WALTER CULVER MEMOIR

PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of tape recorded interviews by Elizabeth Canterbury for the Oral History Office during the Fall of 1973. Elizabeth Canterbury transcribed, audited, and edited the transcript, and Walter Culver reviewed it.

Walter Culver is a 90 year old farmer who was born in the Indian Point area near Athens in 1887, and has spent all his life there. His present home, which he and his wife, Frances, still maintain, was built 55 years ago for his bride. Mr. Culver attended the University of Illinois after the turn of the century, and then returned to the farm to begin his agribusiness. His rich memories bring to life days gone by on Central Illinois farms and keep the reader captivated throughout this memoir.

Readers of this oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator, and editor sought to preserve the informal conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

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Walter Culver, October, 1973, Athens, Illinois.
Elizabeth Canterbury, Interviewer.

Q. Now let's start hearing a little bit about your life from the time you were born here in Menard County.

A. I was born in Menard County about six miles northeast of Athens, Illinois on May 10, 1887. The family was Father and Mother; James Culver and Iona Culver--Iona Johnson Culver. There were seven children in our family. I had two brothers and four sisters. When I first started school, I don't really remember the first day, but I know when I was younger down there and I first went to school. My first teacher was Miss Nina May Hale from Athens. And I started in the spring. I was just five years old and I remember the bigger boys. I was very much pleased to play ball with one of the big boys. They pitched the ball back and forth to me. I remember that very much. My older brother--two years older than I--and I rode ponies to school, three miles. And at night after school if it was raining we'd get to stop at the cousins and stay all night, which we liked very much. But one night it started to rain when we started from school and it stopped, but we stopped there anyhow and Father came down and took us home. (laughs) It didn't rain enough. (laughter) So we went home that time.

Then after the girls got to going--two of the girls--we got a wagon. We called it a trap; two seated rig with no top and one horse. We drove that and picked up our neighbor girl and went to school. So that was that.

Q. What was the schoolhouse like?

A. The school was a two-room brick school. Indian Point School and had two rooms. Had a lower room. I think the lower room went to the sixth grade and the upper room was the higher one. And when I first went there I think there were only two high school grades, but finally they had four grades. I didn't graduate from there, instead I went two years to high school and then I went to business college. I thought that would do me more good than maybe going on to school.

Q. Could you go to business college without graduating from high school at that time?

A. Yes. I went to college about six months. I went to business college.

Q. Where was that? And what was it like?

A. Springfield Business College. Then after that I went to U of I [University of Illinois].

Q. What was life like at the business college? Did you stay in Springfield?

A. Yes, I boarded on South Fifth Street and walked down to school. It was where Thrifty Drug Store is now.

Q. What courses did you take at the business college then?

A. Arithmetic, spelling, bookkeeping, but I didn't take typing or shorthand. After that I went two years to the university [University of Illinois] for a special agricultural course.

Q. Was that directly from business school?

A. Yes.

Q. What caused you to decide to do that?

A. Well, on account I had to take English along with that on account of, well, I suppose my age. I was only about seventeen and I went two years there and then I came home on the farm and helped there. I remember going to school down here. My grandfather lived between here and the mail. Then when we came from school we'd come by and get our mail about twice a week.

Q. How far was it that he walked to Athens?

A. About a couple of miles. It must have been about three or four miles. We'd cut right across the field, had a path showed where you went. (laughs)

Q. Did a lot of the farm men do that at that time? Did a lot of the farm men go into Athens for their mail?

A. Yes.

Q. Was there any delivery service then?

A. No, there wasn't then.

Q. That was the only way?

A. No. I don't know when the delivery service started. Quite a while after that. I remember we used to go to Athens in the spring wagon, or big wagon, lumber wagon. Especially one lane was gumbo mud and it would get up in the wheels and spokes and we'd have to stop and get it out before we could go on. (laughter) That was certainly a job.

Q. Then you came back to the farm from the University of Illinois. Now let's stop and tell a little bit about this community of Indian Point. This has some real special significance. Tell us all you can about Indian Point. How it go its name.

A. Well, I don't know. After I was out of school I was put on the school

board and I served several years on that. Then down here at the church I was on the board of trustees in the church about thirty years. Then that's where they changed it to having just certain years and after that my brother died. He was an elder, and so they put me as elder in his place. I was ordained an elder and still am ordained an elder but I don't serve now.

Q. Tell about Indian Point church that you attended.

A. Well, the building there now was built in 1862 and the fellowship hall was built in 1960. When I first went there we had Sunday school classes there in different parts of the church and had an upstairs balcony and had seats arranged up there for our entertainment. We had the class school day program there and people would come and fill the church. Upstairs, too. But after that when the Sunday school got larger, why, they took out the seats upstairs and used that as one of the Sunday school rooms.

Q. Then you had . . .

A. They had a church choir there and I tried to help sing in that. Every Friday night we'd have choir practice down here at Young's home and Mrs. Young—Mrs. Will Young—was the leader. The choir would give concerts and an anthem every Sunday.

Q. About how old were you when you started taking active part in the church?

A. Well, I guess I joined the church when I was about fourteen or fifteen, fifteen maybe, and there was three or four other boys that joined at the same time.

