PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of tape-recorded interviews conducted by Mary Jane Feagans for the Oral History Office in July, 1975. Mary Jane Feagans transcribed the tapes and edited the transcripts; Ewell Brauer reviewed the transcripts.

Ewell Edward Brauer was born in Cass County on November 26, 1912 and except for several years has lived in Cass County since. He is the son of farmers and at the age of ten began helping his father on the farm. He began his education at a nearby rural school. He graduated from Chandlerville High School, which was a sixteen-mile roundtrip on horseback. After graduation he continued farming with his father for several years.

Mr. Brauer was married in 1942, and in 1947, he and his wife moved to the farm where they are now living. They have nine children.

Mr. Brauer's various activities include Menard County School Board member, president of the Methodist Church Board, and treasurer of Shich Shack Drainage District.

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 views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

Ewell Brauer, July 4 and 9, 1975, rural Oakford, Illinois.
Mary Jane Feagans, Interviewer.

Q. Let's begin with telling us a little bit about your background.

A. I was born on a farm four miles west of Oakford in Cass County. My parents were farmers on an average size farm.

Q. When were you born?

A. 1912.

Q. Were you born at home?

A. I was born at home. All births occurred at home in those days. There were few births at hospitals, no transportation. There was a family doctor from town. Every small village had a doctor.

Q. Why don't you tell us a little bit about your parents? Their names, where they were born, et cetera.

A. My father was Henry Brauer. He was born west of Chandlerville in 1888 of a farm family. My mother was born near Oakford in 1889 of a farm family. They were both from large families. My mother was from a family of five.

Q. Five children?

A. Yes. There were nine children in my father's family, in which he was the middle--four older and four younger. They were married in 1911. They were on a farm where they lived, most of the time, for the rest of their lives, except for a year or two.

Q. Where did they live during that time?

A. They lived on a farm a mile east.

Q. Of where?

A. Of the farm four miles west of Oakford. Of course that was back in the horse-and-buggy days. All the transportation was by train or horse and buggy.

Q. Were your grandparents from America or did they come over from another country?

A. My father's grandparents all came from Germany. Some of my mother's

family came from England by way of Virginia and Kentucky. I'm not sure about the dates on that. But that was in the days when all transportation was by train--good train service. All railroads ran passenger trains. Oakford had two passenger trains north and two south, which included a mail coach and an express car.

Q. Did your parents move immediately to the farm after they were married?

A. Yes.

Q. And that was the farm about a mile from where they spent the rest of their lives?

A. It was the farm where they spent the rest of their lives. They moved away for about a year and then back.

Q. Did they buy the farm or was this already in the family?

A. It was already in the family but it was added to later on.

Q. Was this your dad's dad's farm?

A. Yes.

Q. How long did he have it? Did he buy it or did it belong to his father?

A. No, he bought it maybe eight or ten years before Father took it over.

Q. Let's talk a little bit about the farm operations and field crops. What kind of crops did you plant?

A. It was corn, wheat, and oats with a rotation of clover. Nothing specific. The crops would change occasionally from one crop to the other.

Q. What did you plant the most of?

A. It was mostly corn and wheat with some oats and clover.

Q. How many years did you leave a field in clover?

A. Clover was sown in the oats in the spring of one year and then plowed up two years from that spring and put in corn.

Q. How was the grain planted? They use tractors now. What did they use then?

A. It was all horsepower. Riding implements--they had just begun to use riding implements when my father started farming. I don't remember very many walking plows used. They were all what they called gangplows--four horses with two 12-inch plows. They had as few as three horses pulled, with one large plow--16, 18-inch plow--really rather crude according to today's standards with big tractors, big plows, heavy equipment.

Q. Did you cultivate with horses?

A. Cultivated with horses, one row at a time. There were a few two-row cultivators, but most people said you couldn't watch two rows at one time.

Q. What about the harvest, did you do that by hand?

A. Harvest was with the old steam thresher machines powered by steam engines. They were large machines; it took a great many men to operate them. They would have eight wagons hauling the bundles into the machine, four men to help load the wagons, three men to operate the machine. The grain was hauled to town in wagons. They weren't very good roads, an old sand road. About thirty-five or forty bushels made a good load. It took ten, twelve grain wagons to keep the grain away from the machine, so that would take a total of twenty-five to thirty men to operate a machine. It was slow; it was hot.

Q. Did the farmers all work together at harvest time?

A. This harvest run included about ten to twelve farms--the immediate community. They all worked together well. They would start at one end of the run one year and the other end next year, so that you'd give everybody an even break at harvest time. It would last through most of July.

Q. What crops are you talking about now?

A. This was wheat, rye, and oats. Mostly wheat, a little rye and most every farm had a few acres of oats for feed. The big concern in those days was for horse feed, rather than to sell the oats. There were very few oats put on the market.

Q. Were the machines community owned?

A. This machine was community owned with most of the farmers owning a share. It wasn't mandatory, but if a farmer could, he owned a share of the machine.

Q. What if a farmer couldn't afford to own a share?

A. Well, after threshing, they had a settling-up day and everybody would pay the same price for having their grain threshed, whether they owned a share in the machine or not, which was the customary price around through the country. On the settling-up day they paid their machine men regular wages. If anything was left, the shareholders shared in what was left, which wasn't a lot, but it provided a good machine for the men's use.

Q. Were there ever any disputes over how much somebody owed, any fights?

A. There were a few disputes but nothing that wasn't ironed out with a little talking.

Q. No guns involved?

A. No. It was nothing violent. It was a good neighborhood to work in. Everybody enjoyed it, and they didn't have trouble hiring help here like maybe some communities did.

