now they got, a little later on, some of the younger generation, they didn't like the smell of it. It wasn't sweet smelling soap, and they got to flavoring it. And, my God, you couldn't tell it from store bought.

Q. Did she use that just for the laundry or did you use that to wash your hands?

A. No, just for the laundry.

Q. You got an awful lot of things out of that hog then, didn't you?

A. Yes. They get more today.

Q. Is that right?

A. Yes.

Q. Now tell me about--you put the bathroom in, that would have been after electricity came to the farm?

A. Yes.

Q. Before that you had outdoor sanitary facilities?

A. Yes, outdoor toilet.

Q. Did you ever have to build a new one?

A. Yes, I think I built a couple in my lifetime.

Q. Now, I'm sure that the location was something that you had to give a lot of thought to and tell me what were some of the considerations involved?

A. Well, to get it far enough away that it didn't interfere with your well, your drinking water. And that's probably one-hundred fifty, two hundred feet from our well, which is safe.

A. No, we got it on a water system. We got too lazy to pump water. (laughs)

Q. Where does that water come from?

A. From the barn well.

Q. How does that operate?

A. We got a pit out there below freezing with our water system in it, and it's just automatic. A pressure tank gets low, and she kicks in, and she pumps and fills up and cuts out.

Q. Now, is there a holding tank in the basement?

A. Just our hot water heater is all.

Q. I see. So in other words when we turn the faucet, that water is coming from a storage tank out under ground at the site of the well?

A. Yes.

Q. When did you do that?

A. There's a lot of funny things.

Q. That would have been after electricity came to the farm?

A. Yes, it was.

Q. Now, have you ever had to boil water, do you have the well tested or . . .

A. No, we never did that I remember of. I've heard them talk about it, but we never did boil any.

Q. And you're here.

A. I'm here, so I guess it must not be too bad.

Q. Why, it must be pretty good, I'd say.

A. There's one thing about it, it's awful hard.

Q. It probably presented problems at laundry time?

A. They used to put lye in water to break it and then skim it off. And by the way, they all made their own soap.

Q. Oh, they did?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Well how did they do that, do you know?

we got into the Grade A milk regulations, and you had to comply with them. So we decided to clean it out. And I got a couple of fellows to clean it out, and there wasn't nothing in it. But it had always had a good top on it. And you know that we couldn't pump that well dry. They put two pumps in there and pumped and pumped and pumped, and water was boiling up right out of that same hole that was drilled in there fifty years ago.

Q. Oh, my goodness, and that was just fifteen feet from the well that had gone dry?

A. That's right. So there is something to water witching.

Q. Well, there sure is. Was Mr. Clark a pretty busy fellow, did a lot of people have him?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Real popular around here?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Now how about the well that you have here at the house, is that the original?

A. That's the original well. That well is lined with limestone; it ain't got no brick in it.

Q. Where did that [limestone] come from?

A. Down here at the river.

Q. The Sangamon River?

A. The Sangamon River, down there, you know, where them bluffs are when you cross the railroad bridge?

Q. Yes.

A. That's where it came from.

Q. That's right there at Carpenter Park?

A. Yes.

Q. And that was on the farm when your folks came here, did your dad tell you that well was at the farm when they came?

A. Yes, it's not near as good a well as that one at the barn, but it's awful good tasting water.

Q. Now do you still have that for the house or are you on a water system?

cleaned it all up, and he said, "Send me down that two-inch auger. I want to see if there is any water down here." So we sent him down the auger, and he bored a hole right in the center of that well. And he hit that vein of water, and it shot up out of that ground about eighteen inches, that much pressure down there. So he says, "Make me a plug." (laughs) And we made him a plug, and he plugged that hole up and stopped the water. And [he said], "Send me the brick." And we sent him the brick, and he started walling it. And he walled that well up, and he got about four feet high, he pulled that plug out and that water came right on up after him, about ten, twelve foot of water.

Q. Oh, my goodness. Did you and your dad have to help him with that?

A. Yes.

Q. How did you get the earth out of that well?

A. Windlass.

Q. You're going to have to explain that. (laughter) A windlass?

A. A windlass--it was a contraption--it was all taken out in bucket about, I'd say five, six-gallon buckets, and you'd wind that windlass up, it had two cranks on it, one on each end, and you would wind that windlass up. It had a rope on it with a hook on it to hook in the bale bucket, the bucket bale. (laughter)

Q. A tongue twister.

A. Yes. And we'd bring up one and dump it while he was filling the other. That just was a continuous operation.

Q. Now, did you line the entire well with bricks?

A. Yes.

Q. All the way up to the surface?

A. Yes.

Q. And then you put a pump on it.

A. Yes, put a top on it and put a pump in it.

Q. Now, are you still using that well?

A. Oh, yes. And it's never been cleaned out but once since it was dug, and I guess it's, oh, at least fifty, fifty-five years old.

Q. This was before your father passed away?

A. Yes, and [we] decided to clean it out. Well, what made us clean it out,

A. Well, I think they're pretty near the same as CIPS.[4] I think they run pretty close together.

Q. Now you heat the house with oil?

A. Yes.

Q. Your house is completely modern?

A. That's right.

Q. How about the water, I notice the pump is right out the back door.

A. We've used that all my life for drinking water until we put in the water system. And it wouldn't stand a water system. Did I tell you about digging the new well?

Q. No.

A. Well, at that time we was farming with horses and mules, and we had twelve, fifteen head of them, and it took a lot of water for them. And every summer our stock well at the barn would go dry, and we'd have to haul water. Well, Dad got after the landlord to dig us a new stock well. And he said, "All right, you get you somebody to dig it." So there was an old fellow in Williamsville that was supposed to be a water witch. Do you know what a water witch is?

Q. I've heard of them.

A. Well, Charlie Clark was his name, and Dad went up and got him--and by the way, all that stuff was done with horse and buggy--and brought him down here. And that water witching is done by a peach tree fork, cut a limb off a peach tree that's got a fork on it. And then you hold that fork in your hand like that, and that fork will turn right down to that water by where you walk over it.

Q. So in other words, you hold that peach branch at each end of the fork?

A. Yes, that's right. And you start walking around real slow, and if you cross a stream of water, that thing will turn and twist the bark right off of it. And he walked around out there. He says, "John," he says, "we'll find it right here." "Well," Dad says, "you're crazy." It wasn't over, I don't believe it's over fifteen feet from the well that was dry. "Well," he says, "I'll tell you," he says, "I'll dig it, and if it's dry, it won't cost you a cent." Dad said, "Get digging."

And he laid him out a circle, a five foot circle, it's a five foot well, and started digging. And he dug that well down to about twenty feet, and he didn't have to put his foot on the spade down there; he just shoved the spade down there. It was that soft and wet. He scraped the bottom up and

[4]Central Illinois Public Service. [Ed.]

A. Well, I'm sorry about that, it's kind of like that consolidation of schools, I would say ATA has been out of circulation for about, possibly fifteen years.

Q. That would have been about the time that acre of ground was sold then?

A. Yes. And the reason we went out of business, they had no losses and we had a small dues a year for maintenance, such as light and fuel, and people just quit paying dues and quit paying dues, and we got to where we couldn't operate.

Q. Well, you had some changes in the neighborhood, too, by that time, didn't you?

A. Yes.

Q. The old group wasn't here any more?

A. That's right, the younger generation wasn't interested.

Q. Plus probably your losses weren't as great as they had been in the past?

A. That's right.

Q. Well, Mr. Mills, you were telling me when we stopped last time about electricity coming to the farm.

A. Well, we have what is known as an REA line here, and that's what it started as, Rural Electrification Association. And they went around, had meetings, took up memberships, and they had to have a minimum of three per mile to build you a line. And I never will forget, the minimum rate was $3.25 a month. That wasn't very much.

Q. No, it wasn't.

A. And that allowed you forty kilowatts.

Q. How much was your membership?

A. I think twenty, twenty-five dollars for the membership fee.

Q. Was it difficult to convince some people that it was a good thing?

A. It was at that time. Some places you'd run into a strip that maybe there'd be five or six for a mile and then there wouldn't be over one or two. But they kind of jumped that over and put the line in for everybody. And today, I'll bet you, it will average ten to fifteen to the mile.

Q. I'll bet it would.

A. People has just gone to the country, built new homes, in the process of building them.

Q. How do your rates compare with, for example, Springfield?

they didn't mess with them. When they caught a thief, they just hung him right there and it put a stop to it.

Q. Pretty swift justice?

A. Yes.

Q. Now, did you have some difficulty in this neighborhood?

A. Yes, of mostly killing poultry along the road or stealing hogs and such things as that. They'd come in at night and butcher a hog or maybe a calf. Well, we got to the place where we patrolled the roads at night. And we did that for several years, and we broke it up.