Q. After you came back from the university and went to the farm tell us what farm life was like at the time and what you had learned to help.

A. Before I went up there we didn't have the fertilize stuff and didn't fertilize the land. Before that the corn field stalks were broken down and then raked up and burned. Most generally at night we'd go out and burn the rows of stalks and after I went there [University of Illinois], why, I learned you should plow under the stalks and make fertilizer. So we began to do that and disc the stalks down and then plow them under, so that helped. Before that, Father would sow wheat and have wheat and sow clover on it and have one years of clover and plow that under the next year for fertilizer.

Q. You were rotating crops then?

A. Yes, and then our good yield of corn was about thirty-five or forty bushels. We got to using fertilizer now and last year our corn was 150 bushels.

Q. How big was your home farm?

A. First Father had 340 acres, I believe, and I don't remember but he said when he first went up there the east end of it was a lot of cottonwood trees and kind of swamp place and he took all of those out. It's all farming land now.

Q. Did he have any way of draining the land?

A. Yes, he tiled the land, quite a bit of it, and that helped pretty much.

Q. Do you remember anything about the tiling process?

A. Tiling? Well, they did that all by hand, a man digging with a spade and, oh, it took several days. Down here we also did the tiling.

Q. Did you have a special company that came in and did that or did just the farm men do that?

A. No, we had a man, a regular ditch digger; one or two men that did that for a living, digging land.

Q. No machinery at that time?

A. No, but when they filled up the ditches they'd get a walking plow and have a long pole across the ditch and a horse on each end and then run the plow down there and let the plow push the dirt in; one fellow holding the plow.

Q. How deep did they sink the tile?

A. About three feet, I think it was most generally, so it would be below the freezing line. When I came up here, the first hired man I had, I paid him thirty-five dollars a month.

Q. Did he stay with you?

A. After that there wasn't very many years I had to raise it quite a bit more. But in the wintertime, we put up ice and hauled it on sleds from an uncle's pond down there about a mile and a half and we'd saw out cakes about two feet by a foot and a half and put them in the ice house and put sawdust over it to keep it for the summer. And then in the summertime after heavy harvesting all day we'd be all dirty and the hired man and I would go down to the pond and go swimming. Walked about a mile and a half.

Q. Did you go to your own pond?

A. Uncle's pond. Then they had a boat there, a flatboat, you know, boating on the pond.

Q. What were some of the things you did for recreation as you were growing up out here?

A. Well, my brother and I had a bicycle. Father got it from a fellow in Sweetwater. Had hard rubber tires and the rubber tires would get loose

so we wrapped twine all around to hold the rubber down. (laughs)

Q. Was that the bicycle that had the two wheels the same size or did you have a big wheel in front?

A. No, they were the same size. Big old heavy thing. But we had to wrap this twine around to hold the tires on.

Q. Where would you go on your bike?

A. Oh, just up and down the road. Couldn't go too far on that. It was kind of hard to manage. But after that I got a regular tired bicycle and I used to go clear down to my cousins down there by the hard road and I got so I could ride without holding the handles right down a horse track. You know, the wheels in two horse tracks and then the wheels over here. I could ride right down just as smooth. (laughs)

Q. What were some of the other things that you did besides? Did you and the neighbor youngsters play together?

A. Yes, the neighbors had two boys about our age that lived about a mile from us and my brother and I just walked down across the pastures and go down and play with them or else they'd come up to our house. And our cousins down here would come up once in a while. Before we had telephones, why, the families used to get together. Families come up to dinner, stay all day and play, the kids would play. Father and the men would go out and look at the cattle in the pasture.

Q. Did your dad have mainly a cattle farm or was it a grain farm?

A. He had cattle and grain both. And he generally fed about two loads of cattle a year. Used to feed them ear corn, had boxes, feed boxes and he scooped the corn into the box and we'd go along and break the corn on the side of the boxes. (laughs)

Q. What was that for?

A. So the cattle could eat them better. The ears would be that long. (shows approximate size) And they couldn't chew them very much, so we'd break them up into three or four pieces, and then the cattle could chew them right now.

Q. That was one of the chores?

A. That was a chore.

Q. What were some of the other chores you did?

A. Well, we had hogs, too. We raised pigs and we had to take care of them.

Q. How did you feed the hogs?

A. We'd just throw out the ear of corn to them on the ground then, but in later years we got self-feeders around--shelled corn.

Q. Was that when you were still a boy on the farm or was that when you established your home?

A. No, that's still when I was on the farm.

Q. What kind of hogs did you have?

A. We had Poland China, I believe, yes, Poland China, black hogs. Then when we'd sell the hogs we'd generally sell them to a buyer over here in Athens. His son would come out early in the morning and get the hogs started on the road, driving them to Athens. (laughs) Some of them would give out and you had to take them in a wagon. It was quite a job to keep them together on the road. Some of them would go down the ditch.

Q. About how many at a time would you sell?

A. Well, I don't know. Twenty, twenty-five, something like that.

Q. Can you remember what prices they brought?

A. No, I don't remember just then, but I know when I was home there when you had to buy and butcher hogs and had to pay eight center a pound for them. And you thought that was an awful price then.

