GEORGE MARR MEMOIR

PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a tape-recorded interview conducted by Jane E. Knepler for the Oral History Office on July 17, 1975. Jane E. Knepler transcribed the tape and edited the transcript. George W. Marr, Sr. reviewed the transcript.

This is one of a series of tapes made on a project about the building and testing of the Bates Experimental Road. The Illinois Legislature approved this road before the United States became involved in World War I, but the actual road construction did not begin until the war ended. Construction took place during two summers, and testing lasted until late in 1922. Delegations from other states and foreign nations often visited this site. Data recorded during the testing was used in determining materials for all early hard road construction, not only in Illinois--but nationwide and worldwide.

George W. Marr, Sr., was born in Greensburg, Kentucky, on June 24, 1902. As a young man he came to Bates, Illinois, and he worked as a farm laborer for several years before renting his own land. Due to his hard work, thrifty ways, and good business sense, he finally farmed as many as nine hundred acres. He also purchased a three hundred acre farm. Mr. Marr also discusses the building of the Experimental Road.

Mr. and Mrs. Marr retired from farming in 1968 and moved to a beautiful home in New Berlin, Illinois, which they themselves planned and built.

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.

George W. Marr, Sr., New Berlin, Illinois.
Jane E. Knepler, Interviewer.

Q. Mr. Marr, will you tell me about working on the Bates Experimental Road?

A. Well, I worked in the spring until April, and then I got a job. I went up and talked to the foreman, and he set a date for me to come back. And so I went back, and he said was I ready to go to work. And I said, "Yes."

So he put me on a wheelbarrow, the first work I done, and then I helped haul brick. They came in on the railroad down at Bates. I mean Bates Depot on the siding, and we hauled it back and up along the road past with the brick. And then we hauled sand and we hauled all the road material, you know, that they took to go. And then, of course, we got back up there and went to work.

Well, I had a wheelbarrow, and I hauled the sand and dumped it in the mixer. It was fixed across the road fourteen feet wide. That was the width of the road. And they'd dump in the cement and the sand and the gravel, and they'd mix that. And then right behind it where they let the concrete come out, it smoothed it off as it went along. Well, some of that was covered up and some of it wasn't on the test plot, you see, to see which one could stand the sunshine and which one would dry quicker, and which one was stronger.

Q. What would they use to cover it?

A. Well, they used, I'd say, kind of like a tarpaulin, you know, or tent material. And then they'd leave that on there until it dried. And then, of course, as they moved on, they'd change and they'd put so much concrete down, and then the bricklayers would come along and lay brick on there, different sizes and different lengths. And then they'd go for several feet. I couldn't recall just exactly how many feet, but it would be, anyway, a hundred feet or more that these plots would be built, you see. And then, they'd take and then turn just the opposite way. They'd put the brick down first and then they'd put the concrete over that.

Q. You mean they used the brick as a base?

A. As a base. They tried it both ways, and then they'd come on down, and then they'd put in another just solid concrete. Well, it was mixed in different forms, you see. Of course, I can't answer what form it was, I didn't know. I was just a laboring man there loading a wheelbarrow and helping to build the road, you see.

Q. In some places did they put a layer of concrete and brick on top it?

A. That's right. And then they'd put more than one. That way, you see, they had brick with different sizes. My judgement now may be a little wrong, but those bricks, there must have been a dozen different size brick and different kind of brick that they put down, you see. But then the largest one was eleven-pound brick that they put down one, and then they put concrete over it, and then they put it on top of the concrete. And it was different kind of concrete. There was two or three experiments, and that's the way they went along where I worked, you see.

Q. You said they hauled the materials from the Bates siding out to the site. You didn't carry that all the way by wheelbarrow, did you?

A. Well, no. They hauled it out and dumped it along the side as they come forward, you see. And they knowed about how many loads of sand or gravel or cement. And they'd pack it along the side. Then here would come the machine and the people. Well, we'd take the wheebarrow and roll it into this mixer. And it would mix it all up and then it would go. We had this thing, leveler, right on the behind with a gasloine engine, a small gasoline engine that kept it working, smoothing it out. And they'd move on down, you see. Until then we'd have the hoppers full of the sand and gravel and cement again for another move, you see.

Q. Did they use trucks or wagons with horses to haul the materials?

A. Well now, they used most of the little trucks, the smaller trucks. But they did use these steel-wheeled tractors when they built it up. Then they took and smoothed it down with the tractor some. But you see those, well they kind of busted up, and they drug some with horses, four horses on a regular old road-grader, you see. A drag, I'd say.