Q. How many men were in your local association?

A. I think about forty, thirty-five, forty.

Q. Now do you have much difficulty with that sort of thing today?

A. Not too much. We lose a little stuff but not too bad. And another thing about that thirty, forty men, after we got the telephone, they would pledge to one another where if somebody needed help, they could get on that telephone; and I'll tell you, in thirty minutes there was people coming from all directions. And if they had a gangster there he was caught, now. (laughs)

Q. He sure was. So in other words, if you had difficulty, you would call a certain number?

A. Well, I'd call one of my neighbors and then he'd call somebody else, and it wasn't long until the news was around.

Q. In other words, you had kind of a grapevine set-up that one person was responsible . . .

A. Then we had twelve, fifteen parties on a line, and when they mentioned ATA, they knowed something was up, and they would quit their gabbing and talk business for awhile. (laughter)

Q. There weren't many secrets out here, were there?

A. No. And the sheriff, he recognized our organization. He assisted us quite a lot on tracking down thieves and one thing and another.

Q. When did that cease its . . .

A. Cease to operate?

Q. To operate, yes.

unload them, and then about three o'clock, three-thirty, they came after them. At some of these other local mines; such as, Selbytown and Barclay and Spaulding, they lived right there at the mine.

Q. And when the mine closed down, did those towns just disappear?

A. They all went to pot. Some people bought them and moved them home and made, oh, sheds for use on the farm out of them. A few of them scattered round the neighborhood yet.

Q. Did any of those people live in Sherman or Williamsville?

A. Oh, yes, a lot of them lived in Sherman. Very few lived in Williamsville; Williamsville was never a miners' town.

Q. Did any of those people stay in Sherman, are any of those families here today who had worked the mines?

A. There is only about one or two left. Tony Rock is the only one I can recall right now. There was an old fellow passed away over there about a month ago, Polistina, he was a miner all of his life. Those are the only two that I can recall.

Q. Another thing, Mr. Mills, you told me after the school was consolidated and they weren't using the school house across the road, that a local organization took it over.

A. That's the ATA.

Q. The Anti-Thief Association?

A. Yes.

Q. What can you tell me about that?

A. Well.

Q. Why was that formed?

A. It ceased to become a school and a bunch of us got together and we bought that acre of ground off of the people that owned the farm that it came off of with the understanding if ever we ceased to operate, it would be going back to the farm, original farm. And then time went on, we took up some kind of a notion to sell it. And we sold it, and it brought $10,500.

Q. That's amazing.

A. And it did go back to the farm.

Q. But this Anti-Thief Association, where was that started; was that a national association?

A. Yes, I'd say it started in Kansas, Caney Kansas. And it was started when they had so much horse thieving, cattle thievery going on out there. And

afford to lose part of it and still have a pretty good sized chunk left. If they put it up much thinner than that, the waste would be too great. They wouldn't have much left.

Q. Well, say like last winter, we had a severely cold winter.

A. I made that expression to several people last winter, that would have been a wonderful winter to put up ice.

Q. Would you say if you had put up ice that you'd probably still have it today?

A. Then?

Q. Yes.

A. Oh, yes, yes. It would last up to July, August.

Q. That's really something. Another thing you talked about, Mr. Mills, was the coal mines in the area. There were a number of them.

A. Well, that's a pretty good subject. You hear an awful lot of talk nowadays about this EPA, isn't it?

Q. Environmental Protection Agency, yes.

A. And as I told you, there was five or six mines in a radius of five or six miles out here. And if you was ever around a coal mine, they always have a slack pile, and that slack pile is always on fire, burning. And that throws off a lot of gas and smoke. We lived through that, and it didn't bother us. If they seen a slack pile burning today, they'd have a fit.

Q. Oh, I'm sure they would.

A. Yes, they would.

Q. What happened to those mines?

A. Well, I guess the demand just kept deteriorating until they didn't have--making enough money to keep them open. Some of them was so-called worked out. They got so far away that they couldn't afford to haul the coal. Some of these mines was as far as two mile from the mouth of the mine, and that's a pretty good pull.

Q. It sure is. Do you remember the names of any of the mines?

A. Yes, Peabody Number 6 was south of Sherman, Howard Mine, north of Sherman, Selbytown Mine up here south of Williamsville.

Q. Where did the people live who worked those mines?

A. Well, now at Peabody Mine Number 6, they worked, oh, five, six hundred men, and they run a shuttle train out of Springfield. And they had a switch down there. They'd bring the men out of a morning and back in there and

Q. Is that right?

A. They got muscle. These chickens that's raised on--in these brooder houses--they ain't got no muscle, their meat is soft. That's the difference.

Q. How about the flavor?

A. Well, there is a lot of difference in the flavor.

Q. As well as the texture of the meat?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you let them get bigger than two, about two and one-half pounds?

A. Oh yes, normally it was common to kill three, four pound chickens. Families was larger, and generally it took two.

Q. How would your mother usually prepare the chicken?

A. Now you're getting into cooking, and that's something I don't know much about. (laughter) Well, she first scalded them and picked them--picked the feathers off of them--then take the insides out of them and then cut them up, soaked them in cold water. If she was going to have fried chicken tomorrow, she'd do that today and let them set in that cold water overnight. And sometimes we had ice and sometimes we didn't.

Q. Where did you get the ice?

A. Well, some people--we didn't ourselves--had their own icehouses. They would put up their own ice in the winter, and they'd go out there--it was covered with sawdust, that's the way they put it in there. They throwed water on it, in other words, froze that whole house full of ice in one chunk, and then they'd cover it up with sawdust, probably a foot around the outside and then be a foot deep on top. And you'd be surprised how long that would keep in there. Then when you dig into it, you take a sharp instrument such as an ice pick, and you could pick them cakes loose just like they was put in there.

Q. Where did they get that ice?

A. Out of ponds, farm ponds.

Q. How late in the year would you say they would still have ice?

A. Well, that depended on the season. You couldn't set any specific time. It took a lot of cold weather to make that ice and they wouldn't fool with it unless it was frozen a foot thick. That's what they liked to get it, a foot thick.

Q. Probably easier to handle too.

A. Well, yes, and it wasn't easy to handle; it was heavy, but they could

A. Yes, when you sugar cured you did. Brown sugar and salt and just rub the dickens out of it into the meat and just keep it covered.

Q. For twenty-one days?

A. Yes.

Q. And then you would proceed with the washing, then smoking?

A. Washing it off, dry it and put this black pepper and saltpeter and borax on it.

Q. That was after the smoking?

A. Yes, after it was dried off. And some people would sew it up in cloth sacks. In them days we had plenty of flour sacks, and a ham just fit nicely in a flour sack, and they put it in that flour sack and sewed her up tight. That also helped keep flies off.

Q. Well, it would, and then that was stored in the cellar?

A. No, that was still stored in the smoke house.

Q. Even after the smoking?

A. It hung out there all summer, up till July or August. And we usually had it all used up, oh, I'd say by the last of July.

Q. So then you just didn't eat it until it got cold again?

A. That's right.

Q. You wouldn't butcher in the warm weather?

A. No, not that time of the year, no. But as I told you, they always had sausage fried down. Did I tell you about frying down sausage?

Q. Yes, and we put that in the crocks and covered it with lard.

A. And did I tell you about making corned beef?

Q. Yes.

A. We had plenty to eat.

Q. I'll bet you did. Then about the chickens, your mother raised the chickens, and if you were going to have chicken, you killed the chicken that day and dressed it out?

A. Yes, and put it in cold water and soak it, and you can believe it or not, there's as much difference in the taste of a chicken that's grown out on the ground—you might say run wild—and these broiler chickens as there is sausage and beef steak.

Q. Had she lived at home?

A. Well, till she got married, and then she moved to Chicago. She died up there, and they brought her back here to bury her.

Q. And that wake was held in Springfield?

A. At Athens, Mott and Son Funeral Home.

Q. She was buried at Kerns Cemetery?

A. At that time.

Q. At that time, and you later then moved her to Wolf Creek?

A. That's right.

Q. I had another question about the butchering and that was when you salted the meat, what kind of a container did you put it in?

A. To do the salting?

Q. Yes.

A. Usually a wash tub.

Q. Where did you keep it for those twenty-one days?

A. Usually in barrels or boxes, one just piled in on top of one another, and let her set that way for twenty-one days.

Q. Did you let them set outside?

A. Oh no, no.

Q. Like in the cellar?

A. We kept it in the smoke house.

Q. Oh, in the smoke house?

A. Yes.

Q. So if that was in the deep if winter, it could get pretty cold out there?

A. Yes, but it wouldn't freeze, that salt . . .

Q. Because of the salt?

A. Salt and sugar on it, it wouldn't freeze.

Q. Did you put sugar on it too?

Q. Was that about the time that you got electricity?

A. Well, we had electricity before that. You know, that's kind of a peculiar thing, we wasn't quite as bad as the old guy over at Petersburg, we thought if we could just get electricity to get lights that it would be wonderful, which it was. But it wasn't long till you went to adding on and adding on, and we're pretty well electrified.

