

Preface

This manuscript is the product of a tape recorded interview conducted by Elizabeth Canterbury for the Oral History Office on December 11, 1978. Florence Hardin transcribed the tapes and Frances Staggs edited the transcript.

William Wertheim was born in Burlington, Vermont in 1889. His parents were from Germany. His father died when Mr. Wertheim was eight years old. At this time, he and his mother moved to Athens, Illinois. He learned how to butcher at the age of seventeen. This memoir describes some of Mr. Wertheim's "biggest cattle deals" and life in Athens in the early 1900s.

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William Wertheim, December 11, 1978, Springfield, Illinois.

Elizabeth Canterbury, Interviewer.

Q: William Wertheim, you have spent 89 of your 89 years living in the midwest in the area of Athens, and you have a lot of things that you can tell us. Let's start out by you telling where you were born and when.

A: I was born in Burlington, Vermont, in 1889.

Q: And what . . . tell about your father and mother and your family.

A: Names you want to know?

Q: Yes.

A: My father's name was Aaron Wertheim. My mother was Bertha Wertheim. My sister was Bessie Wertheim.

Q: And tell how your father . . .

A: My father came to New York, and they sent him on to Vermont.

Q: Where did he come from?

A: Germany. He came from Germany. And after so long a time, he got enough money made, he bought a horse and wagon, and he still went through the country, and when he got enough money ahead, he went back to Germany and married my mother and brought her to Vermont.

Q: Now where did you live in Vermont?

A: Hinesburg, Vermont. That's a suburb of Burlington.

Q: And tell what your father did there.

A: My father got enough money ahead that he bought a little place, and he had a horse barn there with, oh, forty horses, and underneath it, it would hold forty cattle. At the right of it he had a slaughterhouse there where he killed cattle and sold them to a butcher in Burlington, Vermont. Killed them there at this place.

Q: So, he would really have the business of a butcher?

A: Yes.

Q: He would be considered a butcher? Were there any other people living in your family besides you and your sister?

A: Yes. He brought his nephew over from Germany, when he was fourteen years old, and sent him to school. He stayed with us till he's about twenty-five years old and then he came to Illinois and married.

Q: And what was his name?

A: Eli Wertheim.

Q: Yes.

A: And after he came to Illinois, he sent and got another nephew from Germany, and his name was Abraham Wertheim. He stayed with us until my father passed away, and after that he helped too. He had about thirty or forty horses to sell and cattle.

Q: About how old was he when he helped the family.

A: Must have been twenty-five or thirty.

Q: Yes. Can you remember what life was like when you were a little boy in Vermont?

A: Yes. My dad sent me out first time to buy a calf. I gave two dollars for the calf and he thought it was too high. He said, "If you live long enough, you'll learn to buy them cheaper!" (laughs)

Q: Now, about how old were you when that happened.

A: I don't remember.

Q: A little boy!

A: Yes. (laughter) I remember that.

Q: So you became a businessman early in life.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Right. Do you have any recollections of school in Vermont?

A: Yes. The school was right next door where I lived. All I had to do was walk out of the house and walk into the school. I went to school there. My mother took me to Germany when I was about . . . I guess six or seven years old. I went to school in Germany three months. When I come back to Vermont, I couldn't talk English, so I talked German. I can't talk a bit of German now. (laughs)

Q: Oh, that's interesting. I think your life made a great change when you were eight years old.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Tell about that.

A: Well, I can remember going through the country with a horse and sled, buying calves, and bringing them home. My mother would help me kill them. I wasn't very old at that time. But we'd kill them and send them dressed to New York.

Q: Now, can you tell why you and your mother were doing this business?

A: Well, we were killing them . . .

Q: What happened to your father?

A: My father got killed when I was eight years old. Got kicked by a horse . . . and I never did see him after he got--I brought him into the house, and got--after that.

Q: Do you have any special recollections about your father?

A: Well, yes. I was always with him. I remember he went to Germany and brought a red shepherd dog back. He was broken to drive cattle in Germany. And he knew German but when he come to Vermont, you had to talk German to get him to do anything. He couldn't understand any English. I remember that dog as well as I do anything.

