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NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER

HISTORY 497 PROJECT: FARMING AND FARM FAMILIES IN DEKALB COUNTY

Oral History Interview
with

HOWARD LANAN

November 10, 1986
Annie Glidden Road
Kingston, Illinois

By Valerie Quinney

NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER

Narrator: Howard Lanan
Date: November 10, 1986

Interviewer: Valerie Quinney
Place: Annie Glidden Road
Kingston, Illinois

General Topic of Interview: Early settlers in DeKalb county, his family history, childhood on the farm, social life, education in twenties and thirties, changes in farm technology.

PERSONAL DATA

Howard Lanan was born October 15, 1914 in DeKalb County. He worked on the family farm, beginning at age seven. He earned a bachelor's degree in agriculture at the University of Iowa and began farming on his own in 1938. At that time, he was his grandfather's tenant. His grandfather signed the note for him to borrow money for equipment. He farmed until 1980, raising grains-chiefly corn and livestock. He and his wife, the former Evelyn Elliot, had no children.

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS

This is a thoughtful narrator with a good memory. He believes that farming has been good to him, and indeed the level of comfort in his house now bears this out. The testimony is useful for several topics: Mr. Lanan shows how family members helped each other and how neighbors helped. He recounts the ways farm technology changed and discusses fluctuations in farm prices.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER

Narrator: Howard Lanan
Date: November 10, 1986
Time: 1½ hours
No. of tapes: 2

Interviewer: Valerie Quinney
Place: Kingston, Illinois

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BACKGROUND

Birth Oct. 15, 1914, on farm 9 miles north of DeKalb on Annie Glidden Road. Born in house his great-grandfather bought in 1867. Location of his present farm is Section 9.

021

GRANDPARENTS

Great, great grandfather, Lanan, was from Belgium; Great, great grandmother was from Germany. Came to Chicago. Name originally Lenan. Great great grandfather died in 1865, left his great grandfather \$200. Great grandfather bought the place in DeKalb. One house was already there-probably built in 1849. On his father's side, his grandmother's name was Tollerus (Sp?). On his mother's side they were Townscends. All settled in this area in 1830's, 1840's.

084

HOWARD LANAN'S EDUCATION

One-room school, one teacher, all eight grades. Sam Deverell, a school friend, still lives on farm close by him. Seventh and eighth grades, all students took tests at county superintendent's office. Teacher/pupil ratio 1 to 10.

118

MEMORIES OF INCIDENT AT BAMBERG SCHOOL

Excitement over "box social." Memory of trapping a skunk on the way to school. Boys not smart enough to make much money at trapping.

141

FAMILY

One sister who was school teacher, now lives in Sycamore.

146

SYCAMORE HIGH SCHOOL

1928, driving to high school with friend.

160

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Took 6 weeks' winter course in 1933. Then next fall, began a two-year course, general agriculture. Then decided to take four-year degree. Graduated March, 1938.

178

WORK AS CHILD ON FARM

Used 2-wheel plow with horses. When he was seven, started raking hay. First chore: Carrying wood into kitchen.

201

SANDWICH FAIR

As an adolescent, went by himself, lost key to truck.

211

DECISION TO FARM

Never imagined himself as anything else but a farmer. Would not like factory work.

222

TYPICAL SUNDAY

Went to Congregational Church, visited other families for dinner, went to see uncles and aunts on nearby farms.

238

RECREATION

Cards with neighbors. Didn't have dances much in the area. First memory of listening to radio-Lindberg's trip across Atlantic. Favorite programs: "Amos and Andy," farm news on WLS.

257

FAVORITE MAGAZINES

Prairie Farmer, Chicago Grower's Journal (?)

264

WOMEN'S WORK

His mother and sister did no farm work. His grandmother enjoyed horses, rode side-saddle.

281

DEPRESSION, 1929

None of banks his father used went broke. Howard lost his little school savings. Prices down on hogs. Hay prices low. His father butchered hogs and sold meat to friends and neighbors. Grandfather would go to other farms with his threshing machine and charge for threshing.

323

HOWARD LANAN'S FIRST FARM, 1938

His grandfather helped him borrow \$400 from cemetery association to pay down on farm machinery. Farmed his grandfather's land-profit divided 50/50. When Hitler went through Low Countries in Europe, prices on farm goods rose. He had three horses and one tractor, would pull 2 14-bottom plows. He was used to mechanized equipment - first used McCormick stram tractor in 1918 on his father's farm.