That old man over there at Petersburg, they had to work on him for a long time to get him to put it in, and he finally did. And he'd turn it on till he got his coal oil lamp lit, and then he'd turn it off. (laughter)

Q. He didn't want to change, did he?

A. We wasn't quite that bad.

Q. Would the whole neighborhood have to agree to have electricity before it came out here?

A. Yes, REA . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

Q. Mr. Mills, you were telling me about funerals in the early 1900's, and I wanted to ask you if the wake was at home or if it was at the funeral home?

A. You mean all wakes or that particular . . .

Q. Well, most of them, say in your family?

A. Well, most of them at that time was held at home--in the homes.

Q. Would the funeral director come to the house?

A. Yes.

Q. Did he remove the body and bring it back or did he prepare it at home?

A. No, they left the body right here at home, and I've sat up many a wake. They'd be a group of the neighbors go in and sit up all night with the body.

Q. Did you usually have the wake one night and then the burial the next day?

A. Yes, one night.

Q. In your family, who was the first one who was waked at a funeral home?

A. Possibly my sister, my mother and father were both waked here, possibly my second sister, Bertha.[3]

[3]Bertha Mills Fessenden, 1892-1954. [Ed.]

Q. You didn't keep the doors closed?

A. No, we didn't keep the doors closed. And the kitchen, we had a coal range set right there where that range is setting, oh, for years and years and years. You might of heard of the name, Copperclad, one of the best ranges you could get. And it burned coal or wood. We burned coal most of the time because wood is more dirty, and it just don't throw out the heat like coal.

Q. So, this is how your mother cooked?

A. Yes.

Q. And your wife cooked with the coal stove?

A. Yes, and the laundry, they had a copper washboiler. They'd put that on that stove and put the water in it and heat the water. The washing machine out there on the porch would wash the clothes. In them days we had an outside clothesline, and they'd hang them out on the clothesline to dry.

Q. What about the wintertime?

A. Same way in the wintertime. Sometimes it would freeze on the line.

Q. Do you remember the time before you had electricity?

A. Oh yes.

Q. How did they do the laundry, did they do it out on the porch?

A. Then they had a hand machine.

Q. Oh, a hand machine?

A. Yes, and a washboard.

Q. Did they ever hang the clothes in the house?

A. Once in awhile if the weather happened to be too bad. They've got a clothes rack down in the basement now that will hold a lot of clothes. And you could set it here in the kitchen and dry a batch at a time.

Q. Did your mother and did your wife also have a special day for laundry?

A. Not particularly, they usually tried to do it on Monday.

Q. You said you put the bathroom in, do you remember when you put the bathroom in, what year that was?

A. Oh, that was, it's been in the early 1950's. Yes, I put it in, I had it put in, I didn't do it myself.

as modern as you could make a house.

Q. Well, I know it is.

A. Outside of central air [conditioning].

Q. How was it heated when you were a youngster?

A. Heating stoves, coal stoves.

Q. In every room?

A. No, just two rooms, living room and dining room, had a stove in each room. And we used that for years and years and years. Finally, we got high-toned and got oil, had an oil stove in each room.

Q. Where did you get your coal for your coal stoves?

A. From the mines locally. There used to be five or six coal mines in a radius of five miles of here.

Q. Did you go get it yourself?

A. Yes.

Q. Took your wagon?

A. Yes, take a wagon and team and go get it.

Q. Would you try to keep those fires going through the night?

A. Oh yes, you couldn't let them go out. If you did, you had some frosty feet next morning.

Q. I'll bet you did. But the bedrooms weren't heated?

A. No.

Q. Is there an upstairs?

A. No, it's all on one floor.

Q. You have how many bedrooms?

A. Three.

Q. Three. So the bedrooms weren't heated.

A. They weren't heated, only what would just automatically . . .

Q. Go in?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you have the newspaper come?

A. Well, more or less by newspaper and telephone. And this brother-in-law of mine, Mr. Petefish, him and I built--made the first radio that was ever in the neighborhood. You know you used to could go to the dime store and buy any part you needed to build a radio. And we went and bought a bunch of parts, and we worked night after night after night sodering them wires and putting them things together, and we got them to where they would work with a headphone.

Q. When was that, do you remember about the year that you built that?

A. Oh, I would say that was in the 1920's.

Q. Before that, did you have the newspaper delivered?

A. Yes, we had the newspaper and the telephone.

Q. When did you get the telephone?

A. It's been here all my life.

Q. As long as you can remember?

A. Yes.

Q. Was it a party line?

A. Yes, used to be twelve or fourteen on there. You took your chances of ever getting to use it. That was the way with our radio. I think we had one or two sets of headphones. Everybody sitting around the room waiting for their turn to listen. (laughter) You'd sit there till your ears would grow fast to your head listening to that thing. Ole Amos and Andy was one of our favorites. Lum and Abner.

Q. Only one person could listen at a time?

A. Yes.

Q. That person then had to relate what happened to the others?

A. Yes. (laughs)

Q. Tell me about the house. What has happened to the house in these years that you have lived here?

A. Well . . .

Q. About how old is it?

A. The house is over a hundred years old. It's got huge timbers underneath it; and, of course, we've done a lot of remodeling. We put the bathroom in. We paneled these walls and put those cabinets in, and it's just

Q. How old were you when that happened?

A. Oh, that just happened six or seven years ago.

Q. Oh, did they set it some way?

A. Yes, Springfield, at the hospital. I can't tell you the doctor's name; he's a bone doctor, Dr. Greening called him. And he came over there and he looked at it, and he says, "I'm afraid to set that hand straight." Them fingers was broken. And he says, "I'm afraid you'll never use them if I do." So he says,"I'm going to set it in that position, put a ball here in the center about the shape of an egg." Which he did and taped those fingers down over it and felt fine. And I don't know, it stayed on there for two or three weeks. Come time to take it off, (laughs) I went down there and he took that off. I'll tell you, I thought that hand would fall off. It was the most funny sensation I ever had in my life.

Q. Oh, really?

A. Yes, I was by myself. I was driving the car with one hand.and I came home that evening, and I was so afraid I would break them fingers over again. I said, "Mother, I ain't going to bed with that hand in that shape." So she had a roll of gauze, and oh, it was about so big around, she put it in the center of my hand and taped them fingers down on it. And I was satisfied; I was afraid I'd get to flouncing around in bed or something and break them fingers over.

Q. How did you break them?

A. They went through a belt on a corndump. It's a wonder it hadn't cut them off.

Q. You were fortunate, weren't you?

A. Yes.

Q. I should say. You must have had colds when you were a kid, how did your mother treat that? Did she have any special rememdies that she used?

A. Goose grease, turpentine, kerosene.

Q. You mean she rubbed that on you?

A. Yes, tie a flannel around your neck and put you in bed. Soaked your feet.

Q. She pulled all of you through?

A. Yes.

Q. That's good. Well, how would you keep in touch with what was going on?

A. Well . . .

Q. What about the clothes that you wore when you were a youngster growing up, did your mother make your clothes?

A. A lot of them, and as the fellow said, "I don't know how old I was till when I went to wearing store-bought clothes." (laughter) I'll bet you couldn't answer that question yourself.

Q. No, I don't think I could. Did your mother have a sewing machine?

A. Yes, still got it.

Q. You do?

A. Yes.

Q. What kind is it?

A. Singer.

Q. Where did she go to buy her material?

A. Probably mail-order houses. And she'd go to town, in them days most all stores sold bolt material.

Q. How about your shoes?

A. Well, there was a store in Williamsville that handled shoes quite a bit, and us kids, a lot of our shoes came from that store up there. Then after we got grown, oh, I'd say our shoes came from Springfield.

Q. Did you go barefoot in the summer?

A. Yes, especially in the mud. (laughter)

Q. Well, your family was pretty lucky then, outside of the time your parents had the scarlet fever, you didn't have any serious illnesses?

A. Oh, measles or mumps or stuff like that, common diseases. But that scarlet fever, I'll tell you, it was rough.

Q. I can imagine.

A. We were lucky, we came through it all alive, and nobody was afflicted afterwards. Now, in that school picture there, I can show you a boy there that had the scarlet fever when he was six years old, and he never walked another step in his life; only on crutches. It affected his spine some way.

Q. How about any broken bones or any accidents on the farm?

A. Well, not very many. I had a little accident myself, broke my hand across there (Mr. Mills pointed to his fingers) And I had it tied up for a couple, three weeks. Outside of that we had no . . .

A. Probably a week; I know it got up to 112 [degrees]. That's pretty hot.

Q. I'll say it is.

A. I know a neighbor and I was mowing, and we knew it was hot, but we didn't think it was anything like that. And he lived down there, not too far--about a mile down the road here--and he had a bunch of broilers in a brooder house just about ready to go to market. And we went down there and he told his wife to go in and make a pitcher of lemonade; so she did. And he went to look at his chickens. They was just falling over here, there and yonder, and dying like flies. And he also had a rabbit hutch, and they was the same way; they was just falling over dying from the heat. He kicked the doors open and just let them go wild to get some air if they could. And that particular one day was the worse, but it was pretty hot there for about a week.