Q: He was a good friend, too?

A: Oh, yes. But . . .

Q: Okay. Then, how long did you and your mother work in Vermont, doing this?

A: Oh, I think a couple of years. We killed the calves and sent them. She sold the house, and we cleaned up and come to Illinois. Sold the furniture and everything.

Q: Now, can you . . .

A: Still got one thing that my father took off of a Texas steer that I brought from Vermont. There's a pair of horns.

Q: Describe them.

A: They're big horns, and they are perfect in shape. I never had anything done only just a little furniture polish on them.

Q: And you've had them mounted in your house all these years?

A: All these years. Brought them from Vermont and they've been mounted all the time. Every house we've had, they've always been up.

Q: How old would you say they are?

A: I'd say they're over a hundred years old because we've had them, I know, before I came to Illinois. I don't know how long, but I've been in Illinois 79 years now. So they are close to over a hundred years old. But they are in perfect shape, and everybody likes them.

Q: We'll have to take a picture of them.

A: I've got a picture of them.

Q: That's right. Now why did your mother and you and your sister decide to come to Illinois?

A: Well, we had an uncle in Petersburg by the name of Jake Eisenberg, and he wanted my mother to come to Petersburg. And we came to Petersburg and couldn't find a house. So, we found a house in Athens, rented a house in Athens, and bought furniture from Mott's Furniture Store, which we still have most of yet, and started housekeeping.

Q: Do you remember how you traveled to Petersburg from Vermont?

A: We traveled by train all the way.

Q: Do you remember anything about it?

A: I remember traveling by train. I remember getting my first buggy ride in Petersburg by Berta Katzenstein. She had a horse and buggy and she gave me my first ride in Illinois. (laughter)

Q: Now, you moved to Athens because you couldn't find a house in Petersburg. What do you remember about Athens?

A: I remember getting a shave for ten cents and a haircut for fifty cents.

Q: Now about when was this?

A: That was when I was--79 years ago.

Q: So it would be about the turn of the century?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And you could buy--back when I ran a butcher shop, I sold chuck steak for ten cents a pound, and for the good steak we got fifteen cents. What they'd get for ribeye steaks, we took the bone out of the ribs and rolled them and sold them for thrashing meat.

Q: Oh. Do you remember anything about the stores on Main Street in Athens at the turn of the century?

A: You want the name of them?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, there was Myer Solenstein's store, there was Seligmann's store, and Hartz Brothers had a bakery next to Seligmann's, and the post office was next to Seligmann's. Then they come up the street and there was Cantrall's store, there was Boyd's store, there was Bergheimer's store.

Q: Was that the time of the opera house? Was the opera house in Athens at that time?

A: Sure was. The opera house was there, above there. They had a dance there one night, and a fellow was drunk and he fell out the back door and never hurt him a bit. Been anybody else it would have killed him.
(laughter)

Q: What else do you remember about life in Athens?

A: They had a policeman by the name of Doug Trent. And they had robbers there one night, and he shot one of the robbers. And they got done, and they had a fellow in the penitentiary and they caught them both. I don't want to tell the name.

Q: Okay. Was it a local person? Do you remember any other incidents? What kind of a town was it considered?

A: Well, at that time they had two mines there, and they were working every day, practically, and there was a lot of business there. Had a man carrying the mail from the post office to the depot, which was about seven or eight blocks north. And they had a shipping pen there next to the depot. They had an elevator, an old elevator there that Bill Harris ran and another elevator east of Athens. Had a lumberyard east of Athens . . .

Q: Was Athens considered a mining town?

A: Bill Barrs had an implement store there, in Athens, which is still there. There's nothing in it, it's vacant. He's done a big business and Frank Howard had a feed store next to it and has done a big business in the feed business.

Q: What do you remember of some of the families that lived in Athens at that time? Can you tell about any of them?

A: Well, there was Jack Campbell and Bill Campbell. They run the barber shop, and Joe Langston had a place where you bought cream. That's where you're at now.