These steam engines were powered by coal. Everyone furnished their own coal, which meant a trip to the coal mine for a load of coal. One of the men on the machine hauled water for the steam engine, which was quite a job. It was hard to find a place where you could pump lots of water. If someone had a small gasoline engine it helped a lot. But the windmills didn't furnish enough water. It meant driving some distance sometimes to a creek or someplace to find enough water to run the machine.

Q. Where did you store the grain after it was harvested?

A. Nearly all the wheat went directly to the elevators, except what was saved back for seed. Maybe someone would have a new variety of wheat that some of the neighbors would buy or something like that, but otherwise it all, except seed, went direct to the elevator.

Q. You stored it at the elevator or you sold it to the elevator?

A. Sold it to the elevator. Oats went into a bin at home for feed; it took a lot of feed for horses. There were no tractors in those days. Locally, there were a few tractors, but they weren't really a success until the thirties when they began to build better tractors and rubber tires, and such as that.

Q. Were there any special techniques in plowing?

A. Everyone used the same standard equipment with the two-bottom plow and four horses. There wasn't any heavy machinery to work the ground down with. If you had ground that was light, it was easy work; if you had gumbo, you needed a lot of help from the weather. (laughs)

Q. So it depended more on the ground than anything?

A. The big change in farming came with the tractors in the thirties as well as the REA [Rural Electrification Administration]. There were a few farms with electrictity before the thirties when REA came around. There were a lot of handles--pump handles, cranks.

Q. Manpower?

A. Manpower. Pumps, cream separators, washing machines, washboards, hoe handles, axes, spades.

Q. That was the big change then, when electricity came in?

A. Electricity and the development of the motor. There were a few gasoline engines, but they were--they took nearly as much energy to start sometimes as they put out. Ice cream freezers had a handle. (laughter)

With electricity it meant a change with the small electic motors on the wash machines. Of course, washing machines, Maytag came out with the gasoline motor. It was a good motor in the later twenties and early thirties.

Q. Let's talk about your livestock you had when you were young.

A. Horses were the big thing on our farm, and we kept several milk cows--five, six, eight, ten milk cows. Raised a few hogs. It wasn't a big project, but it was a part of the farm. Chickens--everyone had a flock of chickens. The young chickens sold in the fall were a cash income that always helped.

Q. How many horses did you have?

A. Depending on how much we farmed, we had from four to ten horses.

Q. So your main source of income was the grain rather than the livestock?

A. It was a combination of all. The livestock furnished a steady income with the eggs and chickens and cream. Cream sold for a good price, much higher then, accordingly, than it does now.

Q. Who did you sell the cream to?

A. Some people churned their cream into butter and sold it locally at the stores. Some women had a reputation for real good butter, which everybody wanted. Others made butter which didn't sell so good--didn't take good care of it. We sold most of ours to the creamery. We'd take it in five-gallon cans and take it to the depot. With two trains running each way every day to pick that up, we had good service on it--it didn't set there.

Q. Do you remember what the price for cream was then?

A. A five-gallon can of cream would bring about seven or eight dollars a can when everything else was real cheap.

Q. What year was this?

A. This was in the twenties. Even during depression times, cream sold good.

Q. You had chickens, you said.

A. Yes, there was a small flock of chickens--a hundred chickens or so, which was for our own use. And then Mother would raise two or three hundred young chickens every year.

Q. Your mother did the work for the chickens?

A. Yes. With the exception of what was kept as pullets, they were all sold as fryers. Chickens weren't really productive then, they didn't get the care and extra feed in the wintertime it took for them to lay

the year round, like they get now. They would start laying in the spring and lay well up into summer, and then they would slack off and in the cool weather would almost stop egg production. But the chickens didn't take that much grain. They got what they could pick up around the farm in the way of green stuff and worms and whatever they could find.

Q. Did you sell any eggs or did you keep them all for your own use?

A. When we had a surplus of eggs they were sent to market. Family eggs came first and then the rest of them were sold.

Q. Did you have a surplus most of the time?

A. In the spring and summer there was a surplus of eggs.

Q. But definitely not in the winter?

A. No. We didn't even use many eggs in the winter. (laughs)

Q. How much work did these chickens take? How many hours a day did your mother have to spend on them?

A. When they were hatching in the spring, with little chickens, she put in quite a little time; otherwise, they didn't get much attention. They just had the run of the farm and whatever they could pick up, they ate.

Q. What about the pigs--where did you keep those?

A. We had a couple of small sheds. We didn't keep many pigs--maybe raised forty-five to fifty, which was more than most farmers in the neighborhood raised, but it wasn't a big. . . .

Q. What did you feed the pigs?

A. They would get corn. They'd run behind the cattle, and it wasn't until we began to feed the commercial feed in the thirties that they really did well. It was just strictly a corn diet.

Q. Did you send many of these to market or did you keep most of them for your own use?

A. They mostly went to market. We would butcher four to six every year. Another community project was butchering. Four or five of the neighbors would work together and each family had a day at their house when they butchered. The meat was salted so it would keep.

Q. What was the process of salting? How did you do that?

A. After it was butchered and the meat was a day or two old, it had set or got solid or it cooled out good, you'd put salt on it. It would be on several days and give the salt a chance to work in, and then you would

smoke the meat. You would get green hickory wood and build a smoldering fire in what we called a smokehouse to give it a hickory flavor. It would take maybe a week or more, ten days, two weeks, for that to give it a hickory flavor.

Q. You kept the fire burning all that time?

A. The smoldering fire.

Q. Was it the smoke that cured it or the salt?

A. No, the salt cured it; the smoke flavored it. If you didn't get enough salt in it, it wouldn't keep and along in the summertime it tasted like it had plenty of salt cure on it. (laughter) And then we would usually butcher one of the steers in the wintertime, and you ate as much of it fresh as you could. And with the weather change when it got warm, Mother would cold pack the rest of it. She would put it in jars and then--I don't know just what the process was, but it was a form of cooking. They cut it up in chunks. It tasted real good in the summertime. It was a change from the cured meat. The only time that we had fresh meat in the summertime was when we had threshers for dinner; we'd get a big roast or fresh meat from the store and that was the meat for dinner.