Q. A drag, that's something like a harrow?

A. Well, yes. It's just like the townships use, you know, before they ever got any oil. You see they'd put four horses onto a steel drag, you know, made out of iron. And then they had a board across it, and you stood on it and rode and drove your four horses. Just like we did in the township, see. For there wasn't no oil then produced at all.

Q. How wide would this drag be?

A. It would be about seven feet or eight feet wide. Seven feet, that would be more like that.

Q. And then about how deep would it be?

A. Well, the width of it and then the side would be about, well, three, three and half feet wide, I'd call it. And then the width of it would be seven feet. And we'd go down. Of course, that's not on this road that we're talking about. But then, that's the kind of drags they used with horses. And then they drug with the tractor most of the time until they wanted it real smooth, and then they put the horses on it. So they wouldn't tear the soil all up, you see, and they kept it packed down so, until they

got it ready to pour the material, the concrete and brick to come on.

Q. When you were working there, where did you live?

A. I lived with my brother, lived right there at Bates. Just north of Bates elevators. I walked to my work every morning and walked back. Of course, it wasn't too far. Well, it was quite a little ways when it's up in the center of the three miles. But that's the way I got to work. And then the same way I'd come home after. See I worked from where I lived. He lived right in Bates. Well, just north of Bates there. And I boarded with him, and I worked there on the road building.

Q. Had you worked for someone else before you started working on the road?

A. Yes, my brother started farming. And I worked until we laid by the corn. That's what they called it back in them days. And so, when he got through that, well, I put in my application for the job on help building this road. And, well, I'll say three days the fellow told me to come to work. And so I did, and then I stayed there until—well, I can't recall the date correct, but it was along way up in the late fall, October, or the first of November.

Q. Do you know what year that was?

A. That was, well, I think it was 1919. I believe that's correct when they put that in there. Of course, they started before that, you see. In the year before that, and when I went on, the road was, well, I judge it to be one mile of it finished, you know. And then two miles I helped with not exactly all of that. When I left there, they was getting pretty close to the end of the three miles.

Q. What do you mean when you say the corn was "laid by?"

A. Well, they called it those days, back when they used horses. They plowed the corn three times. When they plowed it the third time, they called it the laying by. And so, I picked it up from the old people. And that's what I called it.

Q. They mean that they are finished with the cultivation?

A. Finished with the cultivation of the corn. You see, then they didn't bother it until it went to—they called it shucking corn then, you see. Shucking corn, when the corn matured, got dry enough, they went to shucking corn and hauling it in and scooping it into bins, in the ears, see. Nowadays, they'd go out and they'd take their corn sheller and they all shelled the corn and they dump it in the truck and haul it to the elevators. All shelled, it ain't in the ears anymore.

Q. What was the hardest work that you had to do while you were on . . .

A. On the road. Well, the hardest was to be unloading some of those eleven-pound bricks. I think they had two carloads of the eleven-pound

bricks and they had tongs, I called them, that picked up four bricks. And then you had to hand them out to the fellow on the little truck to take and move them up there. And I done that for several days. And of course, that was forty-four pounds of weight there that you had to pick up and hand it over to the other fellow for him to load it on his wagon or truck, you see. To haul up for the fellows would be laying the brick for the road construction.

Q. How did you happen to quit work at the time that you did?

A. Well, when we got down close to the end, they was going to lay off so many. They was about ready to finish the job, you see. And so, I then had a job to go to shucking corn, that's what we called it then. And so, I quit on my own merit. I didn't give them a chance to lay me off. I just went where I could get another job. I knew it was going to soon be over there. So then I hunted another job, you see. And it was about a month later till the end of the three miles was to dry.

Then they started the next spring—I believe I'm right. They loaded these smaller trucks with heavy weight, all it could stand. And they run them night and day, to test the road out. I think they let it stand there till the next April, I believe, is when the trucks started rolling on this road after it went through one winter, you see. And then they started to wear the road out. Well, of course, it went on then.

I left there and went back to Kentucky. And, of course, I fell in love with a girl, and we married, and we stayed around there awhile and we didn't think there was going to be, to make a living there, and get ahead. (phone rings) So, I had two brothers here in the State of Illinois, you see. And I wrote to one of them to get me a job. So he did. And so we came here, and we've been here ever since. Fifty-three years.

Of course, I went to work by the month. And from that I got to farming, renting the farms. And then it got built on up and the years passed, and I got to farming heavy back in World War II. I was farming around eight hundred acres. And of course, I had good luck, and the prices was good. And so then I finally in 1956 or 1958, I bought a farm of three hundred acres. And then, I [was] there, after [that, until] I'd say in about 1968 I quit all together. And my son went to farming my place there. And so then, I moved to New Berlin.