Q. You didn't butcher your own?

A. Yes, we butchered our own. Yes, we butchered about eight or ten hogs and the neighbors would come in and help us. We had to dig a trench and we had a galvanized tank setting right on the trench to heat the water. Then scald the hogs in there and then get the hair off, scrape the hair off, before we butchered them and hand them up and take the insides out and take them down and cut the hams, and cut the lard. And they'd have to cut the lard and put the kettles over the fire ditch and cook the lard.

Q. Did you do that the same day that you butchered the hogs?

A. No, you never tried to do it all in one day.

Q. That was the men's part of the butchering, right?

A. Yes. Then we'd be glad when the dinner came because we always had a big dinner. (laughs)

Q. You'd eat part of the hog for dinner?

A. Sometimes, but when we cooked the lard we'd get a piece of tenderloin to put in there and cook it and we'd then eat it. (laughs)

Q. Tell about the cracklings.

A. That means after the lard was squeezed out of the cracklings. Oh, they aren't bad to eat.

Q. Now that was what was left of the lard after it was boiled out?

A. After you got the juice out of it.

Q. How did you get the cracklings out?

A. Put them in the lard press and squeezed down. Had a cloth inside to put the lard in and that juice would go through the cloth and they'd just raise their cloth up and took the cracklings out.

Q. And that was the treat?

A. Yes.

Q. Now then, what did the women do during the butchering time? The day you all butchered together?

A. I think they visited in the house. (laughter)

Q. And you took care of all the meat?

A. Kept them busy getting a big dinner ready. I don't know, there'd be—how many men would there be? Ten or twelve or fifteen, I imagine.

Q. Doing the work cutting up the hogs outside?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you take care of the sausage too?

A. Yes, we did the sausage.

Q. How did you do that?

A. Used a sausage grinder and put it in a big tub then I believe they'd salt it and stir it all up and get it mixed up.

Q. What parts of the hog did you use for sausage?

A. The lean part for the sausage; cut if off of the sides.

Q. What were some of the other cuts of meat that you had then?

A. Ham and shoulders. We had a smokehouse, what we called a smokehouse, and they'd hang them up in the smokehouse. And we'd have hickory wood to burn and smoked the meat.

Q. You had your own individual smokehouse at your home?

A. Yes.

Q. How long did it take to do that?

A. Well, I don't know. Two or three days I think it was, different times. But if the blaze would get too high, why, we would put sawdust on it so it wouldn't blaze up.

Q. Now this was right in the smokehouse?

A. Yes.

Q. And they were hanging from the rafters.

A. Yes, well, there were poles across that they hung from and they had a flat old piece of a stove on the floor and the hogs were that far from the smoke.

Q. About three feet?

A. Three or four feet maybe.

Q. Did you smoke the hams and shoulders for all of those eight hogs at one time?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you do this as a service for the neighbors?

A. Yes. And we'd go and help the neighbors.

Q. These eight hogs were just for your family, right?

A. Yes.

Q. Then when the neighbors wanted to butcher they would butcher a number of hogs and you would go help them. You shared the work?

A. Yes, we traded work with them. Same way with threshing machine.

Q. Tell about that.

A. There were about eight or nine in our ring, you called it, that did the threshing together and they each helped each one. There were about eight frame wagons hauling grain bundles to the separator and pitched them off. They had bands they had to cut—the bands on the shocks—and the boy on each side, or man would cut the bands for you, put them over here and then the middle man would push them in the separtor.

Q. Where were the bands?

A. Around the bundles. Yes. The binder would tie the bundles. The man would push them in and you have to be careful. The man sometimes would grab over there and he's liable to cut his hand before he cuts the band.

Q. Do you think that farming was as dangerous at that time as we consider it now, with all the machinery?

A. Well, I don't know. I imagine about like this.

Q. What do you think caused most of the accidents, farm accidents?

A. Well, I think the corn picker was one thing. Pull [stalks] out of the corn picker, get their hand caught in it.

Q. What do you think caused most of the accidents when you were threshing?

A. Well I think, well, I don't know. Sometimes a person, a fellow, would be up on the separator and the chain that draws the grain up to the spout, sometimes a loose jacket would get caught in there in the wheel that was running around and tear it off.

Q. Did you see any actual farm accidents?

A. No, I never did then.

Q. Do you think people were more careful then?

A. Well, I think so, yes. But nowadays later when on the tractors there is a revolving rod that goes back to the machinery, sometimes you tend to get your coat caught in that and wrapped all around and tear off an arm or something. We had this fellow that rented the place over home there, he was picking corn by himself and he stopped to rench out the shucks and he caught his hand in there. Took it off right there.

Q. Was that some time ago or recently during the corn picking machine?

A. Yes, that was while I was home, before I was married. He walked down home and a neighbor up there saw the picker stopped over there and he went over to see what was the matter and he found this fellow's hand there.

Q. And the fellow had walked to get help?

A. He walked down home there and I don't know who took him to the doctor, but he is still farming. Just took his hand off there and come right along.

Q. Then that dates corn pickers back some years, doesn't it?

A. Yes.

Q. How long ago do you think they started using corn pickers?

A. Well let's see. Seems to me when I was still at home we got a corn picker, I think it was.

Q. How were they different than the corn pickers now?

A. Well the early corn picker just took the whole ear off. Now they pick the ear and shell it right in the field and haul the shelled corn to the elevator. Before, the elevator shelled the corn. They had a corn sheller. But now they just haul the grain in.