Q. You bought the meat from the store?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you buy much meat from the store?

A. Just the threshing dinner.

Q. It was kind of special, then?

A. Yes.

Q. What else did you have when the threshers came?

A. Well, the table was full of potatoes, beans, all kinds of vegetables out of the garden, pie, cake.

Q. It sounds like a Thanksgiving dinner today, doesn't it?

A. It was a big dinner for twenty-five or thirty men besides the cooks.

Q. That was a lot of preparation, too. How long did it take your mother to fix it?

A. She and the neighbor ladies helped. Maybe it would be planned a day or two ahead, but it was mostly done that morning, same as any other meal. It was all cooked on a range.

Q. What kind of a range?

A. Wood stove. Wood range, or coal.

Q. What did the horses do other than pull the plow?

A. You had one or two you would ride. They were worked from the first of March on. They were worked in the field until after corn shucking. They didn't have a lot of days off except when it rained. And then the first of March we would get the horses in the barn daily, feed them every morning, and we would curry them and start getting some grain into them so they would get ready for the work season. Then after the corn shucking, they were turned out in the stalk field except one team--usually just let run as long as there wasn't too much snow, or enough stalks, enough feed to keep them. They weren't put in the barn until spring when we got ready for work.

Q. Did you use them for transportation during the spring or summer?

A. As long as I can remember, we had a car. I think the folks got their first car in 1916. I would have only been four, so I don't remember when they didn't have a car. But they weren't run in the wintertime much. They didn't have anti-freeze for cars. If you went in the wintertime, which was seldom, and if it was real cold, you'd have to start your car up and put in water and keep it from freezing up. And then the old side curtains that they had on cars didn't keep out much cold. Most of the trips in the wintertime were made with the buggy or a wagon.

Q. How many horses usually pulled a buggy?

A. Either one or two. It would be fixed so you had one or two. If it was muddy, you'd have to use two. If you had a buggy with a tongue in it, you used two anyhow. If it had shafts, it meant that only one pulled it.

Q. What kind of horses did you have? Any special breed?

A. They were different breeds of draft horses, but most of the horses looked like they were accidents instead of being planned. (laughter) But we usually had mules, too. We had as many as six mules sometimes.

Q. They did the same things that the horses did, basically?

A. Yes. They were really a better work animal than horses, but then some people didn't like them.

Q. Were they stubborn?

A. Not really. They had their own ideas, but they would take care of themselves better than horses.

Q. In what way?

A. They wouldn't get into fences and get cut up as bad as horses. In hot weather they would slow down if they got hot, where a horse wouldn't--

he'd keep on going until he dropped.

Q. It sounds like they have a little more common sense than horses.

A. That's right.

Q. Horses got into fences and got themselves cut up?

A. A barb wire fence, which most people had, if they'd get their foot caught or something like that and they'd get scared, then when they tried to get out, then those wires would cut them up.

Q. Why didn't the mule do that? Would he be able to work himself out?

A. He just wouldn't do it.

Q. What did he do if he got his foot caught?

A. He'd either stay there or take it a little easy, and a horse would get scared, some worse than others.

Q. What kind of pigs did you have?

A. They were most any breed. Everyone had their own favorite breed. I think most of the pigs we had were durocs or chester whites.

Q. You didn't do much specialized breeding, then?

A. No. The cattle we had were a dual-purpose breed--we milked, and the cow would raise a real good calf, too. It was mostly shorthorn with a few other breeds mixed in.

Q. Was there a special breed that you liked?

A. Not really.

Q. What was the best breed for milking?

A. Well, they didn't go into milking like they do today with artificial insemination and things like that. They hadn't even started that yet.

Q. So you don't think any particular breed back then was a lot better than another?

A. No.

Q. You said your mother took care of the chickens; did she have a garden, too?

A. Yes. Everybody had a good garden. It took a lot of time, but. . . . We tried to get the garden plowed early and get an early garden in and then all through the summer it was a matter of tending and harvesting and planting at the right time.

Q. What all did you plant in the garden?

A. We had the same thing that you plant today. We started out with lettuce and radishes and onions. Peas was an early crop. [We also had] green beans, tomatoes--whatever an individual liked. Strawberries--most everyone had a strawberry patch. Blackberries and raspberries--not everyone had those.

Q. How big was the garden? Can you give me a dimension?

A. (laughs) Now you're putting me on the spot. It was big enough.

Q. Okay, think about that and I'll ask you later. Did you rotate the garden or did you fertilize it?

A. It had fertilizer put on it sometimes. It was usually planted in the most fertile spot close to the house we could find. We had two gardens. One was maybe fifty by a hundred feet and the other was a good big garden. The small garden was put in early and it happened to be the best ground.

Q. What kind of fertilizer did you use? Manure?

A. Manure was the only kind.

Q. The cheapest and the best available.

A. Commercial fertilizer wasn't used until later.

Q. How big was the house you lived in?

A. It was a six-room house.

Q. Can you describe some of the furnishings of the house?

A. It was four rooms downstairs, two rooms upstairs. The heating stove was what they called a German heater. It was a combination wood and coal. The cook stove was a wood range. We only used wood in it. That meant six rooms heated with two stoves, which doesn't mean much heat in four rooms.

Q. Did the upstairs get much heat?

A. You couldn't tell it.

Q. Used a lot of blankets?

A. Used a lot of blankets, slept on a feather bed, and woke up with snow on the windowsill once in a while, plumb dry. The houses, of course, weren't insulated.

Q. Were the two rooms upstairs bedrooms?

A. The two rooms upstairs were bedrooms. One of the rooms downstairs was a bedroom, and a dining room, living room, and kitchen.