Q. When you worked on the road, did you consider the pay that you got there good wage?

A. Well, it was at that time, but it wouldn't be much these days.

Q. Do you remember what they paid?

A. Well, they paid, if I worked seven days, I got thirty-seven dollars for seven days work. And if I just worked six days--of course you worked six days on that road--well, you got twenty. Well, you got time and a half if you worked on Sunday. And then I worked on Sunday and I think it moved, it was forty-one or forty-two dollars a week if I worked the seven full days, for they paid time and a half or a little more for the Sunday work. And that's the way the price was some of those days, back. . . .

Q. While you were working doing farm work at about that time, about how much were you paid?

A. Well, when I was working on the farm, I started in at thirty, thirty-five dollars a month. Of course, I got my two cows to milk and I got my hogs to butcher for my meat. And we got a large garden spot; but then, another fellow came along. And he had owned several elevators, you know, grain elevators, but he bought a five-hundred acre farm. So then he wanted to, he never had been on the farm only just been on them, too, but never had any operation or any experience at all farming. So, he came to me and wondering if I would be interested in a job. And I said, well, I would if everything's okay.

So, he went to telling me all what he wanted done, cleaned up and everything. And so then, we got on to him, I said, "Now what are you figuring on paying me for changing jobs?" And he said, "Well, how much do you want?" I said, "Well, I want a lot more than I'm getting where I'm at, for I'm working for good people. And I enjoy living in Bates, Illinois." And now he said, "Well, I'll just double your wages." I said, "Well, that sounds pretty good."

Q. Who did you work for in Bates?

A. Well, I worked for old man Ed Taylor. That was Evan Taylor's father. Well, I worked there, I believe it was four years. And then, this other farm was more to it.

Q. Did you also get your meat and your garden and your house when you worked for Mr. Twist?

A. Yes. We got milk and the cows and the meat and the house free.

Q. What sort of house did they provide you with?

A. Well, it was one of these older-time type houses now. There was two-story. It [was] over at Twist's that place was. And then at Bates now, it was just a five-room house. It's still there. And the other one, of course, is gone where I lived in on the Twist farm. But, it had a stairway upstairs of two or three rooms; the same way downstairs. And of course, that was still in New Berlin Township. It was near Prouty out here. It was where his farm is. Then, they went on the way that I worked for four years by the month like that. Then he wanted to know if I'd farm it, you know, me hire the men, and I'll go ahead. So we agreed on that.

So then, it come along, the reason I left there after nine years, I'd been there, well, the government come along, and if you left out so much ground and you put some grass or something on it and mow it off, they gave you a payment. Well, I had laid fifty acres off. And of course, I mowed it off when the stuff begin to weed and stuff and took care of it. Well, at the end of that, they sent out the government checks, you know. So I had almost nine hundred dollars. I had the check, it said to me.

Well, they sent him one too. So, he comes out and he said, "Did you get

a check?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, that's my check." I said, "It didn't have your name on it." (chuckles) And so, one word brought on another. And so, I said to him, I said, "Well now, you're not going to get this check. The government had sent it to George Marr and he's the one that's going to put it in the bank." And so we fell out there. We just dissolved. And he said he'd farm it himself.

So then, well, I went to looking and finally rented 160 acres in Curran Township. And from then on, the next year I rented a lot more ground. And it just kept climbing on up until I'd got about, well, it was over 900 acres of land. But there was pasture there, and I had 750 acres to crop, you know, to produce the grain. And then from that, then I bought the farm, and then I farmed on some more. And then I let some of the other land go back to the owner. Then when I quit, I just had three hundred and some acres of land.

Q. When you started farming on your own, on about five hundred acres, did you have any tractors or did you use mostly horses?

A. No, when I started on my own, I had one tractor and four horses. And I farmed that one year. And then the tractors begin to come in. So then I got two tractors, and then I had to have two straight men when I was farming all of the other ground. Well, then I had four tractors, Allis-Chalmers W-C. And so, I kept two men steady, and the price that I paid for them was about thirty-five or thirty-eight dollars a month. And of course, I give them just like had been give to me when I worked by the month.

Q. When you came back to Illinois, were they still testing the Bates Road?

A. No, they had that completed when we came back. They'd done tested it out, you see. And they was starting to build the road then, you see. Now, I can't say whether the first road on from Bates, I believe it was to New Berlin here, or Loami, one. Now I've forgot that. I don't remember. But that's where they put the first hard road. And from then on it went to growing heavy, you know, and it wasn't long until they had it plumb on through to Jacksonville.