Q. After you went back to the farm you brought back some methods from the university that improved farming?

A. I think so.

Q. Now tell what happened during the time that you stayed at home and helped with the farming, before you established your own home.

A. Well, I did most of the corn planting with a two-horse corn planter. And we farmed about, I think we put in about one hundred seventy-five acres of corn. And I did most of the corn planting.

Q. Did you have your own seed or did you buy seed at that time?

A. No, we picked our own corn and stored it through the winter. And in the winter we'd sort it over, pick out the kernel and see if the kernel was alive or not.

Q. You spent some winter months picking over the seed for the spring. How much would you have to get ready then?

A. Let's see, I've forgetten just how much an acre we counted on. We picked out plenty so we'd be sure there'd be enough.

Q. How did you plant corn at that time? You had the two horse planter, right?

A. The two horse planter and had to drop it [corn] so we could plow it crossways. Had a wire strung across the field and a fork on the planter and had buttons on the wire so far apart. The buttons would go through this fork and bring the fork back and that would open and let the corn drop down. And whatever comes out, why, it's going to be. When you get to the end, why, you pull the thing down behind the planter and then the cross rows would be about the same. So we could plow it crossways. We plowed it first one way and then you'd go crossways and then plow it the third time—corn. Whatever you called that—laid by the corn. Kind of ridge it up.

Q. About how long in the spring and summer would you have to plow the corn before it was laid by?

A. Well, we'd plow it till it got up so it wouldn't break off when we'd plow it. When we first plowed, we plowed with walking plows, cultivators.

Q. How old were you then?

A. Oh, I was about fourteen or fifteen. In the morning early, there would be dew on the corn and brushed on the sides of your trousers. (laughs)

But then they had two men and my brother and I, four of us, and we'd go in the field and start and then we'd count off and leave ten rows for that fellow and the next fellow would leave ten rows, so four of us would plow one row at a time.

Q. How many horses did you have?

A. Two horses on a plow.

Q. Now that meant that you had quite a group of horses on your farm.

A. Oh yes, you had, I don't know, twelve or fourteen horses around.

Q. Tell something about the horses.

A. Well . . .

Q. Did you have any special pets?

A. Pretty near. We had the old horse we drove to school finally. Fat old yellow horse. That was the time when automobiles first came in and she was always afraid of them. They'd have to get out, well, they'd stop and hold her while the car went by. (laughter)

Q. What kind of horses were the work horses?

A. They were draft horses. We had one, two teams of driving horses. We'd drive to Springfield about once in two weeks maybe. Take us about two hours to go in, driving the buggy.

Q. Would you drive the draft horses?

A. No, those were the driving horses.

Q. What kind of a wagon?

A. Most generally a carriage, top carriage, two seated carriage to go into Springfield. They had an outside stable there about where Bressmer's is now. Put the horses in the stable there.

Q. Would the whole family go when you went?

A. Yes, four of us.

Q. Now tell what you would do when you spent the time in Springfield. How long would you spend and what would you do?

A. I think we'd start home about four o'clock. Took us about a couple of hours to go home. Most every time we'd get a bunch of bananas to eat on the way home. (laughter) Then there was timber along the road and in the summertime it'd be warm and when we came to that shade along there. . . .

Q. What were the roads like?

A. Well, we took our time for the better time for the roads. But didn't have any gravel or oiled roads then.

Q. What were they like in the dry part of the summer?

A. They were dusty. There's be just a track for the horses and wheels.

Q. How far was it from your home to Springfield?

A. About fifteen miles.

Q. What did the women do when they went?

A. Oh, they'd shop around in the stores.

Q. What kind of things did they buy? Do you know?

A. No, I don't. They made many of their clothes. Bought some of their outside coats I guess, cloaks.

Q. What did they make for you men?

A. When we picked corn by hand we used to have gloves, mittens rather, and Mother would sew patches on them when they got worn.

Q. Even patched gloves?

A. Yes.

Q. What about your work clothing? Did they make any of your work clothing?

A. No, not many. We generally bought overalls, jackets.

Q. How long were you on the farm with your family when you came back from the university?

A. About twenty years I guess it must have been. We moved from up there down to—our father bought our uncle's place down here and we moved when I was about eighteen.

Q. Was that farm any different from the one you left?

A. Different house and altogether.

Q. What was the house like?

A. About a ten room house, I guess. Uncle had built it. The house where I was born was only six rooms to start with and two story and a hallway. As the family grew they put on another place, two rooms, then kitchen and another room. Hired girl's room up above the kitchen.

Q. How did you move to this other place?

A. You mean like when we moved in wintertime? On sleds mostly.

Q. Why did you decide to change farms?

A. Well, I don't know.

Q. Was it better land?

A. Well, no, no better land. No, it was more rough down there with the hollows and pond and all. I don't know how we happen to, because it would be nearer down here I guess.