And I know that time, a neighbor--well, he's not exactly a neighbor, he lives up there south of Williamsville--he had a windmill setting in the field. And he had a nice level farm, and he went out there and he climbed up to the top of that windmill and--took binoculars with him--looked around over his fields, and you could just see those tassels just cooking, falling over. It was just that hot, corn didn't amount to anything.

Q. It really affected your yield that year?

A. Oh yes.

Q. How about tornadoes?

A. We have been mighty lucky, thank the Lord. We have never had a tornado through here.

Q. You were very lucky then. What about big snowstorms, have you ever felt isolated?

A. Well, we have had some pretty good hail, but I don't recall ever seeing hail bigger than, oh, say an English walnut, that down to the size of a hickory nut, hazel nut. I never saw no golf-ball hail or baseball hail, and I don't want to.

Q. I don't blame you. How about a bad snowstorm?

A. We had them.

Q. Did you ever feel isolated on the farm?

A. Well, yes and no. We could always get out if we wanted to and had to; but if you didn't have nothing to go for, you wouldn't venture out in a storm like that just to go to town to loaf. But our main transportation then would be horseback. You go up in fields or anywhere to get around the snowdrifts.

over that hard road.

Q. Oh my goodness, that's unbelievable, isn't it?

A. No traffic whatever.

Q. But it's been a long time since that's happened though?

A. It's been a long time, but it did happen.

Q. When did you finally get an oiled road out here?

A. Well, that kind of grew on gradually. They got doing a better job of maintaining in the township, and then I just don't quite remember how they organized this county deal, county roads. This road out here now is a county road. It's maintained and taken care of by the county, And, oh, they got miles of it in the county. And they really take care of it. I would just as soon live on it as a hard road.

Q. You have no trouble getting in and out now?

A. No, and we live just far enough off the road that it is quiet.

Q. How far would you say we are from the road?

A. Four-hundred feet. And I'll tell you they use it for a speedway out here too.

Q. Oh, I'll bet.

A. No cops. Them kids likes to romp.

Q. Do you ever remember any severe weather while you were growing up?

A. Yes, I think it was 1918 or 1919; we had an awful severe winter, it was as bad or worse as this winter. We had more ice than we had this winter. And I've seen it as cold as it was this winter several times in my life, twenty, twenty-five below zero.

Q. Would that present some special problems in taking care of your stock?

A. Yes, always.

Q. How would you overcome these problems?

A. Oh, just care. (laughs)

Q. Did you lose any?

A. Oh no, I don't remember ever losing any, only from sickness maybe, but not from exposure.

I've lived through a couple of pretty severe droughts in my time, and the last one was in 1954. It was the worse.

Q. How long did that go on?

Q. Oh, I see.

A. And Donald, he was the guy that hauled the hay in. He run the buck-- rake, one on each side and he'd go down through the field and push up the damnedest loads and push it up to the baler. And them two fellows would pitch it in to me, and I'd poke it in the baler.

Q. You had a lot of cooperation then out here?

A. Yes, and we was talking awhile ago about the changes. We went from stacking hay to baling hay with a stationary baler to a pickup baler that would go out into the field and pick the hay up and bale it and kick it out on a wagon. Well, that's almost past. They've got these round balers now that--we was baling square bales--they've got these round balers now that will put as much as a ton of hay in one bale.

Q. Isn't that pretty difficult to handle?

A. They got to handle it with a forklift. That's the only way you can handle it. That's one of the drawbacks in using that method. And then the other method is feeding it. You've got to have a special way of feeding it. If you just took one of them round bales out to the pasture and kicked it out to the cattle, they'd waste half of it. So you got to fix some kind of a pen around it so they can feed around it.

Q. So they gradually use it up?

A. Yes.

Q. What about the roads in the area, what kind of shape were they in?

A. We had nothing but dirt roads ever out here, and I've seen the time when you couldn't get from here to Sherman with four horses on a wagon. Now, that's hard to believe, isn't it?

Q. It's just two miles away.

A. But it was. And I remember one time when the river got over all the roads into Springfield.

Q. That's the Sangamon River?

A. Yes, and the hospitals and places like that had to have milk. We hauled the milk to Sherman and put it on the passenger train and shipped it to Springfield, and they'd pick it up in there and take it to the dairy and process it.

Q. Was the Sangamon River often out of its banks?

A. This spring?

Q. Well, say in years back when you were growing up.

A. Oh yes, where you came over tonight, I've seen water five feet deep

Q. How old was she when she passed away?

A. Not too old, I think sixty-eight or sixty-nine.

Q. That certainly isn't very old.

A. No, but yet that was a pretty good age at that time.

Q. Yes, that's true. What year did she pass away?

A. I can't tell you.

Q. But you had children of your own then?

A. Oh yes.

Q. How old were you when your father passed away?

A. I think about twenty.

Q. You left school when you were how old?

A. Yes, well, I started in the eighth grade in the fall and went to school up until time to shuck corn, and I had to quit and shuck corn and I never did go back to school. I knew I couldn't go and pass the test, so I just didn't go.

Q. Did you dad need you here at home to help him?

A. Yes, he needed help. They didn't have no money to hire help in them days. You either done it yourself or done without. That's one thing, Mrs. Berg, that had a tendency to draw neighbors closer together. They didn't have the money to go out and hire help. They would help one another. But that's so far gone that . . .

Q. Did you find that one person became especially good at doing one thing and another person became especially good at doing something else?

A. Well, yes and no. You just kind of had to be a jack-of-all-trades and master of none to get along. (laughter) Of course, we had our jobs. Now in baling hay, my job was to feed the baler. They had a platform that you stood up on, and there was two other fellows, Mr. Flagg and Mr. Devantier, they pitched the hay up on the platform to me, and I poked it under the feeder into [the] baler. And then we had another fellow that done the tying, poked the wires and tied them.

Q. So you had to have a group working together?

A. Yes.

Q. And you had to have someone pulling that wagon along?

A. No, this was a stationary baler.

A. Yes, Sally Ray, and when she was in the hospital, after they operated on that leg, they put a cast on her clear around her waist down to the knee on one leg and clear down to her foot on the other one. Well, I went in to see her every night, and I got in there that night, and she was just having a fit. They had got that cast too tight around her crippled leg, and her leg had started to swell. Well, the more it swelled, the more it hurt. And them nurses wouldn't touch it, not without doctor's orders. "Well," I said, "I'll go get somebody that will touch it." So I went over—she lived on Black Avenue—and got Sally and told her what was going on. And she said, "We'll take care of that." And we went over there and she saw the circumstance, and she says, "Can you stand ether?" I said, "I don't know, Sally, whether I can or not." "Well," she said, "I'll go get a bottle of used ether and a saw." And she said, "We'll get that cast to where it will relieve that pain." So she went and got a bottle of ether. And I stood and just drop, drop, drop—that ether would soften that plaster of paris—and she could take the saw and just saw right through it. And she cut about, oh, about two or three inches off the end of that cast and, boy, you could just imagine what the relief was.

Q. What did the hospital personnel do?

A. They stood there with their mouths open. (laughter) They never saw anything like that before.

Q. Did she come home in a cast?

A. Yes, she wore that cast for, oh, I'll say two years, and then we'd taken her back, and they took it off in there. And then is when, I think, that x-ray man treated her leg.

Q. How did your mother accept this misfortune?

A. Just as cheerful as could be. I'll swear before God I think the woman really enjoyed living up until about the last month she lived. She'd do anything, Mrs. Berg, that you'd take to her where she could get ahold of it with her hands. We had a quilt frame that set across her bed, and, of course, we had a back rest on the bed that she could sit up just like she could in the hospital. And she'd sit up there and quilt for hours. And she would enjoy visiting with neighbors. And when we were making garden in the spring--you know when they plant potatoes they got to cut them up in pieces--she had to cut some potatoes. Take her in a bucket of potatoes, and, by God, she'd cut them.

Q. She must have been an inspiration to all of you.

A. She was. She had a world of inspiration.

Q. What happened when she finally passed away, did she contract some other disease or . . .

A. No, as I said, I think she actually enjoyed living up until about the last thirty days, and she just got to the point where she just gave up.

Q. What happened to her?

A. She broke her leg.

Q. How did she do it?

A. I don't know whether the bone broke and she fell or whether she fell and broke the bone. All indications point to the--bone broke was what caused her to fall because her bone was just as chalky as could be. It wouldn't knit. And they operated on her, and they tried to put a plate on it, and the bone wouldn't hold screws or nothing. So they just sewed it back up. And we brought her home and she lay in there.

Before we brought her home, I got pretty well acquainted with the x-ray man down there in the old Memorial Hospital. She lay in there for three months, and he come to me one day and he says, "Mr. Mills," he said, "I'd like to experiment with your mother." He said, "It won't hurt her. I don't know if it will do her any good or not; I'd like to treat that leg with x-ray." And I talked to Mom about it, and she said, "All right." So they treated her, oh, maybe a dozen times. And we brought her home, and that bone did knit. Now, how good, I can't tell you. She couldn't pick her leg up on the bed, but her foot would set up straight, it wouldn't fall over. So the bone did knit. I don't know how strong it was.