Q. How did they get the water out to the site of the Experimental Road to mix the concrete?

A. Well, they went to people's wells, you know, and pumped the water out of the wells, and hauled it in a tank and then decided when they needed water, you see. So that's the way they done the water situation then. And well, everything was hauled by trucks, you know, right from the railroad, and well, of course, the water was got from some of the farmers' wells, you know, the ones that would let them get the water, you see.

Q. Do you know any of the farmers that they went to for water?

A. No, I don't believe I do. There was George . . . No, I was going to

say . . . It must have been old man Ed Taylor. I believe they got some off of his farm there at Bates. But I couldn't tell just exactly what well it would have been. I wasn't on that job, you know. Some other fellows was going getting the water and I was on, helping the supplying, helping mix the concrete, and waiting on the bricklayers. That was kind of my job on the Experimental. And evening come, you knew you'd done a day's work. (chuckles)

Q. How many hours a day did you work?

A. Well, you worked from nine to ten hours every day, there wasn't no union then whatsoever, and you worked until they said, "Quit." They took charge over you, see, and of course, I never did get any extra for overtime work. But I did work sometimes, anyway, almost an hour from the time they was supposed to quit. They'd lack a little so much, and have it mixed up in this mixer, you know. And they'd want to clean it all out for the next day. And sometimes, the ones that was doing some other work, why, they quit at the regular hour, you know, five o'clock or something like that, whatever hour it was at that date. But, where you was working on that mixer, why then of course, there'd be so much, and they'd have to clean it out. And sometimes it would take anyway thirty minutes or three quarters of an hour when you would get that out so it would be clean for morning, you see.

Q. But you would get overtime for Sundays?

A. Yes, they'd pay you time and a half for Sunday. That's where you picked up the extra money.

Q. When you started farming on your own, did you have a better type of house than when you were working for someone else?

A. No, in all we've lived in three houses in fifty years. You see, I lived there at Bates, and then at Twist's and then over on the . . . Well, there'd been the fourth house before we moved here. And they was all except one, there at Bates, two-story houses. But, the first bathroom or running water we had was in, I believe it was 1938, that I got a furnace put in the house and got some running water, and that's the first of that.

Q. What made it possible for you to have running water, that you hadn't had it before?

A. Well, you had to go to the well and draw it up and carry it in, you see. You see for years and years, people back in those days, the majority of people didn't have running water. All they had, they went out to their well and pumped their water and then carried it in the kitchen or wherever it was. And that was, well, the majority of people had done that. Of course, some of the people would have more. Then they begin in the later years, you know, putting the water pumps in the well and running it into the house. And all they had--well, forty years back or fifty, they went out and pumped the water and carried it in the house to the kitchen in a bucket. And that's the way, they didn't have no sink or holder. They had to have a bucket or something like that. Now the majority of people,

that's the way they operated.

Q. Did you have electricity when you put the water in the house?

A. Yes. You see, when we moved in Curran Township, that was the first electricity. That was 1938. I believe that's right. Well, of course, it wasn't long until they got the furnace put in. We was using the stoves then, and then we put in the furnace. And then it wasn't long until they put in running water. And from that time on, we had running water and a bathroom and all too.

But all the years back from the time I was old enough to know anything, people didn't have no rest room or anything. They had to go out, they had back down in the corner, a little building like that, you know.

Q. For a toilet?

A. That's right. It wasn't only one family. It was all of them. I never seen, unless it was in some of the bigger cities, you see, they had the . . . but, I'm speaking of the farmers and the farm people. Now there was years there that they never thought about only going out to the rest room outside, you know. And the same way, they'd go out and cut the wood or carry in coal. That was their heat. And that's the way [it] went on in those days.

Q. Where did you get your coal for your stoves?

A. Coal. Well, we took two horses when I lived there at Bates, Illinois. And I hauled coal from the coal mines from Springfield with two horses and a wagon. And of course, we went north of Bates, and then went east, and then come back a little south and then went on to the coal mine there, well, I'd say it's on 31 now, the number of the road, you see; the coal mine right there past the shopping center now, you know, up there.

Q. You mean [highway] 36?

A. Yes, 36. And then I wasn't the only one, everybody else. . . . Now, sometime, they would get a carload of coal would come in on the railroad, you know. And people would go there and haul it in wagons back to their homes.

Q. Would it come to Bates?

A. It would come on the carload and then the people would haul it from Bates, you know. And well, then the same way in New Berlin, too, you see. And then of course, these mines, like, well there was some close, and then they got to going to the mine itself and getting it. When we lived on the Twist farm, there was a fellow lived here in New Berlin, Howard Perry; and he'd get a carload of Kentucky coal, and the farmers would come in and haul it on the wagon to their home.