Q. Nearer to your community?

A. The community, yes.

Q. Did you sell the farm that you left?

A. No, we still owned that.

Q. Did you farm that too?

A. Yes.

Q. So you moved to another house but you still farmed all the land.

A. Yes, had a hired man and his wife and family live up there.

Q. Then how much land were you farming?

A. I think about six hundred acres, I think, altogether.

Q. And you personally had a lot of the responsibility for farming this, right?

A. Partly I guess.

Q. Were you responsible mostly for the corn at that time too?

A. For the planting I was. Of course I helped pick the corn and when we got over here I had a corn picker and had a team of horses to a wagon and the corn picker on the tractor, small tractor, and I picked one row at a time. Get a load of corn, hitch the horses up, take it to the crib and scoop if off any hand, then go back and hook on the wagon to the corn picker and get another load.

Q. A little bit different.

A. Yes.

Q. I think we'll call it quits and next time we'll start when you and Frances start your own farm.

END OF SIDE ONE

Q. Walter, you're going to tell us now about you and Frances establishing your new farm and what it was like for the farm husband and what his responsibilities were from fifty years ago until now.

A. When I was home there and began helping around the farm, I still used a walking plow once in a while--two horses to it. Then we got a three horse riding plow. I forget what they call it now but anyhow it had three horses to it. Later on we got a four horse gang plow with two plows on it. So I thought that turned the dirt very fast.

Q. How much of a change did that make in the time that it took you to do your plowing?

A. Well, it was two plows and one plow together. We did twenty-five or thirty acres a day, maybe.

Q. What was it before that?

A. Well, I don't know. I didn't do much with the walking plow of course. That was before my time but that was, oh, I don't remember just how many acres. But it took me quite a while to get it all plowed just with a walking plow. Of course I had two or three plows and always had two men at home there to help. The fertilizer didn't begin until I was married and came over here several years after that and then the plant wasn't running down here then.

Q. Where did you get your fertilizer?

A. Right down here on Ward Hopwood's place. They mixed it down there.

Q. Where did you get it when you first started fertilizing? Same place?

A. Yes, same place. Got all of it right down there.

Q. Now was that lime that you used?

A. Yes, lime and then they had liquid fertilizer too.

Q. Now, they didn't use that 51 years ago did they?

A. No. No, no, that had . . .

Q. What did you use?

A. I don't imagine that's been more than fifteen years down here.

Q. Before that what did you use?

A. Well, just clover mostly as fertilizer. Plowed under the clover and the corn stalks. That was most of the fertilizer then. And of course, had cows, dairy cows, and manure from their that was scattered on--had a spreader--scattered on the land, helped some too. After I came over here we had some dairy cows and hogs. About eight or ten horses had to have to

do the work. Had a horse team, three horse, and have to changs off once in a while. Young's father raised our colts and then we'd break the colts to harness and to work. I had one I brought over here, a colt, a young one, I broke him to work.

Q. Tell how you did that.

A. First I had a three horse plow and three horses to it. The first time I tied him to the third horse and had a line back to him and this let him travel along with the horses and get use to going along thataway. Then finally I put him in the harness and he's soon find out to go along.

Q. How long did it take to break a horse?

A. Well, I don't know, sometimes a week or more. More if you get down to it. But they wasn't too bad and when the colts was weaned, we put them in the lot and bring them over to the hay barn--had a box stall there. We'd have about two colts in there at a time put in there. Brother and I had rope halters with a long rope on it, and the stick, had a stick in the top of the halter and then go in there and slip it over their heads and we'd catch them thataway. Then we'd get up to them and pet them and tame them. They'd tame down and we'd have to train them to lead. That was quite a job sometimes.

Q. Can you remember any special episodes with a special horse that you have problems with?

A. Well, I told about that old yellow mare we drove to school so scared of autos. Abut all the horses were scared of autos at first. When we used to drive to Springfield we used to have a driving team and we'd go down the street along the streetcar line and they'd shy at that pretty much too. Trying to keep off of the streetcar line.

Q. Did you have any incidents happen with any of the work horses?

A. Well, one horse, one young horse, got what they called sleeping sickness and, oh, he just got crazy, just bite things. Had him in a box stall out there and he'd bump his head against there. He died finally.

Q. Now was that considered contagious to the other horses?

A. I forget whether it was but I didn't have any others with it. Of course, I had him out in a separate place. But finally he died. But he, oh, he just got crazy. Some kind of sickness they called it.

Q. When you lost a horse that was considered a great loss?

A. Yes, it was. He was a nice young horse.

Q. You had what kind of a farm? A grain farm or livestock farm?

A. When we came up here it was livestock and grain, both.

Q. Mixed farming.

A. Yes.

Q. What was the acreage?

A. This piece was seventy acres here and then that ran into my aunt's farm next to here.

Q. How much was that?

A. A little better than sixty acres.

Q. Then did you still help farm that sixty acres?

A. No, I didn't help farm that, I just farmed over here. And that twenty acres up there, so it made about, oh, one hundred fifty acres or so.

Q. Was that considered enough land to provide a good living for a farm family at that time?

A. Well it was at that time I think, yes.

Q. How do you think that has changed?

A. What do you mean changed?

Q. Do you think that one hundred fifty acres can support a farm family now?

A. Oh no, I don't believe it could hardly. The way the machinery is and everything—expenses.

Q. Explain how it's changed.

A. Taxes have gotten so high and fertilizer and seed and everything, so that counts up quite a bit. And there's transit.

Q. What are some of the changes you have seen in farming practices? Let's go back to when you started. You were talking about working the horses, all right then, when did you get your first tractor and how did that change your farming practices?