Q: Yes. Tell about some of these other people who had stores on Main Street.

A: Well, Cantrall Brothers had a store. You go up the street, next to it Tom Hahn had a restaurant there, and he had an ice house back behind it which they packed ice in it. There was sawdust, they'd haul sawdust from the sawmill, and . . .

Q: Where did he get the ice?

A: Off the pond. Haw's Pond, and Rankin's Pond . . .

Q: How did they get it?

A: [They'd] get about twelve-inch to fourteen-inch ice. They cut it, it was sawed by hand, and they hauled it with teams to the ice house.

Q: Then did it last all summer?

A: Oh, yes. It would last all summer. Packed in sawdust. It would keep good.

Q: And did he sell it to people in town?

A: Well . . .

Q: Or use it in his business?

A: Yes. Sold to people. Most of it Tom Halm used for the restaurant, and after he quit filling it, I filled it and used the ice in the butcher shop to keep meat.

Q: Do you remember cutting ice?

A: Surely do. Helped cut it many times.

Q: Well, tell about it.

A: It was cold. You get down on the pond there and the saw going, cutting it by hand. What they've done now, took a week, two weeks to fill an icehouse. Now they get it overnight.

Q: Right. Okay, now we are still at the place where you had just moved to Athens—we kind of got ahead of ourselves a little bit--and you are telling about what you remember about Main Street and some of the old families. Do you want to describe what your home was like in Athens when you first moved there?

A: When I first moved there, I moved in to Athens, I moved over to the west end next to the Catholic Church. I had a house rented there, had a chicken house, kept chickens, had their eggs. Afterwards we moved to another house there, and then I had a milk cow, and they came to the house and bought milk, five cents a quart. And it was better milk than we get today for a dollar in a quart. Eggs, I think were ten cents a dozen then, butter was not over twenty cents a pound.

Q: What were some of the things that you did to help around the house?

A: I didn't do much to help around. I had a sister--she helped her mother, and I didn't do much to help around the house. Didn't . . .

Q: Now was that about the time when you . . .

A: We had a base burner and once in a while that would go out and I had to dig the coal out and start it over again. Then we finally put in a furnace and got off of that trouble.

Q: Yes. But you were helping earn a living at that time. Right? You were helping earn a living at that time? Even when you were a little boy.

A: Always did.

Q: Explain some of the things you did to help earn a living.

A: Well, I always had a few runt pigs. The farmers would give me runt pigs and I'd feed them out. I'd buy shorts and feed them corn, and I had them in town, which they wouldn't let you keep them there now. And I sold them when they got fat, and they always The farmers were my friends. They would always bring me in a pig or call me up and I'd go get them and then you'd go out I used to go out to John Evers and he had two daughters, and they raised a lot of Plymouth Rock chickens. I'd go out there and get chickens fifty cents a piece. Great big roosters, and, then every fall my mother had to have three or four geese and fatten them, and we'd kill them, and she'd make feather beds and pillows out of the feathers and use the fat for cooking, and the meat, we'd eat. That happened every fall

Q: Now, you were part of the small Jewish community in Athens. Did you ever feel that you were any different from any of the other people in town?

A: No, I didn't. When I was a kid my mother sent me to Sunday School at the Christian Church, and I went to Sunday School there just the same as the rest of the kids. There was no trouble whatever.

Q: What do you remember most vividly about school, after you went to Athens?

A: I started to school, I think, in Athens, if I remember right. It was the fifth grade, and I went on to school to the eighth grade. I came in to Springfield, went to Springfield Business College one summer. That's all the schooling I ever had.

Q: Do you think that your life in Athens as a boy was any different from the other boys that lived in Athens?

A: I don't think so. The boys all liked me and the girls liked me and . . . (laughter)

Q: How come you didn't get one of those girls? (laughs) You never married, right?

A: I'll tell you why.

Q: All right.

A: But not to put over there.

Q: All right. Okay. (laughs) (tape recorder turned off)

Q: But what were you doing when a lot of these boys were out playing?

A: Other boys were out playing and I was out helping some farmer carry water to a thrashing machine or something like that. If I wasn't doing that I would go out and visit with them.