Q. Did they consider that superior to local coal?

A. Well, they thought it was, and they claimed they proved it out it was. But it was a little higher priced, too, you see. It was warm. It wasn't as dark a coal as we had here, you see. And of course, the heat. I know for several years that he done that every fall. He'd have it shipped in there and then people would come in with their wagons and haul it away.

Q. Did they think it was better because it gave more heat or it wasn't so dirty?

A. Well, it give more heat, and it wasn't so dirty, too. That's the way now, in their stoves, you know. People liked it better, that's all I can say that I knew about it. I didn't know it was that much different, but a lot used it. They thought it was, too.

Q. Do you remember any mines closer by than Springfield?

A. Any miners?

Q. Any coal mines closer than Springfield?

A. Well, when we lived out here at Prouty, there was one just south there about a half mile. That's where we hauled our coal from. And then, when I lived at Bates, of course, I hauled it from Springfield on 36, right there where you make the curve on MacArthur, you know. There was one right on across the railroad there. And so I hauled it from there. But when we lived over in Prouty there pretty close, I hauled it from--Reynolds Brothers operated it--and then they sold it to, I can't recall his name right now. Well anyway, they sold it to another fellow, and he run it the rest of the time and Reynolds moved to Springfield.

Q. Do you know when they quit operating that mine?

A. No, I couldn't say just exactly when they quit operating that one there. It was, I imagine along about in the early fifties. I think that was when they quit operating, that's when the Reynolds left there and moved to Springfield. And the other fellow that bought it, he run it about a year and a half or two years, and then they quit mining.

Q. How many miners would that small mine employ?

A. Well, I judge, now I don't know for sure, but it looked like there's about six or eight that worked there. I been down there pretty late one evening, you know, when they was coming off from work, but I never did count them or I never thought much . . . but just guessing that would be about the limit for that size coal mine.

Q. Did they work the year round mining?

A. Yes, they did. Well now, people would haul the coal for the winter, you see, sometime through the summer, they'd go get a load and put it in the coal shed for winter, you see. And I don't know whether they trucked

any away or not. Now I couldn't answer that question, but I don't know whether they did or not.

Q. There wasn't a railroad there, was there?

A. No, there wasn't no railroad at all. All the wagons and small trucks, that's . . .

Q. Was that a shaft mine?

A. Well, yes. You mean to go down, yes.

Q. When you started farming for yourself did you keep livestock on your farm?

A. Yes. I kept livestock and then as I got more acreage, then I increased the livestock quite a bit. I went from, well, cattle, from forty head up to one hundred head of every year of cattle. And then from hogs, for several years there, I had, say eight hundred hogs, anyway, for the market every year. I was farming and had two men with me. So we worked with the cattle and worked with the hogs and raised quite a bit.

Q. Was the livestock your main source of income?

A. Well, it helped out if you could, like if you bought feeder cattle and you got the right kind, and you got a margin on them, and you got an increase in the price. Well, of course, you made some profit on the investment, you see. And then, of course, the hogs, we'd take care of so many brood sows, you know. And then we'd take care of all of them pretty good, and we'd come out on them pretty good by raising my own hogs.

Q. Did you keep the hogs and the cattle in the same feed lot?

A. Well, just some of the larger hogs with the cattle, and the smaller ones was separated. I just kept enough in with the cattle for the droppings and like that to keep cleaned up, you know, the corn and stuff . . . That's the way I done that. I kept well, say from 125 pound on up until they got ready to go to market.

Q. You say from the droppings, the hogs ate the cattle droppings utilizing the corn then that the cattle didn't digest?

A. Yes, that's right. They kept all that cleaned up, see. No, I enjoyed fooling with cattle and hogs and, of course, I had good luck and all. And everything worked out it seemed like in a good way and I never did have . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

Q. Did you buy your feeder cattle or did you raise them?

A. Well, I raised some, but I bought the biggest part of my feeder cattle.

Q. Where did you buy them?

A. Well, I bought them down in Missouri and a few in Arkansas, and then I bought some private, I mean from some of the neighbors, you know. But the majority come from Missouri.

Q. Would you make a trip there to buy your cattle?

A. Yes. Yes, I would make a trip there and then when I sold them I would send them to Chicago or St. Louis, and I would make a trip with them to see them sold.

Q. Where in Missouri would you go to buy cattle?

A. Well, that, I can't recall the town now, it's down there where that college--but anyway, I can't recall the name of that town, different places would have these . . .