Q. And an outhouse?

A. And an outhouse. With another room added on later to the front part of the house.

Q. For a bathroom, you mean?

A. No, just for a living room--another living room.

Q. You had two living rooms? Or did you just extend the living room?

A. Just extended it.

Q. Who built your house?

A. It was built a long time ago. I don't know who built it.

Q. How old would you say it was when you were ten?

A. I think it was built before the Civil War. I'm not sure about that, but it was a type common to the neighborhood. There were three houses in a row built a good deal alike.

Q. It was there when your grandfather bought the farm, then?

A. Yes.

Q. What kind of barns did you have?

A. This old barn we had was a pole barn. It had very little loft room for hay, which meant that we stored hay either in stacks or in bales in another building. It should have been torn down a long time ago and rebuilt. We did build a new one in 1934.

Q. You tore it down and replaced it?

A. Yes.

Q. Was the new one about the same size?

A. The new one was quite a lot larger and it had a real big hay loft. We had room in the new barn to store more loose hay in than we would ever feed.

Q. Did you build the new barn yourself or did you have somebody come in to do it?

A. We had carpenters come in and build the new barn.

Q. Do you remember how much a barn like that cost then?

A. This barn was 46 foot long and 34 foot wide. This was just at the end of the Depression and it cost under a thousand dollars to build.

Q. How much would the same barn cost today, do you think?

A. You don't build barns like that today. (laughs)

Q. That's much bigger than you would every think of building today?

A. No, it's a different style of barn than you would use today. It had room on one side for ten work horses, which was as many horses as we ever used. The other side was for milk cows. It had storage for oats, for feed, and corn. It was a well-built barn.

Q. Was that the only barn you had?

A. Yes.

Q. Were there any other buildings besides the barn, the house, and the chicken coop--or did the chickens have a house?

A. Yes, they had a chicken house. We had a machine shed and a corncrib.

Q. Were they new buildings or were they there when the farm was bought?

A. They were built in around 1920--the crib and the shed was.

Q. You had one corncrib?

A. Yes.

Q. Was that enough to keep all the grain you needed?

A. It would hold about five thousand bushels of ear corn, which was quite a lot of corn in those days.

Q. Was it bigger than most of the farmers had or was it typical?

A. It was more or less typical. (tape stopped and started)

Q. Let's backtrack a little bit now and talk abour your childhood.

A. Well, I went to school at Lynn School, which was just across the field a short distance. When I started school, why, we lived up the road about a mile, and that was a good long walk. When I was in about the second grade, we moved back to the original farm. When I was around ten, why, it was time to start helping with the chores, as far as milking and feeding were concerned, field work.

Q. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A. I had two brothers and three sisters, and they took their turns with milking--occasionally, not all the time. My sisters worked with the dishes and helped in the garden. Everyone helped a little, or we'd never got around and got it done, as much work as there was on the place. Labor-saving devices were being used, but sparingly. We did a lot of hoeing, milking

by hand, and everything was done the hard way. We had a windmill to pump water for the livestock. When the wind didn't blow, then we supplemented it with hand labor, pump handle.

Q. Did you have to do that frequently?

A. Not a lot. We had a tank that would hold about a three-day supply of water, and it would carry us over. Once in a while it wouldn't, maybe.

Q. How old were your brothers and sisters--how much younger than you?

A. One sister was born in 1917, one in 1919, a brother in 1920, a brother in 1921, and another sister was born in 1928.

Q. So you were the oldest?

A. I was the oldest of six.

Q. Did you have to help take care of your little brothers and sisters?

A. Not a lot. By the time I was old enough to do that, I was out helping with chores and helping in the field. The kids went to the field very early in those days, cultivating corn, hauling grain to town from the threshing machine.

Q. With a horse, or what?

A. With a team and wagon.

Q. How far was it to town?

A. This threshing run was from three to five miles from town.

Q. How old were you when you started making that?

A. I was ten when I started.

Q. So you would take the grain in all by yourself?

A. Not the first two years. My father would go with me; we took two loads at once. Then after that I went by myself.

Q. What did you do with it in town?

A. We took it to the elevator.

Q. Unloaded it?

A. Unload it at the elevator.

Q. How did they unload it?

A. They had a dump--we would dump the wagon. The back end would drop

down, and the grain would run out. It wasn't scooped.

Q. Where did they put it then?

A. They had bins in the elevator, and then during threshing season they would load it on boxcars just about as fast as it came in. We never had to wait at the elevator to dump our grain. It wouldn't come in as fast as it does nowadays during harvest, but they would handle it and it was loaded on boxcars and shipped to terminal markets.

Q. Let's talk a little bit about going to school. What kind of school was it?

A. It was a two-room country school. There were only two two-room country schools in the county at that time. I think there was another. There were forty-five to fifty kids in the school. They had as high as a hundred.

Q. That went to this one school?

A. That went to this one school. In the years past, the boys would drop out of school in the spring around March and they wouldn't get back until the corn was shucked in November, which meant that some of the boys went at a good deal older age. Maybe even some of them would be twenty-one and still be in grade school, which meant a lot of kids in the school. They had had more than a hundred kids in this district, if not more than that.

Q. And one teacher?

A. And one teacher.

Q. What did you learn at school?

A. We had a good purpose to it--it was reading, arithmetic, history and geography and spelling. I think the school had an advantage over the modern schools that have all kids of one age. The young ones learned a lot from the older kids from recitations and such as that, which is an advantage that the kids don't have nowadays.

Q. Did the older kids help the young ones?

A. Occasionally, but a lot of it was just listening to the older kids recite.

Q. That teacher must have been awfully busy.

A. The teacher was busy. We had some real good teachers; there were others who were not as good.

Q. How much education did the teachers have?

A. They had a teacher examination to pass.

END OF SIDE ONE

(First two minutes inaudible due to faulty tape recorder)

Q. You said that the boys dropped out in the spring and didn't come back until late fall. What about the girls--did they go all year long?