A. I got my first tractor when I was three or four years over here. I got a small Intervational tractor and had a cultivator on it. You could plow the corn with it and also had a place where you could hitch a plow behind it and you could pull and that made quite a difference. Then I had a two plow Ford. Had two plows on it right under the tractor and that helped out. Then you could use the tractor and you didn't need horses.

Q. Now when it came time to harvest the corn, you still harvested by hand until when?

A. We harvested by hand until, oh, I imagine twenty-or twenty-five years, I imagine by hand.

Q. Tell how you did that.

A. Had a wagon, two horses and had on one side of the wagon had what was called a bump board. It would go along the wagon. The ears hit against the bump board and they'd fall into the wagon.

A hundred bushel picker a day, was very good and I thought I'd try it. One time I was hauling to the elevator out here so I thought I'd try it. I got out early, hopped to it and in two days I did a hundred bushels a day by hand. (laughs) Just from dawn to dark putting it up.

Q. Did you walk along beside the wagon?

A. Yes, I walked along side the wagon. Generally took two rows of corn, one right by the wagon and one over here and just throw them.

Q. What was the art of corn picking to make it go faster?

A. You had to hustle along and not waste any time. Just grab ahold of it and jerk up the husk and jerk the ear out.

Q. Wasn't there something that you wore on your hands that helped?

A. Oh, yes. Had a husking pad.

Q. Tell about that.

A. It slipped on your fingers and had a curve out here, hook--kind of a hook--and you ripped the shuck out with that and then throw it in. And then on my thumb I had a wire thumb stall. A piece of wire in the thumb.

Q. Did you wear gloves?

A. Yes, I wore mittens.

Q. Did you wear that thumb stall over your mittens?

A. Yes, but I'd keep wearing the mitten out right away. It'd soon wear out on the mitten.

Q. The mittens had to be patched. Weren't there mittens that had a double thumb?

A. Yes, it did.

Q. Why?

A. First they only had the single thumb but then they got so they had the double thumb; turned them over.

Q. How did the shucking peg improve your speed?

A. Used the shucking peg all the time from the beginning. Some kind of a peg. No, if you just did it by hand you just wore out your hand. (laughs)

Q. Now when you started harvesting the corn by machinery tell about that. What was the first corn picker like?

A. I think I told about that the other day. I had a one row picker on the tractor and you'd go around and get a load of corn, walk your wagon behind the picker, and when they got a load have horses out there to hitch on and take to the crib and unload by hand and then come back and get another one.

Q. Did you store all your own corn?

A. Yes, we did in those days. Yes, we had rather a big corn crib and next year we'd make a rail crib--square--put rails each way for extra storage.

Q. How did you plan how much corn to plant?

A. Oh let's see, what was it? I've forgotten what they counted to the acre now.

Q. I mean how did you decide how much acreage to plant in corn?

A. Oh. At that time we planted some wheat and oats, too. So you kind of divided up, generally about fifteen to twenty acres of oats and about that much wheat maybe, and then the rest in corn.

Q. Did you plan to plant just enough to feed your stock?

A. No, I sold some of it. No, it didn't take all of it to feed the stock. The cows had oats and ear corn and we took it to the elevator and had it ground up for the cow feed. And the horses, of course, eat ear corn and oats and then we had hay, timothy and alfalfa hay.

Q. Tell about baling the hay. First it was loose hay, wasn't it?

A. Yes, loose hay.

Q. Tell about the hay.

A. We cut they hay down and then let it dry a while and then rake it up in windrows. Then we'd go along with the wagon, spring wagon, one man on the wagon and two on the ground, pitched the hay into the wagon. Then we'd haul it into the barn. Hay carrier and the rope would come down with a hay fork and put it in the hay and on the other end of the rope was a horse and boy to pull up the hay. They'd holler when they was ready and the boy would drive the horse down and get on the track and then drop the hay where they wanted it in the side. Then the boy

would turn around and come back and be ready for the next time.

Q. Tell how many people it took and how long it took.

A. Generally had two wagons and about two men in the field and a man on each wagon and two in the barn, about six and the boy. It'd take about that many.

Q. How many times did you do haying during the summer?

A. Alfalfa we did about twice a year, anyhow. Sometimes three times. The timothy hay we just cut the one time and the straw from the field of wheat we'd bale that and put that in the barn for bedding for the cows and horses. So the barn loft was pretty well filled with bales, bales of timothy hay.

Q. At first you didn't bale the hay?

A. No, didn't bale the hay.

Q. But you baled the straw?

A. Baled the straw, yes.

Q. Tell about threshing, the changes you've seen in threshing.

A. Yes, the wheat, we threshed it. I guess I've told about the neighbors all helped with the threshing. About eight neighbors--men all around--and they'd go to each place. Begin at one end one year and then the next year they'd begin at the other end.

Frances Culver: They came at night so they'd be at your house for breakfast.