Q. Rolla, maybe, or Mexico?

A. Mexico. [Mrs. Marr whispers something to her husband]

Q. Pardon, do you know?

Mrs. Marr: Well, some of the places was Salem, Missouri, and we went to five different sales. I went with him. But they were all different from Mexico. We went down towards Sullivan, down toward Rolla. Sullivan was one of the places. I forget the names of the places, it's been so long.

Q. They were more or less small towns?

Mrs. Marr. Yes.

A. Yes, and they had days that they had special sales for stock cattle, you see. Now, just like, we went down in Missouri and there was five sales that week. But, I took my wife along with me, and so we rented a motel, you know. Well, I seen the manager and the trucker about hauling the cattle if I bought some. So then, the trucker said if I bought ten here or five, whatever I wanted to, he'd be at the next sale the next day to haul them. So, I'd buy maybe ten head of cattle at one place, and then another ten, and then until I got a truck-trailer load, you see. And sometimes, well, then we'd wind up in Missouri, that would be the fifth sale that week. And then, of course, we'd head for home. I'd call home and tell my boys that the cattle was on their way, to take care of them. And then we came in later after the sales was over, you see. But we went that way for a few years.

Q. What time of the year would you go?

A. Well, it would be along in the early fall like that. And then sometimes, of course in the spring of the year, too, you would have cattle sales. They would send me a card, they had that kind of organized for

these salesmen, you see. These cattle sales, then they would send people cards, you know, the date when they was going to have these sales. Then, you could figure on where you wanted to go.

Of course, my wife and me, well, we'd make it a kind of vacation, you see. We'd go to the first one started down in Arkansas and then come on back up. It would be one hundred miles or one hundred-fifty [miles] apart, you see. But, they would have all of those lined out for that week. And, it was a good idea to have the different grades of cattle penned off, and they had so many in that one. They'd run from twelve hundred to, I believe it was, three thousand cattle at each sale, you see. There was quite a few, but they had them all separated being uniform, you see. And, they had the pens numbered, and then when you wanted to buy that pen, well, you would bid on it, or you had some more, and you didn't get that one. So, that's the way the sale went on.

Q. It was an auction?

A. Auction sale, that's right.

Q. You said something about a dinner bell. Could you tell me about that?

A. Well, when we first married, me and my wife's father was talking about a dinner bell that he had, you see. And it was old then, and he told about getting it from his father or grandfather, something he said was extra old, you know. Then it went on that way. Well, of course, her mother passed away and then in a few years, her father did, too. Well, of course, he had some more of the pretty good-size family, you know. Well, he owned his farm, and it was just sold and everything was, you see. So I didn't get to go to the sale, but I told one of my brother-in-laws, I said, "Buy that dinner bell for me." He said, "How much do you want to pay?" I said, "Don't pay no attention to that, have it knocked off on to me." So he did. Of course, it wasn't too high after all, but we still got the dinner bell.

Q. Do you remember how much it cost you?

A. Yes, it was eight or nine dollars, what it cost.

Q. Did you bring that dinner bell back to Illinois?

A. Oh, yes. It's out on the farm now. If you knew just exactly the years, it's some of the first one's come around, I imagine.

Q. Exactly how did they use the dinner bell?

A. Well, they put them on a pole, you know. Then, you put a rope up on this bell and then when dinner time comes, the wife or daughter, whoever's got the dinner, would go out and pull and ring that bell. And the people in the tobacco fields or the corn fields, well, they'd just stop the plowing with the horses or mules. They'd stop and just come right on in and

eat your dinner, you see. They didn't go by the watches or clocks or anything like that. When they got dinner ready, why, they went out and rang that bell, you see. And that's the way they operated back, years back ago.

Q. Did the horses stay in the field while you left them?

A. No, you brought the horses; but, now I heard them talk about there were a lot of mules worked, you know. And they said when the bell rang, the old mules would even stop and wouldn't want to go on across to the other end and turn around and come back. They got on to it, they said it was because the bell rang. (chuckles)

Q. You talked about picking corn awhile ago, shucked corn. Will you tell me how you went about shucking corn and what the process was and how you brought it in from the field?

A. Well, the first thing that you done when you got your wagon ready and your two horses, well, you put one side of your wagon box up, anyway four or five feet above the bed. And then you went to the field and you picked two rows of corn and throwed it against that knock-board, they called it. And then when you turned around and come back, well, then you picked up those two that you'd knocked down by the wagon and you throwed them in. And then you would make about your second round and then you was loaded, had practically forty or fifty bushel of corn, you see. And then you would come in, and you'd scoop it off in the crib or bin to wherever they wanted to put it or wherever you could manage to put it, you see.