A. The girls had a better break on it. They usually went real regular. (inaudible) Some kids had some distance to go and some didn't--the same as they do now.

Q. How old were you when you started school?

A. I started when I was five.

Q. They didn't have kindergarten? You went to first grade when you started?

A. They didn't have kindergarten until forty years later.

Q. So you started to first grade. How long did it take you to graduate from high school then? If the boys didn't go spring and fall, did it take you . . .

A. They didn't graduate from eighth grade.

Q. But you did.

A. That was before I--see, the boys quit dropping out of school about the time that I got started right good. Along in the twenties, why, the boys quit dropping out of school, in general, for farm work.

Q. So you finished eight grades in eight years?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you go to high school there at Lynn School?

A. No, I went to Chandlerville to high school.

Q. But you went your first eight grades to Lynn School?

A. At Lynn School--eight month school.

Q. Eight months?

A. Eight months because of the farmer. The town schools had nine months.

Q. The town schools had nine months but you only had eight?

A. That's right.

Q. You said you went to high school at Chandlerville. How far was that from your farm?

A. It was eight miles. You furnished your own transportation, usually

horseback, a lot of horseback.

Q. So you had to ride a horse eight miles to school and eight miles from school for four years?

A. I did that for a year and a half.

Q. You had to do that in winter?

A. Yes.

Q. You didn't stay with anybody during the week in Chandlerville?

A. Oh, if the roads were drifted shut [with snow] or something like that I always had someplace I could stay, but not usually.

Q. How long did it take you to make your ride?

A. It was at least an hour each way.

Q. That was a lot of horseback riding--you must be pretty good. (laughter) Did you ever take a fall on your horse?

A. Once in a while.

Q. Any bad ones?

A. Not really.

Q. Did you have well-trained horses?

A. They were just ordinary horses--not too bad to ride.

Q. Was this your own horse?

A. Yes.

Q. Anybody else ride it but you?

A. If they wanted to.

Q. He wouldn't buck anybody else off, then?

A. No.

Q. You graduated from Chandlerville High School?

A. Yes.

Q. What did you do after that?

A. Stayed home, worked.

Q. Helped your dad on the farm?

A. Helped on the farm.

Q. How long did you do that?

A. Oh, four or five years.

Q. Did you divide profits or was it as if you were still one of the kids?

A. What do you mean profits? That was during the Depression. (laughs)

Q. You just managed to eat and live?

A. That is what we tried to do.

Q. What year did you feel the Depression start, did you feel its effects?

A. Oh, it didn't bother me. I was a kid at home and of course everybody ate and wore hand-me-downs. When I was a kid growing up, taxes and different things wouldn't bother me. As I got a little older, I realized what a struggle it was.

Q. So when do you think you first realized this?

A. I don't know.

Q. Did your dad ever talk things over with you when you got out of high school? Like how to raise money or anything?

A. If it was a worry, I didn't know. (laughs) It just wasn't there.

Q. Did any of the other people have such a hard time that they couldn't make it, that they didn't have enough food to eat?

A. Well, the farmer had enough food to eat. They raised their food.

Q. What about the people in town, were they having problems?

A. They were having problems, sure. They were without jobs, and if they had jobs they didn't pay much money. Of course then, you see, it didn't take much money. And then they started with WPA [Works Progress Administration].

Q. What is WPA?

A. It was a government project started in Roosevelt's administration. They created work and they would do roadwork and such as that. A lot of it didn't really accomplish a lot, but it did keep the men busy. And they made four dollars a day, which was good money.

Q. So the farmer, you don't think, really felt the Depression like the other people did?

A. Well, they felt it. They didn't buy anything new--you didn't buy harness, you didn't buy machinery, you used the old.

Q. You patched the old ones?

A. You patched the old. You'd buy the best you could. You borrowed a little bit, machinery, if you had to.

Q. But there really wasn't the worry about what you would have for dinner tonight?

A. Oh, we always had food. We had a garden, we had chickens and cows. We raised our own pork. We could always butcher our meat. It got to where mostly what we bought in town was flour, sugar, and salt. And we even took wheat to the mill and traded it for flour. There were a lot of clothes mended--patch on patch. We patched the patches. (laughs)

Q. Like the jeans today?

A. It was like the jeans today only it was a necessity then. You'd get a new pair of overalls that you wore on Saturday night.

Q. What happened on Saturday night?

A. That was the night we went to town, and if you had a new pair of overalls that's what you saved them for.

Q. Where did you go in town? What was there to do?

A. Oh, there wasn't a lot to do, just visit and talk with the people.

Q. So it wasn't anything like a movie, or . . .

A. Oh, there were some movies. Some went to a show, but some didn't care for them.

Q. Were the shows pretty expensive compared to other prices?

A. They were in line with everything else. If you had a few cents in your pocket, you could go to a show.

Q. It was definitely a luxury in hard times?

A. It was a luxury then. But the silent movies had come on before, and they were with the old silent stars. Talking movies were billed during that time.

Q. Did you ever go see a silent show?

A. Oh yes, I saw them. There were silent shows in Oakford.

Q. Did they have a theatre in Oakford?

A. Yes, they had what they called the Old Opera House, and they had a movie projector put in it. It was the kind that would stop after every reel and change the reels, and start from scratch then again.

Q. How old was that building? It's not up now, is it?

A. It burned several years ago. It was an old building. They had had several stage shows there. It was built back before the 1900's.

Q. Who ran the opera house?

A. Slick Thomas ran it as long as I can remember. [There were] a lot of western shows.

Q. What happened to Slick Thomas? Was he an old man then?

A. No, he operated it as long as it was profitable to operate it, and then when the talking shows came in, why, it was more expensive--projectors. And then of course, the Old Opera House burned.