Q: So you really, from the very beginning, were interested in farm life?

A: Oh, yes! I always was interested in livestock, horses and . . .

Q: Now, how did you get into the livestock business?

A: I just got in the livestock business. I helped them drive cattle and hogs. There's two brothers, Eli Soltenstein and Charles Soltenstein, they had cattle yards right across the house from me, and I helped them sort cattle and hogs, and one thing and another.

Q: About how old were you when you did that?

A: Around fifteen. They never paid me anything, but then I got my experience from them. I got a lot of experience from Charles Soltenstein because he handled horses and mules. He used to go to Lincoln and Atlanta and buy horses and mules. They would deliver them to Williamsville and then I had to go from Athens, ride a pony, and lead the horses and mules to Athens. I'd get them about three o'clock and they'd be wore out, and it was just like driving a wagon. Get them to go.

Q: And you would drive them from Williamsville to Athens?

A: Lead them. Lead them.

Q: Lead them--from Williamsville to Athens? Then what did you do with them?

A: Turned them into the mule pen. He had a mule pen there. Mules and horses, put in box stalls.

Q: Yes. And then they . . . was that to trade and sell?

A: He would feed the mules and then ship them to St. Louis. Fed a lot of mules. Fed twenty or twenty-five mules, put them all together in one big shed he had there and fed them all corn and oats and bran. And got them fat and then shipped them by rail to St. Louis.

Q: Yes. And you think that is what influenced you to go into the cattle and horse business?

A: Yes. That was my--I got a lot of help by helping them.

Q: How did you happen to become a butcher?

A: I learned that from George Lomino. I worked for him for three dollars a week for two years and he learned me how to cut meat and kill calves.

Q: About how old were you when you did that?

A: About sixteen years old, seventeen.

Q: And how long did you work for him?

A: Two years. I quit and came to Springfield and made a deal with Gebhardt-Bricks on Fifth Street to take my calves. I'd go out and buy a calf--you could buy a calf at that time for ten dollars, two hundred pound calf for a nickel a pound. I'd ship them in by rail, kill them the night before and ship them in next morning, ten o'clock on the train to him.

Q: Would that be considered custom butchering?

A: I don't think so.

Q: No.

A: Just . . .

Q: That was just business between you and that one person?

A: Yes.

Q: All right, then, what changed your life at that time?

A: Well, I just kept getting a little bigger--buying and more stuff and getting a little older, and . . .

Q: What happened when the First World War came along?

A: First World War, I had to sell out. I had a sale and sold my horses and sold my cattle, and I had two awful good riding horses I had, had to sell, and I had a house there in Athens. I traded it off for forty acres of ground. I had another building there where the post office is now and that was a lot, and I had the building next to it that the Catholics owned. I traded that for a hundred and forty, fifty-nine acres of ground.

Q: Where was that?

A: South of Athens.

Q: So before you went to the war, you became a landowner?

A: I didn't have that land. I had forty acres was all.

Q: Oh.

A: Well, I had forty acres, then I bought a hundred and forty--sixty acres from Charley Watt joining it. I had two hundred acres before I went to the war. Then when I come back, I traded for this other land.

Q: Tell how the war affected your life.

A: Well, I was--I had blood poisoning in my hand and was laid up for six months. Then they made me supply sergeant and I was supply sergeant the rest of the time I was in the war.

Q: Where were you?

A: In Fort Tauten, New York, and I was there all the time that I was in the war. My sister came to New York, she stayed close by.

Q: Where was your mother at that time?

A: Mother had passed away before I went to war.

Q: So were you in New York all of the time during the war?

A: New York all the time during the war.

Q: How long was that?

A: One year.

Q: So then what happened when the war was over?

A: When the war was over--they discharged me, going to discharge me, but they sent me to Chicago. And from Chicago they sent me to Rock Island, discharged me up there and then sent me back to Chicago, from Chicago they sent me down to Springfield. (laughs) I was closer, closer when I was in Chicago to home than I was (laughs) where they sent me to be discharged.