Q. But she was never able to get up again?

A. No, she never was.

Q. Could she sit up?

A. In bed. We had an awful good friend by the name of Sally Ray that went all through World War I in all kinds of cases, disabled veterans, one thing and another. And she told me, she says, "We'll build a frame, and I'll go down to Armbruster's and order the canvas made." Well, she told me what kind of a frame she wanted, and I built it. And on the foot of the bed--it was a single iron bed--we laid it on top of the foot of the bed and at the head of the bed, we had to tie it with ropes so it would be level. And then she had these cavases made. The upper part was about that long. (gestures with hands)

Q. That's about a yard, that's about three feet?

A. Yes, and then they had a section about so wide that went around her middle, and then they had another about three feet down here at the foot.

Q. That middle one was about eighteen inches?

A. Yes, and when she had to have the bed pan or anything--they were all buckled--my wife would loosen that center canvas and let it down and set the bed pan under her.

Q. Wasn't that wonderful that Miss Ray--was that Miss or Mrs. Ray?

A. Oh, not too often, maybe once a month, maybe once every two months, something like that. Now in vegetable season when Mother had a lot of vegetables and poultry and stuff, she might go every week, about once a week. She sold a lot of butter and eggs.

Q. How did she keep it, Mr. Mills?

A. Kept it in the cellar.

Q. It must have been nice and cool down there.

A. It is, it's real cool.

Q. Is it just earthen walls or . . .

A. No, it's brick walls.

Q. Must be deep in the ground then?

A. Yes, it's not as cool down there anymore as it was before we built the furnace room. When we built the furnace room and put the furnace in there that changed the temperature a lot.

Q. What about the Fourth of July, do you remember any celebrations on the Fourth of July?

A. Yes, they used to have regular picnics on the Fourth of July, and sometimes they'd be in Williamsville, sometimes over here at this Wolf Creek Cemetery. There was a church set there called the Wolf Creek Church; they might go over there and celebrate over there Fourth of July. There was one time we always went over there, and that was on, I think, Decoration Day. And the families would all take the food with them, and they'd have a big picnic.

Q. Would you children play games?

A. Yes.

Q. How about Thanksgiving? Did the family get together?

A. Well, they usually celebrated Thanksgiving in the homes.

Q. Did the whole family come together?

A. Yes, most generally they'd come here. This was home base.

Q. Well, your mother was with you, wasn't she?

A. Oh yes.

Q. She had kind of an unfortunate happening . . .

A. My mother lay in bed in that livingroom there for fourteen years and one-half flat of her back, and that little wife of mine take care of her.

A. Oh yes, lot's of skating when it was cold, it had to be cold to skate.

Q. Are there ponds here at the farm?

A. There were, not now. There used to be [ponds]. I think it was about 1918, it come an awful sleet, and you could skate all over the country, just out across the fields, anywhere. It was just a solid layer of ice. I know us kids skated to Sherman and skated to Williamsville, just like a solid chunk of ice.

Q. How far is Williamsville?

A. Five miles.

Q. And Sherman is two miles?

A. Sherman is two miles.

Q. My, I'll bet that was a lot of fun.

A. It was.

Q. Did you children keep in touch with one another through the years?

A. Yes, pretty close. Our immediate family has kept in touch real close. See, I've lost the two older sisters and the little brother, but the rest of us is still living, oh, in a radius of twenty miles. Auburn, I have got a sister that lives in Auburn.

Q. Do you remember any of the ways you celebrated holidays when you were growing up, remember anything about Christmas?

A. Well, we just had a big feast, potluck or whatever you want to call it and they'd all come.

Q. Did you exchange gifts at Christmas?

A. Yes, that was a must.

Q. What sort of things?

A. Useful things.

Q. Were they things you purchased or things you made?

A. Most generally, well, I'd say both. Some of the gifts were purchased and some of them were handmade. And, of course, kids [gifts] was just toys.

Q. Where did you go to buy the things?

A. Springfield.

Q. How often did you go to Springfield?

hit that stack of hay and burned it up.

Q. Did that happen often?

A. Reasonably often, not too often, but it did happen.

Q. Was there any precaution you could have taken to prevent that from happening?

A. No. There's a site right down the road here that's almost unbelievable. You know lightning is a mighty powerful thing. Well, it struck a tree down there right close to the road about a month ago, and I never seen anything busted up in my life like that tree is. It even throwed part of it clear out in the public road. It must have hit it dead center.

Q. Do you keep lightning rods on the house?

A. No, we used to, but not anymore.

Q. Did the neighbors get together, Mr. Mills? How did you people get together, did you come and visit on the weekends?

A. Oh yes. We done a lot of visiting on the holidays and birthdays and anniversaries and what not.

Q. And you children in the neighborhood played together?

A. Yes.

Q. What sort of games did you play?

A. Oh, God, everything that kids would play. Our main games at school was wolf and sheep and shinny.

Q. What are those games?

A. Well, shinny is pretty near like golf as anything you can get, only we had a tin can we was knocking around instead of a golf ball. (laughter) And wolf and sheep, we'd choose up sides and we'd have to run from here to there, and if you got caught, you had to go to the other side. I remember that. And our house parties, we played spin the plate, post office and, oh God, I don't know what all.

Q. Did you make candy together?

A. Oh yes. I'll tell you quite a trick. Get a dish pan full of water and put apples in there and then reach over and try to pick one up with your teeth.

Q. Apple bobbing, (laughter) I'll bet you had a few wet heads.

A. Yes sir, foolish things like that.

Q. Did you do any skating in the wintertime?

A. Just across the road. They live in that trailer. There was a fine family lived there for years and years and years. Kail.

Q. Did they farm the land?

A. Yes. Do you happen to know Mr. Vasconcelles?

Q. I've heard that name.

A. He was the boss of Social Security down here for--well, he retired last year.

Q. Yes, not too long ago.

A. His wife was raised over there.

Q. Was she a Kail?

A. Yes, she was a Kail. And she was over here more than she was at home. And we growed awful close together. Her mother was kind of poorly, a big woman, not fat but tall, just a big woman. And this girl's name was Elizabeth. Well, I don't know, she got the name of Jack, and she went by the name of Jack all of her life. And Jack and I would take her mother to the hospital, I'll tell you, in some of the awfulest weather.

Q. You took her into Springfield?

A. Yes.

Q. How would you . . .

A. In the car.

Q. By that time you had the car?

A. Yes.

Q. What kind of jobs did the neighbors do for one another? You know they had this wonderful feeling of . . .

A. Oh, that butchering for one, fence building, and if they wanted to put up a shed, why, they'd all jump in and help build that shed; hay baling, putting up hay together. That's not a one-man job, it takes several men to do that. And I have stacked hundreds of tons of hay. And if you think that ain't work, you just ain't there.

Q. Has it changed today?

A. Yes, it's changing rapidly. Now, we went from the hay stacking--by the way, it was on a Saturday afternoon, I stacked a big stack of hay down here. Oh, it was hot. And a Kail boy and I and some of the other boys was going down to the river to spend the night--the weekend, Saturday night and Sunday. Well, we hadn't got to the river till the lightning

Tape turned off. (housekeeper came into the kitchen)

Q. Mr. Mills, you were telling me about illness and disease in the family while you were growing up.

A. My mother took care of a lot of sick people. Maybe that's what give me the intuition to want to be a doctor, I don't know. But she had very good luck. In our immediate family, my sister, Mary, and I--we were just little devils--and we were probably five and six years old, and we both broke down with scarlet fever. Well, it didn't hurt us. As a rule, if a kid had scarlet fever and if they take care of themselves, it doesn't hurt them too bad, but an old person, boy, it's hard on them. My mother, my father and that aunt I told you about staying with us and my two older sisters, I'm telling you, they like to died with scarlet fever.

Q. Your mother had never had it as a child?

A. No.

Q. Nor your father?

A. They finally pulled through it. And one thing that comes to my mind just as fresh as if it was this morning, they was trying to keep my sister and I in bed, and we was too ornery to stay in bed, and we was up running around here. It was in the wintertime, way below zero, and one of the neighbors come there to that kitchen door. He had a big mustache, icicles hanging down off of that mustache, that's what left the impression with me. And my fahter's name was John, and he said, "John, is there anything I can do for you this morning?" I never will forget that. Dad said, "No," he said, "everything is pretty well taken care of for today." Now, things like that stays with you.

Q. They sure do. Who was that man?

A. John Anderson.

Q. He was a neighbor?

A. Yes.

Q. Did your neighbors have that feeling of closeness and togetherness?

A. Yes, they did. I think I mentioned in the tablet that I wrote, there was five families lived here in this neighborhood that was just as close as five families could be. It didn't make any difference what one had to do, they all went and helped and got it done. Now then, Mrs. Berg, if I was going to be shot, I couldn't tell you who my closest neighbor is.