Q. How long ago was that?

A. Oh, about 1930.

Q. He didn't build it back?

A. No.

Q. Where else did you go in those days besides to town on Saturday night?

A. Well, with the Model T Ford and the horse to ride, you didn't cover much distance.

Q. Did you go to church?

A. Yes, we went to the country church, down at Mt. Olive.

Q. That's a Baptist church?

A. That's a Baptist church.

Q. You went every Sunday? Or occasionally?

A. Occasionally.

Q. How far was that from your house?

A. About two miles.

Q. Did the whole family go, or did your dad stay home and work?

A. Oh, it was nothing definite, just who wanted to go.

Q. Was that something that you didn't do winter? Did you go more in the summer?

A. There was a lot of times in the winter we didn't. Mostly no set

pattern, just occasionally.

Q. Did your dad belong to any of the local farm organizations?

A. When Farm Bureau came in, in the twenties I believe, and most of the farmers belonged to it.

Q. Why did they join? What did they feel was the advantage?

A. The Farm Bureau sponsored different things for the farmers, and they tried to bring a better method of farming and organization. Of course, a lot of them didn't prove out economical until later years, but. . . . They tried to get out improved seed, and breeds of cattle. the importance of purebred cattle. Tried to improve feed and things.

Q. Do you still belong to Farm Bureau?

A. Oh yes. I pay yearly dues.

Q. Wasn't that kind of high for a group of farmers in the Depression?

A. I imagine several of them dropped out of it.

Q. Did your dad feel that it was worth it, though?

A. Well, when corn got down to ten, twelve cents a bushel and wheat to thirty-five or forty, we had begun to get doubts about anything.

Q. Maybe the Farm Bureau could help bring them up.

A. It was deeper than the Farm Bureau could take care of.

Q. Any other local farm organization or activities?

A. No. . . . Well, the women organized the Lynn Community Club back in those days to . . .

Q. What was the year on that, do you remember?

A. Around 1920. The purpose was to buy supplies for the school. They bought a piano, reading books. They bought carpenter tools to teach manual training for boys. A basketball--once a year, maybe. They would have nights at the school for school events. They had Christmas plays, that was a yearly event. The last day of school was a good day.

Q. What did they do on the last day of school?

A. Eat dinner. (laughter)

Q. That would make it a big event, wouldn't it?

A. Most every farmer in the country would unhitch in the field in time to go to the last day of school. Of course, it was just ahead of corn

planting. See, it was eight month school, it was only run until the first of May. The farmers would spend two or three hours together and visit. There were very few in the neighborhood that didn't attend.

Q. Just kind of a reason to have a social event on the last day of school?

A. That's right.

Q. Back to the Lynn Community Club, how did they earn their money for all these things?

A. They would have box suppers or maybe a chili supper or something like that. They didn't earn a lot of money, but it didn't take a lot to buy all that. I think they bought a real good piano. It seems like a hundred dollar one, I'm not sure. And they would usually buy a few books--reading books. A lot of schools didn't have any library. This one wasn't very big, but it had a library.

Q. All the local women belonged to this club?

A. I would say most of them did.

Q. Was it a social club, too, as well as service?

A. It was social. They had their meetings about every other week. Of course, that was mostly social. And if there was something that the school wanted, why, they worked together pretty well to get something that the school really needed.

Q. Did your mother belong?

A. Yes.

Q. Is the club still active today?

A. The club is still in existence, but it's not very active.

Q. Does your wife belong?

A. Yes, I think so. (laughter)

Q. You're not sure, so that makes it kind of inactive, huh? I think that's enough for this session.

END OF TAPE

Q. You said you had something you wanted to add about the care of your pigs?

A. Well, first let's go back to how they were fed. When we took care of our milk, we ran it through the cream separator, and the cream was sold either as cream or as fresh butter at the store.

Q. How did the cream separator work?

A. It turned by crank, and by centrifugal method it separated the lighter cream from the skim milk. The skim milk was fed to the hogs, which was an important source of protein for a small bunch of hogs. It was what was used before the so-called commercial feed, like tankage and soybean meal, was used.

Q. What is tankage?

A. Tankage is made from dead animals. There were rendering plants that went out after the dead livestock even before the days of trucks. They were skinned for the hides and the fat was rendered from them. Then what was left, more or less, was called meat scraps, or tankage, which was a high protein feed. It was the more popular supplement in the late thirties until soybean meal was being used in the forties. Soybeans was a new crop and was started being raised in the prairies in the thirties and in general use and was planted in most of the country starting in the forties as the markets developed and demand and so forth.

Q. So you gave the skim milk to the hogs?

A. Skim milk and scraps from the table and whatever, things that we didn't want to throw away that was edible.

Q. How long did you stay on the farm with your dad?

A. I was on the farm until I was twenty-three or four years and then I left for two or three years and then came back to farm on my own.

Q. You didn't go back to farming with your dad?

A. I went back to farming on my own. He was past the age to where he could work and manage the farm.

Q. Did he have any other help on his farm?

A. He hired help part-time and full-time, depending on what the need was. Help was easier to get in those days. There were always local boys looking for a job by the day or hour or month or most any way.

Q. Did he have any other family to help him?

A. He had two other boys that helped, and they went to school. One of them went to the Army and the other one worked in town.

Q. Which one went to the Army?

A. George went to the Army at the beginning of World War II, and the other brother, Irving, went to school and worked in a factory at the same time during the war.