Q: All right. Where did you take up then, when you got back to Athens after the war?

A: When I come back I went to board with Mrs. Churchill. She ran the hotel there.

Q: In Athens?

A: In Athens, there, I boarded with her I know for a while. Then I couldn't find no house and came to Springfield and rented a house, and I went back and forth. First, I went back and forth on the train and then I went and bought an automobile and drove back and forth.

Q: What was your business, then after the war?

A: I went to doing business just the same as ever. I went to buying some cattle. I had a man on the place, and when I came back, he had a hundred and some odd hogs. My neighbor, John Dirks, he had about forty he wanted to ship, and I had about forty due to go. So, we put them together and took them up to Athens, and we was going to ship them. Bill Powell offered us twenty-two and a half cents for them, and we just sold them to him. I kept my others about two or three weeks and shipped them to St. Louis, they brought sixteen and a quarter.

Q: What are some of the things you've learned from the cattle business?

A: Well, I learned a lot from the cattle business. I bought cattle one time in Kansas City, nice steers. I bought three hundred and I gave two and a half--at the start. I bought eighty cattle and I wound up--I had three hundred, and I gave three ten for one load of choice cattle weighing eight hundred which I had an order for, and a friend of mine out there had twenty-five shorthorn cows. He wanted to sell me all day and I told him I didn't want no cows, I was buying steers. And at eleven o'clock I saw him and he wanted me to go look at his cows. I went down to his pen and looked at his cows and I said, "What do you want for them?" And he says, "I want two cents a pound." I said, "Would you take a dollar ninety for them?" And he said, "No, I've got to have two cents." I says, "I'm going to buy the cows."

I weighed the cows and they weighed five hundred and seventy-two pounds, and they cost twelve dollars a head laid down at Andrew. Had a man working for us, he wanted some cows and I told him I'd sell them for fifteen dollars a head. "No, half of them will die." I says, "They can all die, they won't cost anything." So I turned them in the pasture south of Cantrall where the coal mine is, or was, I had a pasture, two pastures rented there. And I put them in there and I had them about three or four weeks. A man came up there and wanted to buy twenty cows. I said, "I've got twenty-five cows I'll sell you for twenty-five dollars a head." He says, "I'd like to go look at them." Went out and looked at them and he bought them.

He had them--he told me before he came he had a hundred and forty acres of corn stalks, and a hundred acres of bean stubble and twenty acres of clover stubble, but he didn't have no money. I says, "I'll furnish some money. I'll sell them to you for twenty-five dollars a head." And he had them three weeks, and he sold them to a man by the name of Zed Linton in Springfield here for thirty-five dollars a head. He kept them two weeks, sold them to Barney Constantino for six and a half cents, and weighed them at the stockyards. They weighed over eight hundred, at six and a half cents a pound, and when I bought them they weighed five hundred and seventy-two. You can imagine them . . .

Q: Oh, so that's one of the parts of the cattle business. Tell another kind of a cattle story.

A: Well, the first cattle I bought, I was running a butcher shop, and a man by the name of Marion Wells from Salisbury called me. Said he had a steer that broke his leg and he wanted me to come get him and butcher him. I went over there and he still had twenty-five of the fat cattle--they were yearlings--which there wasn't very many people fed--they always fed bigger cattle. He wanted to sell them to me. I never bought any cattle to ship, and so he wanted nine cents a pound, and I finally bought them.

I took them the following week and we weighed them and drove them to Bradford Station, and shipped them to Chicago. I went up with them to Chicago, and a man by the name of Ballard had two loads of beef cattle. They was guessing which cattle, what my cattle would bring, and what his cattle would bring, and they thought his cattle would bring a dollar under mine. So I went up with them in the train. He did too. My cattle came down there and some

fellow from the east was there and followed them down. He wanted to buy them, and he offered ten cents a pound for them. The commission man told me he might get a quarter more if he kept them, but I said, "Just sell the cattle." So I sold the cattle and they went to the scales. Ballard's cattle stayed there till about three o'clock and they brought ten, fifteen, just fifteen cents a hundred more than my cattle. And he took a shrink on them.