Q. Is that right?

A. Things has just drifted apart in the last twenty-five years, just unbelieveable.

Q. How close is your closest neighbor?

Q. Was your mother called for any other emergencies in the neighborhood?

A. Well, yes, she was kind of the family doctor for humans and my Dad was the animal doctor. He was the veterinarian. (laughs) Anybody had a sick cow or sick horse, they'd call Dad. I never will forget, we had some neighbors over here had a pear orchard, and it's dangerous to let cattle in a pear or apple orchard. They ain't got sense enough to chew them up, they'll try to swallow them whole. One got stuck down in this calf's throat, and, boy, he started to blow up, and this Johnson was their name, they called Dad. And he got me out of bed, and he said, "Come, go with me." So I went with him, and I was as stout as a bull, and I was just strong enough that I just mashed that pear in that calf's throat. It went on in his stomach and everything was lovely. Ordinarily, they would take a broomstick and poke it down that calf's throat and poke that obstruction on into the stomach. But this time, I just got ahold of that on the outside--you could feel it--and I just mashed it and it went down.

Q. Mr. Mills, was Dr. Shearl in Sherman?

A. Yes, and Williamsville too.

Q. How many doctors were in this area?

A. At one time?

Q. Yes.

A. I think it was two. One in Sherman and one in . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

Q. You were telling me about the doctors in Sherman and Williamsville.

A. Dr. Smith was in Sherman and Dr. Shipman and Dr. Shearl and Dr. Stuttle was in Williamsville. And I'll tell you, after it's all said and done, you got to give them old fellows a lot of credit. It didn't make any difference what the weather was, how stormy it was, you'd call them; they'd come. It would take them awhile to get here. They'd come in a horse and buggy.

Q. Tell me how many doctors are in Williamsville and Sherman today?

A. None.

Q. Where do you have to go now for medical attention?

A. Springfield. Takes you about six weeks to get an appointment. (laughter)

Q. Do you remember any illnesses that the family had? You said your mother was kind of the doctor of the family and the neighborhood . . .

Q. About how often during the day would that run?

A. Oh, they'd run every hour or hour and a half.

Q. About how long would it take you to get to Springfield?

A. God, I don't remember, about fifteen or twenty minutes. They'd get on over here at the crossing up the road.

Q. But that's a couple of miles.

A. Yes, somebody would take them or maybe they'd walk. Then maybe they'd miss the car, or hoping they would. (laughter)

Q. Did you have any particular ambition when you were going to school?

A. Yes, I always wanted to be a doctor.

Q. What do you think made you have that ambition?

A. I don't know unless it was my mother. I would say that Dr. Shearl in Williamsville and my mother delivered more babies in this neighborhood in her lifetime then any other two people in the neighborhood.

Q. If someone knew that a baby was about to be born, would they come and get your mother?

A. Take her. (Mr. Mills pointed to himself)

Q. How did they get word to you?

A. Telephone.

Q. Would she sometimes be gone more than just a day?

A. Oh yes, she might stay a week with the mother and baby.

Q. Did she work with other doctors besides Dr. Shearl?

A. Well, yes, but he was the mainstay at the time. Her last baby was Dorothy, and Dr. Smith delivered her right here in this house.

Q. Outside of you and your older brother--no, the two girls were born in the log cabin too, weren't they--the rest of the children were born here?

A. No, I was the only one born in the log cabin. The two older sisters were born down there up on the hill from Moonlight Gardens.

Q. Before the family moved?

A. Yes, and then the rest of them were born right here--Mary, Helen and Dorothy.

A. I think some of the family met her in there, [the hospital] and they told her I was in there, and she come in to see me. That was a shock, now.

Q. Did you recall one another?

A. Yes, I recognized her just as soon as she walked in the door. She was older.

Q. How old was she when she taught?

A. Probably eighteen, nineteen, just as redheaded as a woodpecker. Good girl.

Q. How did your teachers maintain discipline in the classroom?

A. Well, they were more or less pretty strict. If you needed a paddling, you got it, and there wasn't no ifs and ands about it.

Q. What time of the day did you start school, and what time did you end?

A. Usually at eight o'clock in the morning and an hour off at noon and got out at four.

Q. Did you children come home for lunch since you were so close?

A. Most of the time us kids had to come home for dinner. If it was storming or raining or bad, maybe Mom would fix our basket lunch and Dad would bring it to us. But most of the time we came home for dinner. The school started about the first of September in the fall and let out the first of May in the spring; eight months.

We had almost as many male teachers as we did women. The last teacher who taught over there when they closed the school, her name was Rachael Flagg, Paul Flagg's wife. The teacher just ahead of her was Mary Hewitson. She taught there nine years and she was an excellent teacher.

Q. After the children graduated from this school, where did they go?

A. Usually, they went to Williamsville, and some of them went to Springfield High School. Williamsville had a high school, and some of them went to high school there in Springfield.

Q. How did they get there?

A. Mostly, rode the interurban. You know the old interurban that used to run up and down the road, they'd ride it.

Q. Did that interurban go from Springfield up to Bloomington?

A. Yes.

A. Well, it stood there up until two years ago. And the land--it was an acre there, came out of that farm across the road there--it was donated as long as it was used for a school. Well, then we had a little organization here in the neighborhood; they called it the Anti-Thief Association. They took over the place, and they got ahold of the fellow that owned the land and he said as long as they wanted to use it for a meeting place, they could have it. Well, we scraped up some money and paid something for it. I don't remember just when it was, but then they decided to sell the school land, and they did. What do you think it brought?

Q. I don't know.

A. Ten thousand five hundred dollars for that acre of ground.

Q. For that acre of ground?

A. That acre of ground. And, of course, I bid $6,500 for it, and I didn't get started. It went back to the family and back into the farm.

Q. What made that one acre so valuable?

A. Well, it's a wonderful location for anything, for a home or a tavern. That was always what I was afraid of that somebody might get ahold of it and start a tavern there, and that I didn't want. But they didn't, and it went back into the farm, and it will always be a farm now.

Q. About how many children were in the school? We have the picture with nineteen.

A. It would vary. I would say it was one of the small schools, went up to 35 or 40.

Q. How many grades would there be?

A. Eight. One teacher taught all eight grades.

Q. Do you remember some of your teachers?

A. Oh yes, that teacher there was Hallie Clark (school picture) and Bill Chambers and Bill Hoek and Bessie Pool.

You know that was kind of a concidence, she [Bessie Pool]--wasn't too long after this teacher here (pointing to picture of Hallie Clark) and I liked her a lot. I guess I was ten or twelve years old, and she'd keep me after school for something I had done and she'd come back and sit down in the seat by me, and she'd say, "Win, you're not mean, you're just mischievious." Which was true. And we'd go skating that night, and I'd put her skates on for her, and everything was lovely. And you know, we drifted apart, and I never seen that woman another time until I was in the hospital here a couple of years ago.

Q. Under what circumstances did you see her?

Q. For how many families would you butcher in a season?

A. Probably a dozen, fifteen. We'd kill eighty, ninety hogs. You cut that many hogs up, you learn a whole lot.

Q. I'll bet you do. Did you have a set fee? The time you did the twelve hogs, you were paid three dollars.

A. No, it was so much a day.

Q. So much a day depending on how much of the day you spent there?

A. Well, daylight till dark. That was what they figured a day in them days.

Q. Mr. Mills, how old were you when you started going to school?

A. I presume around six. I was thinking about that before you came. I was born in 1898, and I must have been four or five when I started school.

Q. Where did you go to school?

A. School was right across the road there.

Q. What was the name of it?

A. Sangamo Center District #15. It was started in 1881, and it run up until the consolidation. And I've thought several times since you was out here that I'd try to run that down and find out when it was consolidated, but I haven't done it. But I would say--oh, this is 1977--I would say it was sometime in the 1950's.[2]

One mistake I made when they consolidated those schools--the law said each district turn all records over to the new superintendent--well, I had a ledger that was started when this school started that had everything in there from the time the school started until it was closed; the money that was spent, what it was spent for, what the teacher's salary was [and] who the the teacher was. I was a fool that I didn't keep that. I gave that to that superintendent, and do you know what he done with it, burned it up. I had a record there one-hundred years old.

Q. That is a pity.

A. That's right. And we had, I think, three sets of encyclopedias. We had Picture Knowledge, Comptons, and I forget what the name of the other one was; and he burned them up.

Q. What happened to the building?

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[2]Sangamo Center District number fifteen was last included in the official listing of the Sangamon County School Directory for the 1952-1953 school year. [Ed.]

A. Bleed him, stick him in the throat and cut the jugular vein and bleed him. Then we'd drag him over to the scalding vat and put him in that water and scald him. And if you was right careful, that hair would just come off there just like it was supposed to. If the water was too hot and you got that hair set, only way you'd get it off was to shave him.