Q. What factory?

A. William's Oilomatic in Bloomington.

Q. What does he do in the factory?

A. Well, it was just factory work--machinist.

Q. You said you came back on your own. Did you buy a farm or rent one?

A. I rented my father's farm and operated it for about three years and then I bought a place of my own.

Q. What three years, do you remember?

A. It would be from about 1943 to 1946, maybe.

Q. And then you bought your own?

A. Yes.

Q. Where was that?

A. That is where I live now--five miles southwest of Oakford.

Q. How much acreage do you have?

A. There is 270 acres.

Q. Is it all tillable?

A. Less than half is tillable, the rest is pasture land.

Q. Wasn't that quite a bit of acreage in those days to till?

A. No, the change had been made from horse and buggies to tractors. In the days of horses you worked a day and quit at six o'clock, and with a tractor you could work longer hours or of a night, or two people on one tractor, or whatever worked out. With horses everyone respected the six to six day which was a good long day. Horses needed to rest, as well as the men.

Q. Did you have any help when you first started?

A. I had help most of the time--as I needed it.

Q. Was that mostly at planting, or all year round?

A. It was always during crop season, and then if I had other things to do or wanted to do, I had help with that.

Q. When you started on your own, did you have about the same amount of pigs and cows as you had with your dad?

A. I started rather small into livestock and kept adding to it as I could or had time or could finance it, or whatever it took. I started

out with about four or five sows, farrowing twice a year. Then I farrowed as many as 2,000 pigs a year later on, which meant quite a large number of sows.

Q. How about cows?

A. On this place I have a beef herd of about twenty-five to thirty cows.

Q. That is what you started with?

A. No, I started with less than that and added to it as I saw fit until it reached the present size,

Q. How often do you send the cattle to market?

A. Well, I market the calves every year, and the cows, I cull them out depending on the age and their productivity, as well as the replacements that I have to raise.

Q. At what age does a calf go to market?

A. I usually sell the calves at about eighteen months because fat cattle are about eight to ten months as feeder calves, depending on circumstances.

Q. What about the pigs--how old are they when you send them to market?

A. The pigs are about six months old. I started out with a two-litter system, and . . .

Q. What is the two-litter system?

A. You farrow in spring and fall, as well as market the hogs, more or less twice a year. Then with the increase in numbers, I went to a full-time farrowing in a farrowing house built for the purpose.

Q. When was that built?

A. That was built in the sixties--in 1962. That meant full-time farrowing as well as full-time marketing--market the year around and feed the year around.

Q. What did you feed these pigs?

A. These pigs were fed a ground ration of corn and soybean meal with mineral additives and antibiotics and vitamins. They are fed a complete feed. It is quite a lot different than feeding ear corn to pigs where you feed them twice a day.

Q. Do you still feed them twice a day?

A. They are on self-feeders. The feeders are filled once a day, but they are on self-feeders, so they get feed whenever they want it.

Q. Do they get fatter faster?

A. No, it's not a faster method of raising hogs, it's--well, there's much less labor.

Q. What about the cows? How is the feed you give the cows different from what it used to be?

A. The cattle are on grass. The old cows, they don't know what corn tastes like until they get in the stalk field. If I feed the young calves, they are given a ground feed mixture.

Q. What about in the winter?

A. In the winter they are fed hay. They're run through the stalk fields--fed as cheap as I can.

Q. Let's go back to about 1940. When did you meet your wife?

A. Ask her. (laughter)

Q. You don't remember?

A. I met her in 1939 and we were married in 1941.

Q. Do you remember where you met her? (laughter) Just sometime in 1939, huh?

A. Sometime in 1939.

Q. Then you started dating after that?

A. After that, yes.

Q. Married in 1941? Did having a wife influence the kind of farming you did?

A. Well, it meant that I had to make a living I guess. (laughter)

Q. Were you more concerned with profit after getting married?

A. I don't think so. It meant a lot more responsibilities. Maybe it goes together, I don't know.

Q. You were married December 6, 1941. Is that correct?

A. That's right.

Q. And what happened the next day?

A. Well, the next day was Pearl Harbor Day, as it's remembered.

Q. Can you tell us your feelings and responses to hearing about Pearl Harbor?

A. You heard so much war news and it was another added news story, and it meant that we were involved in war automatically. Everybody was behind the effort. It meant that the boys were called up for service. War bonds were sold. It called for all-out farm production and in the factories. We were put on gas rationing with gas stamps.

Q. Why did they have gas rationing?

A. Well, the war effort came first. It meant that people at work had a supply of gasoline to use in their cars, farmers had gas for their tractors. It meant that the war effort came first ahead of pleasure and everything.

Q. How did they administer the gas stamps?

A. Each county had a rationing board and these stamps were given out according to needs.

Q. How did they determine need?

A. The farmers got about all the gas that they needed. The factory workers got gas according to the distance they drove, or the businesses as needed. Tires were rationed, as well as meat.

Q. Was there a shortage of all this stuff, or did they just want to make sure there wasn't a shortage?

A. They wanted to make sure that the material necessary went to the war effort. I don't know of anyone that ran out of gas. They complained about not having enough, but everyone got along pretty well with it.

Q. You said your brother was in the Army. Was he drafted or did he volunteer?

A. He enlisted in the Air Force and was . . .

Q. Was this George?

A. George. He went on to pilot school and graduated from pilot school and was a pilot during the war.

Q. Did he fly any dangerous missions?

A. Well, they were all dangerous. He flew twenty-nine missions over Germany for his quota.

Q. Did he receive any awards?

A. He received two or three awards. I couldn't tell you what they were--as all the boys did who took part in it.

Q. Were you in the Army or Air Force?

A. No.

Q. Was that because you were a farmer?

A. Farmer, and then one physical I didn't pass. They let several farm boys out to keep up production on the farm. Food was one of the more important things.

Q. What about your brother Irving, he didn't go to the army?

A. He had a bad ear and he didn't pass because of that.

Q. How long was your brother George in the Air Force?

A. He was in the Air Force until the end of the war. He was in England one winter--most of one year including a winter. And after completion of the missions, he came back to the States and served as an instructor in the air base.