Q: Did you consider that a good deal?

A: Well, it didn't cost so much to ship them in them times, and they made a little money. Didn't make very much, but a little profit to me at that time was a big profit because I didn't have no money, and I had credit. I could pay for them, the bank would pay for them for me, so I made a little money. I just thought I was getting along.

Q: Tell what your biggest cattle deal was. Can you remember that?

A: Yes. My biggest cattle. I went to Springfield Marine Bank and asked them if they'd loan me some money. That was in 1932 when it was hard times, and I didn't tell them how much I want because I didn't know. So, I went to St. Louis, and I bought three carloads of cattle--fifty in a car--all shorthorn cattle weighing six hundred, at four cents a pound. And I walked up the line to another commission company, and I thought of selling my cattle that I bought. As it was, I didn't. He said, "Would you buy them?" And I said, "What do you want for them?" And he said, "Four cents a pound." So I had three hundred cattle bought, and they all belonged to one man but they split them. They were all red and roans. The first cattle they found out I'd bought were three hundred. First the commission company thought I was buying too many cattle, they called the bank to see if I could pay for them. Well, I'd made arrangements to pay for them, but I didn't make arrangements to pay for three hundred cattle! I shipped them home and I sold one man a hundred and five of them cattle at five cents a pound, and drove them from Sherman to Buffalo. That was an awful drive; I wouldn't try that again. Filled the road with cattle. There wasn't no automobiles at that time to bother you, though. That was the biggest cattle deal I think I ever had.

Q: Did you come out well on that?

A: Yes, they all made money.

Q: Yes. What did the depression do to the cattle business?

A: Depression? In 1932 there were so many cattle and I had no water and no feed for them and I had to sell them. It was a "have to" case to sell them. In the west, they had no feed, had no grass, and water or starvation.

Q: What did that do to your business?

A: Didn't bother me any because they had water and feed up here. Didn't have too much, but then . . .

Q: Could you get credit to buy cattle then?

A: Oh, yes. I got all the credit I wanted. I sold them on credit, too; but I took a mortgage on them and never lost no money. They were all paid for. Come out on them and made money.

Q: Okay, then. After the depression, you kept right on, selling and buying . . .

A: Oh, yes.

Q: . . . cattle?

A: Kept on buying cattle.

Q: Now what about horses and mules? Didn't you trade in horses and mules, too?

A: Yes. I had a cousin in Vermont . . .

End of Side One, Tape One

A: I shipped him a load of horses every spring. Twenty-eight horses we put in a car by express. Sometimes I'd ship him two loads of horses, be fifty-six horses, by express. He sold them to the farmers there. It was dairy country, and they hauled milk with them, and they farmed a little; they didn't farm too much. They had to be broke, and they wanted a horse weighed fourteen to fifteen hundred, with color--they didn't like a black horse because they called them hearse horses.

Q: (laughs) Okay. Then what about the mule business?

A: Mule business, I had a big country trade and I traded mules, and traded mules for horses, and horses for mules. I never did ship any mules without I had something that wouldn't work or something that I couldn't sell to the farmer. I didn't want to keep, put them in the car and ship them to St. Louis. But otherwise I sold most of my mules at home.

Q: When did you get out of the horse and mule business?

A: I never got out of the horse and mule business till after the depression when they wouldn't buy no mules at all. Nobody wanted them; the South didn't want them, and . . .

Q: Can you think of any reason why they didn't want them then?

A: Well, money was scarce for one thing, and then the tractors was coming in and taking the place of horses, and the trucks come in. And instead of shipping them, why we hauled the horses and mules in trucks. They made a lot of difference.

Q: But then, after you got out of the horse and mule business, you continued with the cattle business?

A: I still stayed with the cattle business and the hog business. All my life.

Q: All right, now. Starting after the depression, tell about some of your best cattle deals.