Q. Tell now big the threshing ring was and who had a threshing machine and how they worked that.

A. Most generally they had a . . . First there was a straw stacker, then the two men on the stacks kind of stacked the stack right. Then there was a man on the separator, machine man, and the one that run the engine and the water hauler. Anyhow, five men with the machine, then besides the two men that cut the bales--twine--and the middle man shoved it into the separator. And the separator would revolve it into--straw stacker is separate from the separator and it had slats, reel it up and that would bring it up on the straw stack and a man would . . . (noise on tape; inaudible) I helped stack some too one time.

Q. What kind of a job is that?

A. It's quite a job; when the wind blew especially.

Q. What did the wind do?

A. Wind would blow the straw around and if you got on the wrong side it was too bad.

Q. What was it like?

A. Straw would blow all over you.

Q. They stacked the straw. What did you do with the wheat straw?

A. Well, the wheat you stacked that, too. But you stacked that separate from the oat straw because the wheat straw we'd bale. Or sometimes we'd fed the straw--oat straw. And the wheat straw we'd bale separate, had a separate stack. Sometimes we'd put the stack out in the field for a wind shelter for the stock, too because it [wind] curves around from the north--north wind--and it'd help shelter stock. We had a stack over on the hill and the hogs slept around there. One morning I went over there and I saw blood around there and followed it out there into the field and sombody had jumped from the railroad and butchered a hog.

Q. They had rustlers then, too?

A. Yes. (laughs) They got the hog. I don't know how they happened to get it from the straw stack there and dragged it over to the railroad. (laughs) So we lost that hog.

Q. Were there any more incidents like that of losing chickens or hogs or cattle?

A. Not of ours I don't think. I don't know of any around here.

F. C. Coons would come and get the chickens.

A. The coons would come to the chicken house. We'd have to close up the chicken house at night.

Q. What did you do when you heard the chickens at night?

A. We'd have to go out and scare them out.

Q. Did you ever take your gun?

A. Yes I did. We had a place there where we could close this little door from the hen house and generally closed that trying to keep them out of the hen house. Sometimes in the morning early we'd open it up and they'd come out and the coons would be around then (laughs) and scatter them.

Q. What about sheep? Did you have any sheep on your farm?

A. Yes, we had a few, yes, but we didn't keep them too long. Then we had a place there where the barnyard--we had grass on that and I had a couple of sheep on that.

Q. What did you use those couple of sheep for?

A. Just to sell and keep the grass down.

Q. You called them the grass cutters?

A. The lawn mowers. One or two years I had sheep and then I had two calves at other times. Had corn right near the fence and they'd break the fence down and get into the corn field. That was a job, so I quit that.

Q. What would you have to do when the cattle got in the corn field?

A. We'd have to go chase them up and we'd round them up and get them back in the pen.

Q. Did it cause any harm to the cattle when they got in the corn field?

A. No, it didn't seem to hurt them any.

Q. What did it do to the corn?

A. Knocked some of it down. They'd go down between the rows mostly.

Q. What were some of the other things that kept you busy on the farm? Tell how winter was different from summer.

A. Well in the wintertime we had hogs. We kept them over in what we called the feed lot over there by the crib kind of on a hill and kind of a gulley around the side of it and we'd feed the hogs over there. I'd go over there and shell out the corn to them. Sometimes it would be snowing—bad weather—I'd have to be facing the wind coming up the . . . (inaudible)

Q. Was your work day as long in the winter as it was in the summer?

A. No, it got dark sooner in the winter and we'd come in by then. Didn't work much after dark.

Q. What time did you get up in the morning in the winter?

A. Corn picking time we got up fairly early. We'd be out as soon as you could see. You'd have to do the milking and feed the horses and get them in and eat breakfast and then hitch up to go out in the field by daylight, anyhow. I don't know what time, I imagine five o'clock anyhow be up.

Q. How long a day did you pick corn?

A. From daylight to about dark. Sometimes get a load before dark. I think we would generally get two loads a day.

Q. How late in the winter did the corn picking go on?

A. Sometimes until after Christmas. Get bad weather and you couldn't do it. Had a lot of corn to get out and it took a while to do it. Oh, generally begin about the first of November to pick and then it'd be, oh, be Christmas or after sometimes before they'd finish.

Q. What were your chores like, then, after the corn was out of the field all laid by?

A. Well, we did the milking and fed the cows and the hogs and took care of them.

Q. Was there every any leisure time on the farm?

A. Oh yes, in the wintertime in the middle of the day you'd have a little leisure time.

Q. What are some of the hobbies that you developed during the years when you had some extra time?

A. Over at the high school they had adult classes in woodworking and I went over there, joined over there, and made tables and this table, and that steptable, coffee tables and several things.

Q. How have your hobbies changed over the years?

A. Later years they had painting classes down at Petersburg and an instructor from the university came down, a painting instructor and gave painting lessons and Frances went down to take painting lessons. So I had to go down and so I took carving lessons from him.

Q. Tell about your hobby of carving.

A. I got so I could carve fairly well and in the wintertime I did sketching too, sketching different buildings.

Q. Do you consider yourself in a semi-retirement now?

A. Yes, I retired several years ago, six or eight years ago I imagine, from farming.

Q. Since you've retired you've gone on 21 trips?

A. Well, I've forgotten to count them, Frances said it was 21. Yes, we went to Alaska, Europe twice, Mexico, out West, California; Seattle, Washington; Montreal, Canada—we went there—Japan, Hawaii, Hong Kong. We flew over the Pacific to Japan and over the Atlantic twice for Europe. When we came from Europe the last time we got on the plane at London and came clear to Chicago. Before, we had to go to New York and come back to New York. We took the bus from Springfield to New York.