Q. Did you use gloves or anything particular to husk corn?

A. Well, they had, they call them mittens. They wasn't no finger gloves, they was just a solid glove, and you just put your peg on that, you see, or your hook on it, you see, once you got the shuck started. Then you grab the end of the ear and you just throwed it that way, you see, in against that siding on that wagon, you see. It would be opposite the side that you would be, it would be four feet above the regular bed, you see. So you could just throw it to your right all the time, you see. And then your team would walk and straddle the row, you see, and then, of course, you'd holler, "Whoa!" or "Get-up!" when you'd want them to move up and like that.

Q. You used the hook or the peg?

A. Well, I used the hook the most of the time, but I put them both on. The majority of the people just used the peg. And some used the hook.

Q. Was this something you wore on top of your glove?

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. And you used it for what purpose?

A. Well, you used it to start the shuck on the corn, you see. So you could get hold of the ear, so you could jerk it, break it off, and throw

it in the wagon, you see. So it would be clear out of the shuck.

Q. And the purpose of the knock-board was to keep the corn from going over the wagon?

A. Yes. You see, if you didn't have it, just like say four feet, when you throwed it that way, you see, why you didn't even have to look towards the wagon after you picked so much corn. Learned that well you could just throw your hand that way, and it would hit that board, you see, and fall down in your wagon box. It was hard work, and then when you came in, you would drive up in the crib or wherever they had fixed for your corn; and then you had to take a corn scoop and scoop that load of corn off. And then, generally, the way I done, I'd tie my horses up and go eat my dinner. Then, I'd go right back to the field, and get the second load that afternoon. And we'd come in, of course, you had to, and you knew that you'd done a day's work if you got close to one hundred bushel of corn picked.

Q. About what were the yields of corn when you started farming yourself?

A. Well, it run around sixty to seventy-five bushel. And then we got to sowing more clover, and then we got to plowing this clover under. And then it got to increase, and then the fertilizer started coming. And got to increase, and then the fertilizer started coming. And we got to spreading some limestone on our land where we would have it tested. Well, we would take it in to the Farm Bureau and they would have it tested for us, you see. And so then, we got to using some fertilizers as the years come on. And the yield began to pick up, see.

And now, if you can have the right kind of season, you're getting pretty close to one hundred-fifty bushels to the acre. I think the average of the corn of the State of Illinois was one hundred twenty or one hundred twenty-five bushel, I believe I'm right, for this last year, the average, you know. Well, it's because of the fertilizer used, you know, and it's helped push it up. And then they plant it closer together, and a different variety of corn. It's a hybrid, you know, and they've got different numbers of that, and it's different to the really old corn we used to plant, you know.

Q. How did you plant the corn when you first started farming?

A. Well, I had a corn planter, you know we called them, that you just hooked two horses on, and then you had two boxes. You planted two rows, and then you had a check bar in a quarter of a mile. And when you checked that corn you'd get off and set your stake behind you. Then you'd drive through, then you'd trip that, and the wire would fall off. You'd turn your horses around and you'd get off your seat and you'd go over and just stretch that wire up. And then set it, and then you'd fasten it on to your corn planter. And then you'd get back on, and you got off and on at every end, every two rows you planted. That's what they called checking corn.

And the majority of people them days, they all checked their corn on account they could plow it both ways to keep down the weeds and the

grass, you see. Nowadays, if they get it plowed once and run over it with the harrow, rotary hoe or something, they've got to spray it for weeds. And they treat it that way. And they treat it that way, and they don't have to plow it so much. That's the way the difference is. And the corn, yields more and everything. But, they plant the corn now, the population is increased, and the amount of corn you put per acre, oh, I'd say, two-thirds more seed goes down than it did back then.

Q. When you checked the corn, you more or less had hills of corn?

A. That's right. Two and three, the majority of people planted it that way. You set your planter to drop two and three, you see. The plates you put down for your corn, you see. And then, when that trip would go, why, that would turn that plate, you see, to the other and two grains would fall. And then the next one, three grains would fall. And that's what they'd call two and three, you know, what they was planting. Some would plant three straights or just whatever they wanted to, you know, or two straights. They had different plates to go in the corn planter that they used.

Q. What was the hook or the peg that you used to shuck corn made from?

A. Well, it was made from some kind of a metal. It was steel, you know, at the end; and then it was covered with something like a leather glove, only just narrow pieces that you'd run your fingers through with the peg, you see. It started from your fingers through with the peg, you see. It started from your forefinger down to your little one all the way through there, you see. And you had your peg to come out, stuck out about an inch and a half, I imagine, from your forefinger, you see. And then you just grabbed your ear of corn with that thing, just like you'd pinched it, I called it, and jerked it back and that tore the ear of corn to start. And then you grabbed it with the same hand and helped kind of with the other hand, and then throwed it in the wagon.