Q. You had to know just the right temperature?

A. That's right.

Q. Would you build fires under those containers?

A. Yes.

Q. Would they start that before you got there?

A. Usually, yes.

Q. After you had scalded and removed the hair, then what was the next step?

A. Hang them on a pole and take the insides out of them. That was my job. I've gutted many a hog. And then prop them open and let them hang there and cool out. And when it's zero, it don't take too long.

Q. No, it wouldn't. Did you have special knives that you used just for that?

A. No, not particularly, just about a seven-inch butcher knife is what we used.

Q. After it had cooled, what was your next step?

A. Lay them on a table and cut them up.

Q. Is that when someone else would start rendering?

A. Yes. Some wanted pork chops. If you wanted pork chops, we had to saw down the backbone. If they just wanted the backbone taken out, we'd split it down each side of the backbone and take the ribs out that way, and then you had the backbones and ribs. But if you wanted pork chops, you had to split that backbone.

Q. How did you learn to do this?

A. Well, I don't know, it just seems like it come natural. (laughs) I've had it all my life when I was a kid and watched others, and I just picked it up as we went along. I thought I was a pretty good butcher.

Q. You and Mr. De Silva did this together?

A. Yes.

A. Well, they're generally boss, ain't they? (laughter)

Q. Well, you said that.

A. I'll tell you [about] one family that I helped butcher [for]. A fellow by the name of Frank DeSilva and I; we butchered together, and we went to this place to butcher. We'd get there before daylight and have to wait until it got light enough to see to shoot a hog. And that woman would come out and tell you you wasn't leaving until that butchering job was done that day. Now, who was boss?

Q. I guess she was, Mr. Mills (laughter)

A. We'd butcher ten to twelve hogs, and we'd let those hogs cool out and start cutting them up, and the son, he'd start rendering lard--probably nine o'clock in the morning--and he'd render lard all day long. Me and this DeSilva would cut them hogs up and trim them out; and maybe four o'clock in the evening, we'd get the meat salted, and then we'd go in the kitchen and grind the sausage, by hand. And we'd get done at 10:00 or 10:30 p.m.

Q. That was a big job.

A. Three dollars a day.

Q. For three dollars a day each?

A. Yes.

Q. My goodness, and that was twelve hogs?

A. Yes.

Q. Was that a big family?

A. Well, pretty good sized family, and then they sold quite a bit of that meat to this Dockum & Dawson. The bacons and back bones and spareribs and all that stuff went to Dockum & Dawson. They kept the hams and shoulders.

Q. But they sold the bacon and some of the other pieces?

A. Yes.

Q. Now, what kind of equipment did you have when you butchered?

A. Well, it took an old cast iron kettle to heat the water in, and we had different ways of scalding. We done all our butchering with scalding. Some had vats, some had barrels, and we'd scald them.

Q. This was after you had shot the hog?

A. Yes, couldn't scald him before. (laughter)

Q. That's right. What was the next step?

Q. You wouldn't be smoking cattle, what did you do with them?

A. No, they would make a lot of hamburger out of it and steaks, and I just don't remember how they prepared the rest of it. They used to make a lot of corned beef. I couldn't tell you how that was done, but they did. Do you like corned beef?

Q. Sure do.

A. Well, it was good.

Q. I'll bet it was. Now, tell me about the smoking. What sort of wood did you use?

A. Well, we were supposed to use hickory and sassafrass. And we usually took an old wash tub and filled it about half or two-thirds full of ashes or dirt or something and built our fire on top of that. And you don't want much of a blaze, all you want is the smoke. We would run that for maybe three or four days.

Q. Would you have to tend that round the clock to make sure that it kept burning?

A. No, we usually, I think, let it die down at night and then started it up again of a morning.

Q. How big was the smoke house?

A. Well, it's about, it's ten-by-ten is what it is.

Q. Did it have a window?

A. No. Just the door.

Q. It was very tight?

A. Pretty tight.

Q. So the smoke would just fill up the house?

A. Just filled up in there and settled on the meat. And it got hot enough in there that you'd see the lard drip out of that meat. So you know it got pretty hot.

Q. Was butchering a neighborhood undertaking?

A. Yes, but that was the way we handled our own stuff here. We butchered all over the neighborhood, and they all had different methods of preparing their meat.

Q. Was that usually up to the wife of the house? Was it she who had the recipes?

A. Oh, yes, about all they bought was sugar and coffee.

Q. And flour?

A. And flour.

Q. What kind of meat did you eat?

A. Everything; hogs, cattle and chickens.

Q. Did your father butcher?

A. Oh yes, we used to have them whole neighborhood butcheries, and all the neighbors would come in together, and I think in that picture, we probably butchered six hogs that day and worked them all up. And then we would salt that meat and leave it down twenty-one days then take it out, and put it in a tub of warm water and wash it all off. Then we'd hang it out here in the smoke house and smoke it. And we would smoke it until they thought it was right to keep and then they would take and put black pepper, borax and saltpeter on that meat and hang it. And you talk about something good to eat, you cut into one of them hams along in June or July, out of this world.

Q. Was the entire carcass hanging in the smoke house or had it been cut up?

A. Oh, it had been processed, all cut up, ham, shoulders [and] bacon. And the sausage, Mother used to fry that down. They had big stone jars, five, ten gallon stone jars, and they would fry that full of sausage. Most of the time they would stuff that sausage in casing, and then after they got the jars so full, they would cover it with fat.

Q. That is with lard they had rendered from the carcass?

A. Yes, it kept just as good in there as could be.

Q. Where did you keep that?

A. In the cellar.

Q. If your mother wanted to prepare some of that sausage . . .

A. Just go down there and dig it out of that lard and bring it up here and put it on the stove, just like it was butchered yesterday. (laughs)

Q. Did you butcher in any particular time of the year?

A. No, not exactly, only we butchered in the winter.

Q. The weather was cool?

A. Yes, so the hogs and cattle would cool out themselves.

Q. What about the produce that she used for the family, where did she keep that?

A. Mostly in the cellar.

Q. Is that under the house?

A. Yes.

Q. What kind of fruits and vegetables did she keep in the cellar?

A. Everything; potatoes, apples, onions, just most everything. And in the fall of the year, we usually buried a couple or three barrels out here in the ground and filled them with cabbage, potatoes and stuff like that, and then covered them up. Well, they kept in there just like they was in a refrigerator.

Q. How deep?

A. Possibly two feet.

Q. You mean the top of the barrel would be two feet under the ground?

A. Yes, and put dirt over the top of it.

Q. Did she do any canning?

A. Oh yes, hundreds and hundreds of quarts--berries, vegetables and everything.

Q. Did she have the berry patches here on the farm?

A. Yes, we did at one time and an orchard of pears, apples and peaches.

Q. Were these things that your father had planted or were these orchards already on the farm?

A. Yes, it was down there, (pointed northeast of house) and there was quite an orchard down there on that twenty acres, and then we had quite an orchard right out in here. But fruit business is more so today then it used to be. It's a business of its own. You never heard of people spraying back there seventy-five years ago, and we always had fruit. Now then, today if you don't spray and take care of your fruit trees, you don't have nothing.

Q. What do you think is the cause of that?

A. Why, it's the insects that's developed, come into being.

Q. So you almost have to spray now?

A. You almost have to spray if you want a fruit crop.

Q. Did your parents raise most of the food that you ate?

Q. What kind of chores did you children have when you were growing up?

A. Well, I could cover that in a few words, just everything. (laughter) And my parents weren't real strict, but we finally learned when they said to do it, we done it. One time I didn't. It was the only real whipping that I ever got, and my mother like to beat me to death.

Q. What did you do to deserve this punishment?

A. Well, my oldest sister--she was quite a gardener, my mother--and I had come home from school. My mother had quite a patch of onions, and she had pulled these onions, and they had laid out there a few days and dried, and us kids was supposed to pick them up. Well, I didn't want to. My sister had the bucket picking up the onions, and I had the sack aholding it to put them in, and I just let the sack fall down, and onions went everywhere. (laughs) My mother gave me a whipping that I'll never forget. I could pick up onions after that.

Q. I'll bet you could. Where did she keep those onions?

A. She usually took them right to Springfield and sold them.

Q. Did she sell other produce in Springfield?

A. Oh, yes--eggs, poultry, butter and vegetables. She was a regular peddler. And she drove that with two horses and a spring wagon. It was an all day trip.

Q. Did you children ever go with her?

A. No, not that I ever recollect of.

Q. Did she go alone?

A. No, she had a sister, my aunt. My mother and this aunt married brothers. Well, my aunt's husband got killed over here on the railroad accidentally some way, I don't know how, and she lived with us for years and years and years until after her father and mother both died. She had an old maid sister and an old bachelor brother, and after my grandmother and grandfather died, she went back home and lived with them.

Q. She would go with your mother to Springfield?

A. Yes, them was the two that done the peddling. And by the way, they did most of their shopping out there at Dockum & Dawson[1] out there on North Grand Avenue. That was one of the oldest stores in Springfield.