A: Have to go back over that?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, I was in Kansas City and bought eighty cattle for two and a half cents weighing five hundred. I bought three hundred cattle that day and I did give three cents for a load of choice eight hundred pound cattle which I had an order for. I had a friend [who] had a load of cows [he] wanted to sell me all day long and I wouldn't go look at them. And at eleven o'clock I quit buying steers, and I went and looked at his cows. I says, "What do you want for them cows?" He says, "I want two cents a pound for them." And I said, "Would you take a dollar ninety for them?" And he says, "No, I've got to have two cents a pound for them." I said, "I'm going to buy your cows." The cows weighed five hundred and seventy-four pounds, and they cost twelve dollars a head, all expenses laid down at Andrew, Illinois. And I'd sell them to a friend of mine at fifteen dollars a head, and he wouldn't buy them.

I had a pasture rented there south of Cantrall where the mine was at that time, and I turned them in the pasture there. I had them three or four weeks and a man came and wanted to buy twenty cows. He didn't have no money but he had a hundred and forty acres stock field, and a hundred acres of bean stubble, and twenty acres of clover stubble. I said, "I got twenty-five cows to sell you at twenty-five dollars a head, and I'll furnish the money." He said, "I'd like to look at them." We went out to the pasture and looked at them and he bought them. He had them three weeks and he sold them to Zeb Linton here, a butcher in Springfield, for thirty-five dollars a head. He had them two weeks and sold them to Barney Constantino at six and a half cents. And weighed them at the Springfield stockyards, and they weighed over eight hundred pounds, and the cows made everybody money.

Q: Was that the best deal you ever had?

A: No, I had another deal. I went down to the Springfield Marine Bank to borrow some money to buy cattle, and I didn't tell them how much I wanted. In fact, I didn't know how much I needed. I went to St. Louis and one commission company had three loads of cattle, fifty in a load, a hundred and fifty cattle. All shorthorns, reds and roans, and I bought them at four cents a pound. And I went up the line and I thought I had seen my cattle, and the commission company said, "Would you buy them?" And I said, "I bought them cattle, I think." He says, "No, you didn't." And I says, "What do you want for them?" And he says, "Four cents a pound." So I bought them. I had three hundred shorthorn cattle, all the reds and roans. They all belonged to the same man, but he'd split the cattle to different commission companies, and I got them all together. I shipped them home and I sold one man a hundred and five of them and drove them from Sherman to Buffalo, which was an awful drive.

Q: Now, about when was that? Was that before or after the depression?

A: That was right along the depression. It wasn't before, it was right in the . . .

Q: In the depression.

A: But they were awfully cheap at that time.

Q: Yes. But did you consider that you came out well on that deal?

A: Cattle all made money. They made the man that bought them money. They were good doing cattle, and they were . . . cattle, all one man's cattle, all nice reds and roans.

Q: Now, after the depression, you kept on buying cattle and hogs?

A: I sure did, but they kept getting higher all the time.

Q: All right, now tell me what's happened since then in your cattle business.

A: Cattle I bought for four cents a pound then, now would cost sixty, sixty-five cents.

Q: What do you think is going to happen to the cattle business?

A: I don't know what'll happen to it. I have no idea.

Q: Now, you are eighty-nine years old and you are still buying cattle, right?

A: Yes. I'm still buying cattle.

Q: Well, explain that, will you? How that all came about?

A: I bought cattle for the Springfield Dressed Beef as long as they were in business, and when they sold out, I quit. And the other company hired a man and they had him six weeks, and he died. They came back to me to buy cattle for them, and I'm still on the payroll far as that's concerned. But I haven't been very active in the last two months. They would like for me to go back. I don't know whether I will or not.

Q: So you consider that you've been a cattleman for how many years?

A: All my life.

Q: All your life. If you were going to give advice to some young people going into the cattle business now, what would you tell them?

A: I'd tell them to stay out! They're too high to buy.

Q: Do you have any advice to give to young people going into farming?