383

MARRIAGE 1939

Married Evelyn Elliot, who lived five miles away. She went to NIU and was a school teacher in Sycamore.

398

WARTIME

He had two houses on the farm - luckily he got tenants, often older men with families.

413

WIFE'S WORK

She kept chickens, otherwise, did not work on farm.

420

WARTIME FARMING

Corn was biggest crop, oats, hay. Raised hogs and beef cattle. Raised hemp.

433

PESTICIDES DURING WORLD WAR II.

Was not using pesticides.

440

HYBRID SEEDS

Had used them from the beginning.

447

MACHINES

Could not purchase machines during war. Just repaired old ones.

456 (Interruption when new tractor passes window.)

467

KITCHEN GARDEN

Some things canned

473

SOCIAL LIFE DURING WARTIME

Went to the show, went to church.

481

SYCAMORE TRADING CENTER

He brought in eggs and sold them. His uncle was implement dealer there and Howard went to high school there so Howard knew town better than DeKalb.

510

PROFITS FROM WAR

Paid off farm debts

517

TYPICAL DAY DURING HARVEST

Rose at 5 o'clock, milked, fed livestock, often breakfast at 6. Then went out to fields. Main meal at noon, supper at 6, then worked after supper.

548

MECHANIZATION

When he first started farming, picked corn by hand, rented corn-picker during war from father-in-law. With neighbors bought a corn-picker and small combine in 1947. Whose crop was ready first, machine went to him.

581

FARM BUREAU

Extension and farm bureau were together for a long time. Extension agent recommended tillage and production methods.

610

MEMORY OF TENANT DIFFICULTIES DURING WWII INCIDENT

632

CHANGE IN CROPS

Started raising less oats and less hay, more corn and more soybeans.

640

MACHINERY, 1950's

Bought new tractor and new combine. Expanded area by renting farms. Used chemical fertilizers in the forties, also used organic fertilizers. After WWII, used pesticides.

687

OVER-PRODUCTION

Didn't hear about that until the 1980's.

701

SIDE 1 ENDS

Side 2

002

LAND PRICES

Farmers got in trouble in the seventies - land priced high so they could borrow. Later land prices went down.

015

CONTINUING EDUCATION

University of Illinois would have week-long courses. Still reading Prairie Farmer. First television bought very early.

031

1960's

War in Vietnam pushed prices up. Still he did not have much in savings.

041

REMODELED HOUSE

1950's borrowed \$21,000 at 4% interest and remodeled house. University of Illinois Extension sent architect to draw up plans.

061

DEATH OF PARENTS

Inherited farm from grandfather. Parents died in 1976 and 1977, and he inherited more farms.

075

NEIGHBORS

Bought machinery together. Exchanged labor.

086

CENTER OF COMMUNITY

Church in Sycamore before 40's.

090

CHANGE IN COMMUNITY

Hardly knows neighbors now. Older generations - when people visited, they were always invited to stay for a meal.

107

MARKETING

When hog is ready to sell, you have to sell him. Now his tenant sells about 30 to 40 hogs a week.

125

GRAIN EMBARGO, 1970's

Did not affect him drastically.

138

1970's HIGH PRICED MACHINERY

He bought combine and one tractor in the 1970's.

161

TENANT'S CONTRIBUTION

Tenant supplies machinery - rents several farms to make 1,000 acres. Tenant has two full-time hired men, plus extra help.

180

ACQUISITION OF LAND BY INHERITANCE

186

RETIREMENT

Retired 1983. He was seventy years old. Had slowed down before then - farmed 125 acre farm.

200

LIVESTOCK FARMING

Didn't have such extensive acreage by doing livestock farming, therefore, did not need more and more machinery.

240

GRANDFATHER

Speculation on how grandfather acquired land.

262

TAXES ON HIS LAND

\$30 an acre.

269

SPECULATION ABOUT FARMING IN 21st CENTURY

Continued increase in production: 40 bushels of corn an acre when he started; now 175 bushels an acre. Six pigs to a litter in 1938; now 10 per litter.

308

LIFE IN RETIREMENT

345

END OF INTERVIEW