Q. What was the name of that [store] Mr. Mills?

A. Dockum & Dawson, right there where Noonan's Hardware Store is, where it was.

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[1]Dockum & Dawson was located at 723 East North Grand. [Ed.]

discovered was these little white pearl buttons and then one of them old-fashioned side combs women used to wear in their hair. And then we found a skull, the arm bone and the leg bone. We gathered them up when we came to them, a piece at a time, and took them over and laid them down by the fence until after the funeral was over, and then we brought them back and put them right back in the same grave. And they had been buried, Mrs. Berg, in that direction. Now, that's contrary to ethics of burial. All burials are usually east to west.

Q. In other words, it was buried going northeast and southwest?

A. That is right. And there was a baby and a mother seemingly buried there in that same grave. And I assume it was one of those cholera victims.

Q. That had probably been taken up there in the night.

A. They just wrapped them up in blankets or anything and buried them quick.

Q. Because of the contagious aspect of the disease?

A. Oh, my, yes. And my little brother--I found out something I didn't know--I knew what he died with, he died with spinal meningitis, and that's very contagious. And they buried him in a sealed casket, that's how come that glass was there.

Q. You think the coffin was lined with glass?

A. Yes.

Q. Was he the only one of your parent's children who died in infancy?

A. Yes.

Q. How many children did your parents have?

A. Well, let me see, seven, I guess. I had a rough go. I had five sisters. (laughs)

Q. Oh my, where did you come in the family, Mr. Mills? Are you the older brother?

A. No, the one that died would have been the oldest. He was born, I think, in 1895. He was four years old when he died, and I was born in 1898, so that figures out.

Q. How much older were you than your sisters?

A. Well, I had two sisters older than I, and Mrs. Petefish and I are just pretty close together--her birthday is in June and mine is in December--and then Dorothy and Helen. Bertha and Flora, they were my two older sisters.

Q. So there was the little boy who died at four, two sisters, you and then your other three sisters.

A. Yes.

there wasn't nothing there. It was all mashed flat. And we gathered up what we could and put it in a--what do they call those--stillborn baby caskets about so big. And then we took the vaults out. My mother, father and sister were buried in Clark Steel Vaults. And they came out there, Mrs. Berg, just as good a shape as they was when they went in there. We loaded them on a truck and took them over to Wolf Creek Cemetery and re-buried them.

Q. How long had they been in the ground?

A. My father had been in the ground about thirty-seven, thirty-six, thirty-seven years, and I think my mother and sister had been in the ground about sixteen or eighteen years.

Q. What did it cost you to move those vaults?

A. Now, you would be surprised; I was. The vault company came up from Taylorville, see those vaults were made in Taylorville, and moved those vaults. We got a man with a backhoe to dig them out. After it was all said and done, $150.

Q. That was a bargain, wasn't it?

A. It wasn't very much. Of course, we didn't have nine or ten-dollar-an-hour men like they got today.

Q. That's true. Did you ever have to dig any graves?

A. Oh, yes. I have helped dig, oh, I expect, a dozen or more graves. I had a funny experience up there. A fellow by the name of Collins had a relative die, and they had a particular spot--there never was no records kept of that cemetery; you just had to guess where the people were buried--that they wanted this person buried. Well, there was three of us digging on the grave--and by the way, you dug them by hand then--and we was digging, and I told them, I said, "Boys, this dirt is not right, it's been moved." Now we proceeded to dig the grave, and we got her dug, and we came home to dinner. I think the funeral was two o'clock or two-thirty. When we went back, one whole side of that grave had give way and fell over in the grave we just dug. There was the other casket setting in there just pretty near as good shape as the day it was buried, and it was buried in a wooden box.

Q. I wonder how long it had been in there. Was the wood still intact?

A. Yes, and we had a pile of dirt there big enough for a basement out of a house. And the undertaker came and said, "Where in the world did all that dirt come from?" I said, "You pull that grass up and you can see." We had that grass lining hanging down in the grave, you know. And he said, "Oh, I see."

Q. That's what happens when they don't keep records.

A. In that particular grave we run into a corpse. The first thing we

believe it was 1918. I know it was as bad or worse snow as we had this last winter. And my father and uncle walked over to Andrew and caught the train and went to Athens to Mott's Funeral Home and got the casket and brought it back and got it in a bobsled, and they just drove right across the fields, anywhere, to get to where they was going. They finally got home with it, and they put him in the casket, and they buried him the next day. They just went out across the fields. And they're buried in the Kerns Cemetery north of Sherman.

Q. Both of your grandparents?

A. Yes.

Q. And their name was Sparks?

A. Yes, I got several aunts and uncles buried up there too. And my folks were buried there until--I told you about our grave moving.

Q. Well, tell us about that again because that was very interesting. Tell me why you decided to move your parents' graves.

A. Well, Mrs. Berg, it's a long story. My father's mother owned that property up there, that farmland, and it was the time that they had the epidemic in this country of the cholera. Now, when that was, I don't know as to [the] year. And they would die just about like flies. It was very contagious, and they'd haul them away at night and bury them just any way to get them in the ground. That went on and on. And the family, my family, wanted to move those graves to a place where it had perpetual care. That up there has just almost gone back to the Indians.

Q. How could you get into that cemetery?

A. Well, it's kind of a rough go. That was one of the drawbacks; there is no road into it. It is a nice spot up a hill, but they had to cross a bridge. By the way, one time I had an uncle die that was buried up there, and Staab had the funeral. And we went there, and it come a four-inch rain. It was raining when they got there, and Staab said, "Just stay in the cars until it quits." Well, when it quit, the bridge was four feet under water, and there was that whole mess of people up there on that hill, and Staab had another funeral at four o'clock in Springfield. Well, he waded out across the cornfield through the mud and water and got to the hard road and caught a ride into Springfield. It finally quit raining, and we got down in the grave, dipped the water out and buried the corpse.

That was kind of off the subject in regards to moving the graves. We decided to go over here to Wolf Creek and buy a lot, which we did, a six grave lot. And we moved my father and mother and sister and a little brother. I had a little brother that I never saw. He died when he was four years old. And we dug where my mother had told me he was buried, and you know, we found it. I was down in the ground digging, and I found some glass. And the undertaker was there, of course, and he said, "That's it, the top of the casket." So they made me get out and somebody else got down in there, and they found his hair, his arm bones, skull, leg bones and handles off the casket. I assume he was buried in a wooden box because it was just,

Winfred E. Mills, May 25, 1977, Sherman, Illinois.
Jean A. Berg, Interviewer.

Q. Mr. Mills, will you tell me something about your parents?

A. My parents, well, they came from Ohio to Williamsville. And I couldn't tell you what year, but they went from Williamsville to Caney, Kansas, in a covered wagon, drove out there with a covered wagon. Now, you'll have to dig into an encyclopedia to find out when; it was a grasshopper year. Have you ever heard of that spoken of?

Q. No, I haven't.

A. Grasshoppers was so bad they got on the railroad track, and they would stall the trains. And they stuck it out that year, and then they came back here to Williamsville. Then they went to work for the Joneses by the month. And there was quite a family of the Joneses. Now, the one he worked for in Williamsville was named Milton, I believe. He worked there a few years, and then he moved out there--you know where Moonlight Garden was, up on the hill there--there used to be a big house set up there. And that Jones was named Samuel Jones; he was president of the Marine Bank. He [my father] worked there nine years, and his main job was taking care of race horses. This old man Jones raised runners, race horses, and fed cattle too. They lived there for nine years. Then they bought this little twenty acres down here, and they moved up here. And in the meantime, I was born down there in my grandmother's house. My grandmother's house was only about 300 yards up the road from where they lived. And after they lived there one year, they moved here. And we've been here ever since, or I have.

Q. What year were you born?

A. 1898.

Q. So they came in 1899, and you have been here ever since.

A. Been here ever since.

Q. When were your parents married?

A. I couldn't tell you.

Q. What about your mother's family?

A. Well, my mother's maiden name was Sparks, Lydia Sparks. She was born in Sherman. And how and where her mother met my grandfather, I don't know; but his name was Elijah Sparks. And they lived down there in the old log house where I was born--I was born in my grandmother's house--the rest of their lives. They both died there. By the way, my grandfather died, I

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PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of tape recorded interviews conducted by Jean A. Berg for the Oral History Office of Sangamon State University during the spring of 1977. Jean A. Berg transcribed the tapes and edited the transcript.

Winfred E. Mills was born in rural Williams Township in Sangamon County on December 30, 1898. While in the eighth grade, Mr. Mills left school to help on the family farm.

During his long career in agriculture, he witnessed the modernization of the farming business. He raised grain and stock, operated a small dairy business, was a dealer for Pioneer seed corn, and was employed by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Mr. Mills also served on the Williams Township Board of Elections, the Sangamo Center Board of Education, and was a charter member of the Anti-Thief Association. His recollections of rural lifestyle include family life, school, hog butchering, water witching, WPA work, burial customs, and the activities of a vigilante group. Mr. Mills retired from farming in 1967 and died on September 18, 1977.

Readers of this oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator, and editor sought to preserve the informal conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

WINFRED MILLS MEMOIR