A: Yes. I give a lot of them advice, but some of them don't take it. I talked to one the other night, he was here at the house, and he bought forty acres of ground with a house on it. His house burned down and he had insurance, had it insured, and he got the insurance. And a neighbor offered him a big price for it, big profit on it. I told him to sell it and buy a hundred and sixty acres of ground in the place of it, but he didn't do it. He went and built a new house, and he was here the other night, and his wife was with him, and I sprung it on him. I said, "If you had bought that hundred and sixty acres of land and sold that, you'd have been rich today." And his wife spoke up and says, "I didn't know anything about it." (laughs)

Q: What do you think is going to happen to the family farms?

A: Well, it's pretty hard for a family to make a living on a hundred and sixty acres of ground. In the first place, these old people had six or seven cows they milked, they had chickens, they had hogs, they took eggs and butter to town and traded it off for groceries. Today you go to a farm and they haven't got a milk cow, they haven't got no chickens, and most of them haven't got no hogs. And they're having a hard time getting along which I don't know what'll happen. But another thing, they shell the corn and they have to dry it, and after they dry it they . . . it's not got the feeding quality in it that the old pollinated corn had, and it costs a lot of money to dry it. They got no corn cribs to put in the ear because they've tore them all down. They either got to pay storage on it at the elevator or sell it to them.

Q: So what do you think is going to happen?

A: I couldn't tell you what'll happen; but you can't go back and crib it because you got no way of shucking it and they got no cribs to put it in.

Q: Yes. Well, let's look back on your life now as a cattleman, Mr. Wertheim. What do you consider some of your greatest pleasures, as life has gone on?

A: My pleasure always was doing business with my friends. At one time, one Sunday . . . well, I was in Kansas City and I bought two loads of cattle, and I had a friend after I came back that night. He called me and said, "I got two loads of cattle I want to sell you." Well, I said, "I just stopped there and got two loads," and I never went to see him. He said, "I'm going to send them to you anyhow." So he sent them to me. So the next day they had a sale at Bloomington, and I went up there, and they were in trouble selling them, and I buy three loads, trailer loads, of cattle up there. Well, I had three hundred cattle and I called all my friends and they all come in on Sunday and I sold three hundred cattle private to my friends on Sunday. Right there on the place.

Q: So one of your greatest pleasures is the . . .

A: My greatest pleasure was doing business with them fellows to my friends. They came in, everybody came, bought cattle, and wasn't nobody get away.

Q: What do you think has made you the good businessman that you have been?

A: My friends made me a good businessman. If it hadn't been for my friends and my credit, I couldn't have done business.

Q: What do you think you could give to this business of yourself? They wouldn't have given you credit except for some reasons.

A: I had no trouble getting credit. I get . . .

Q: What do you think that is?

A: I always went, if I couldn't pay it when it comes due, I always went to the bank and told them I had to wait thirty days or something like that. I never had any trouble that way because they would extend the loan for me without any ifs or ands because they know they would get the money . . .

Q: Do you consider the business then a good business for you over the years?

A: It's been a good business for me. My friends helped me, and I helped them, and I helped a lot of people.

Q: And that's been your greatest pleasure?

A: That's been my pleasure, helping somebody.

Q: Tell about the young boy.

A: Well, I went to Florida, and I hired a man by the name of Carter, fed my cattle. Rex Carter, while I was in Florida in the wintertime. I come back and wanted to pay him for feeding them, and he wouldn't take anything. I never said a word. When fall comes, I went past the house and stopped and I told his wife to send his boy over, and his name was Billy Carter. I wanted him to help me. He did help me at times, sorting cattle and one thing and another. They came over, they all come over, the boy and the father and the mother. So, sorted the bull calves off and had the heifer calves left. I says, "Billy, I want you to go in there and pick a heifer calf out." And he says, "What do you want me to do with her?" I said, "I want you to take her home and feed her." So he went in there and picked one of the best heifer calves out, and took her home, and fed her in the winter, and brought her back the next summer and bred her. She had a heifer calf. He wound up, he just sold eight cows and calves. He sold out the other day. They had to sell out because they had no pasture anymore.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: It made me feel good because he took care of them and he wouldn't take nothing for feeding my cows, but I got even with him anyhow.

Q: Good. Is there anything else that you want to tell about your life as a cattle man?

A: I don't think so.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: You got it all?

End of Side Two, Tape One