I had been in Europe before when I was in World War I, eight months. Two of the months were spent in England and France. When the war ended I was in machine gun school.

Q. Do you think that a farm family can be just as cosmopolitan as a town family?

A. Oh, I think so.

Q. It sounds like you have. If you had to start a career over again would you have done it just like you did?

A. Oh, I imagine so, yes. Wouldn't do it any different. I was brought up on the farm and knew farming, about all I knew.

Q. What are some of the changes that you think have been most pronounced in the manner of farming over the years?

A. What do you mean, an improvement?

Q. Right.

A. Well, the corn picker-sheller now does away with a lot of the corn hauling in ears to the elevator. And then shell it over there, shell it right in the field. I think that is quite an improvement.

Q. Do you think that the men who are farming now have as hard a life as you had when you started farming?

A. No, I don't think so. They have more machinery now and can ride and don't have to walk. When we used to plow the ground we'd have a three section harrow with four horses to it and you walk behind and drive them. And if the harrow wasn't heavy enough they'd put loads on the harrow instead of you riding it, you'd walk behind. (laughs)

Q. Do you think that the men in your day got a lot more exercise?

A. Yes they did. (laughter) (tape turned off and on)

Q. Now, Walter, you've told us about farming and such. Do you have some things you want to tell use about how your ancestors pioneered and settled in this part of the country?

A. Well, my grandfather's folks came from Kentucky. My mother's folks came up in a covered wagon and they settled just about three miles from here on the other side of the Indian Point church in 1821. There was—what was it, four?

Q. How did they come?

A. In a covered wagon. They had oxen I guess. Yes, they had oxen. My grandfather's mother married a, well, the Williamses came before that, didn't they? No. The Culvers came in about 1935, I think it was. They pioneered over here. Grandfather bought the land from the government. And the ancestors--most of them mine—ancestors are buried down here at the Indian Point cemetery. On one side, on my mother's side, I have four generations buried there.

Q. What was your mother's name, last name?

A. Johnson. On my father's side there are three generations buried there.

Q. So after they came from Kentucky they settled pretty much in this area and stayed?

A. Yes. Yes, it was close to the creek and timber. Got close to timber so they'd have log houses and I think they built the log house there. I don't know how long they kept it.

Q. Can you explain why this particular community was called Indian Point?

A. It's quite an Indian place around here and we used to find several arrows, Indian arrows, around on the ground and dig them up.

Q. Are there any family stories about the Indians when your family settled here?

A. No, I don't know of any right now. I don't think they had much trouble with the Indians by the time they came. Because there wasn't many around then but there was one settlement of Indians down towards that way. (motions direction)

Q. Do you know what tribe of Indians lived in this area?
(tape turned off and on)

A. The last tribe of Indians that were around here were the Potawatomi and they finally left and went over towards Chandlerville, Illinois and finally died out.

Q. Did all of your mother's and father's families, both, follow farming careers or did any of them branch into other businesses?

A. Most of them did farming I think, yes.

Q. What are some of the tales you remember some of them telling about early farming or life just pioneering. Do you remember any stories that your granddad told?

A. Only this particular story. Once my grandfather used to ride his horse and take a sack of wheat down to New Salem to get it ground for flour. He said he remembered seeing Lincoln down there when he was down there. But it surely wasn't a very big sack to be on a horse, but he rode a horse down there.

Q. Did he go very often?

A. I don't know how often he'd have to go. That's where he got it ground.

Q. That was the closest place to Indian Point?

A. Yes.

Q. Anything else you can tell about some of your ancestors that settled here? How many children did your grandfather have?

A. Grandfather had three girls and two boys I guess, yes. Oh he was married twice. In the first marriage he had a boy and a girl and the girl died after she was of age. Then he married the second time and had three girls and one boy.

Q. What about your mother's family? How big a family did they have?

A. Well, that was her grandma.

F.C. The fourteen? Don't you know the Williams that came?

Q. Who had fourteen children?

F. C. The one that came, the first one that came had fourteen children.

Q. Was that your mother's family?

F. C. Yes.

A. Yes, that was the other ancestors. The Williamses was the main ones; oldest ancestor. Their daughter Cynthia Williams married Johnson, my grandfather's father and then she had three or four boys I think and I don't think she had any girls. They lived around here, most of them. Uncle Jeff Johnson had a deer park down here just west of the church and he kept deer there and had slates—high slats—and once in a while one would get out, jump over the top. (laughs) Have to round it up.

Q. Do you remember that or was that before you time?

A. No, I remember that. That was when I went to school down here they was still there.

Q. Were there any wild deer around?

A. Yes, there were wild deer around, too. There still is once in a while down in the timber there.

Q. Well, thank you for the reminiscing. (tape turned off and on) Walter Culver is an 86 year old farmer who was born in the Indian Point area which is six miles northeast of Athens. He has spent all of his life there. His present home, which he and Frances still maintain, he built for his bride 51 years ago.

END OF TAPE