Q. Do you remember what air base it was?

A. No, I don't. It was in the South.

Q. Did he continue flying after he got out of the Air Force?

A. He flew some. He had intentions of getting a job as a pilot, but after the war these pilots were a dime a dozen, there were a lot of them. He soon lost interest in flying and went into farming on his own.

Q. Where does he farm?

A. He farms on what is known as the home place, west of Oakford four miles.

Q. This is the farm that your dad farmed most of his life?

A. Yes.

Q. What about your brother Irving? What did he do after the war?

A. He went to--he completed his schooling and went into farming. He was with the ASC office as office manager for a while.

Q. What is ASC?

A. (laughs) I don't know.[1]

Q. Where did he graduate from school?

A. He went to Illinois State Normal and then graduated from the University of Illinois.

Q. What about your brother George? Did he go to college?

A. When he got out of the Army he completed his schooling, also at the

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[1] Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation. [J.F.]

University of Illinois.

Q. Did you say Irving has a farm?

A. He started farming at Geneseo, Illinois, and has been there most of the time since then.

Q. Does his farm have an emphasis on crops or livestock?

A. He put an emphasis on livestock with a complete farrowing-to-market program. At one time he had his production up to from eight to ten thousand hogs a year average. It was quite a large operation.

Q. Did he have any cows?

A. No, no cattle.

Q. He had nothing besides hogs?

A. Only hogs.

Q. What about George?

A. He went into hog production on his place on a scale of around eight to ten thousand a year, farrowing through market.

Q. Can you tell us any more about the change in farming methods that has taken place since you started farming?

A. There has probably been more change in the last few years than in the hundreds of years before. It started with, of course, the steel plow and the McCormick reaper, and the last several years it's been the development of the gasoline motor. Diesel motors are very efficient farm tractors; rubber tires helped. Rural electrification meant a big change, it meant the use of small motors to take the place of cranks. Pressure water system made it possible to modernize the house, as well as to pipe water any place on the farm. Along with the development of tractors meant the development of the other machinery, as well as combines. In the early thirties they started using combines. They were small and not too large of capacity. They were cheap enough that each farmer could own his own. They developed them into the present day self-propelled combine which are getting bigger all the time and faster and more efficient. The tractors have been developed from a small two-bottom tractor to where a tractor that pulls five or six bottoms is rather common.

Q. What is a bottom?

A. A plow. So many plows on one tractor. They are now equipped with cabs on the combines and tractors both--with heat, air conditioning. The original tractors, a large tractor had no power steering or hydraulic equipment to handle the machinery with and that was all done with levers and muscle. The larger tractors in the old days was hard to handle and they were slow and not very efficient. The new tractors are as modern

as can be--they are power steering and power brakes. They have a hydraulic system where you can put hydraulic cylinders on implements to raise them and lower them and control them.

Q. How does the hydraulic cylinder help to control them?

A. It gives you power to lift the plows out of the ground and put them in the ground--plows, discs, or any machinery.

Q. The hydraulic cylinders give you more power?

A. It gives you use of the power.

Q. Okay. (tape stopped and started) Did you have any children?

A. I have nine children--six girls and three boys.

Q. What are their ages?

A. Their ages are from 32 to 15. There's Shiryl, SuEllen, Don, Lois, Jane, Mavis, Rich and Bob, who are twins, and Liz.

Q. Was that a big thrill getting twin boys after you already had five girls? Do you remember when they were born?

A. They were born on the hottest day that central Illinois ever had--it was 112.6° that day.

Q. That was rather warm. Was there any air conditioning then?

A. We didn't have any.

Q. Did your wife have any in the hospital?

A. I don't think so, no.

Q. Were you expecting twins?

A. No.

Q. It was just a big surprise?

A. Yes, it was a surprise.

Q. It must have been an extra surprise when you already had six kids. What about the one boy you had--was he especially excited over having twin brothers?

A. I remember that Jane didn't know how we would keep care of them.

Q. (laughs)

A. The kids all went to school at Petersburg. All but Liz have completed high school. The oldest, the first six have finished college. One of the

twins will be a senior this next year at the University of Illinois and the other one dropped out of school this past year. Liz will be a sophomore at Petersburg High School next year.

Q. Can you remember back to when the first child was born? Was the birth at that time similar to, say, your own sisters and brothers, or was she born at a hospital?

A. She was born at home. She was the only one that was. At that time people were beginning to go to the hospitals for maternal care.

Q. Where did you live at the time she was born?

A. I lived four miles east of Chandlerville on the Chandlerville-Oakford road.

Q. Were you farming your own farm at that time?

A. I was just starting to farm.

Q. Were any of the births of the other children eventful or did they go according to schedule?

A. Yes, I think they did [go according to schedule].

Q. What about the health of the children--did any have any physical problems?

A. They have never had any problems health-wise, or been back to the hospital. Never any tonsils taken out or broken bones. Shiryl graduated from Southern [Illinois] University, majored in home economics. She now lives on a farm with her husband in southern Illinois.

Q. How many children do they have?

A. They have three children.

Q. SuEllen graduated from Illinois State, majored in math. She has since taught at Eisenhower [High School] in Decatur. Don graduated from the University of Illinois, majored in animal science. He worked at the First National Bank in Chicago for two years, has since attended law school and passed the bar. Lois started at Illinois State University and graduated from the University of Illinois, majoring in math. She has one girl and is now living in Reston, Virginia, teaching there. Jane graduated from Sangamon State, majored in math and taught last year at Ashland High School. She has two children. Mavis graduated from Western, majored in physical education and now is in the Army Air Force, stationed at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. Bob is a senior at the University of Illinois this next year, majoring in animal science. Rich has dropped out of school this past year and is now working for my brother George on his farm. Liz is still in high school.

Q. Do you think any of your sons will take over the farm--or your daughters, for that matter?