Q. It was easier than just using the bare hand. It was a help for your hand?

A. Well, you couldn't hardly. You blistered your hand so bad. A lot of fellows when they first started, they'd blister their hands with their gloves on. And if you tried to do it barehanded, why your hands would have been all tore up. You couldn't get the job done at all. You had to really wear the glove to protect your hands.

Q. Do you remember when they started growing soybeans in this part of the country?

A. Well, it was about 1924 or 1925. Just like, old Mr. Ed Taylor brought that seed from Arkansas, and he started them then. In the second year, I believe it was, or third year, well he sowed it and then cut it and raked it and then fed it to his cattle, you see, for hay. And then the year, or two years after that, they got some more people started. And the elevators or the grain companies, you know, they started getting the bid on soybeans. And then they went to threshing these soybeans just like they did the wheat or oats or anything like that, and from that day until

until this, it's been the soybean that's growed.

And I went to a soybean show, I guess you'd call it, up here two or three years ago, at the state capital in the Armory building. And they had all of the different things that was made from beans, you know. Well, there was way over a hundred different items, things that was made from soybeans. And it showed different things was made. Of course, there's a lot of other things could be made only in different ways. But that was quite a show then of what soybeans could do. And you know, now they have worlds of material and stuff made out of soybeans.

Q. How many soybeans did Mr. Taylor grow that first year that he grew them?

A. Well, I think it was, the first year, was thirty acres.

Q. With the first seed that he brought back?

A. No, I'll take that back. Now that was about the second year after he'd tested it out. And then he planted about thirty acres. But he just planted a small percentage the first year, you know. Then the next year, he went heavier, I mean planted more acres. And then he cut them with the mowing machine after they matured and then raked them up. And then we hauled them in and fed the stalk and beans all to the cattle, left them in. The next year the elevators started to buying soybeans.

Q. When you started farming, did you grow soybeans as well as corn?

A. Yes.

Q. What other crops did you grow?

A. Well, wheat and oats and soybeans and corn was the major crops. Corn, soybeans, well wheat, and oats too, you see. We worked horses, a lot of them, when we first started. And we had to have oats. They made good feed for horses, and then if you had more that what you'd . . . oats, why then you'd take them to the elevator, you see. Of course, the wheat, we'd sell all of that only just enough for seed wheat, you see.

Q. What did you grow for hay?

A. Well, most of the time we'd sow clover and some alfalfa. But we had more clover to improve the ground, so we'd follow it up with corn. And alfalfa, we sowed just a small [amount] for hay for cattle, you see, and horses and stuff like that.

Q. Did you make use of the straw from the wheat and the oats?

A. Did I make use of the straw? Well, yes, sometimes now I baled that straw, enough to make bedding for my hogs, my sows, you know, that's going to farrow, to protect the little pigs, you know. And then, I'd clean out the barn where the cattle was, you know, and I'd fix a place, some of the

straw for bedding in bad weather and stuff like that. It's what I used the straw for.

Q. Did you use the waste material from the animals for fertilizer?

A. Well, yes. And I had what they call a manure spreader. And then every spring of the year, I'd take in the barns and around the cattle lots and all where there was manure, we'd load it into this and then we'd take it out into the field and scatter it with the manure spreader, we'd call it.

Q. How did the manure spreader scatter the manure?

A. Well, you see, it had a reel in the back, and it had something like a ladder and a belt, you know. It started up here and run from the hind wheel, and that would gradually pull this back, and then that spreader would throw it out, you see. They called it a manure spreader. And that's the way that that was handled. Well, it wasn't only me, but the neighbors done the same thing. And now, they got away from a lot of that. They don't scatter the manure like they did back in the days of the past.

Q. Did you butcher your own meat?

A. Yes. In fact, years back the neighbors would get together and there'd be five or six or seven men, neighbor men, you know. Well, and then a lot of times the wives would go with them, and they'd just have a big--they'd butcher my hogs one day; and maybe it would be a few days the next neighbor would want his. And we'd butcher them and cut them up. Right after noon, we'd cut all of them up and render the lard.

Q. How did you render the lard?

A. Well, put it in these big black kettles, you see, and they'd stir it with a big long wooden paddle. And then they'd cook until it all cooked down and made the, well some of the older ones or the women knowed more about when it was done than I did. But I had used the paddle in making the lard, you know, stirring it to keep it from sticking or burning.

Q. Would you have to cut the fat of a hog up in order to render it?

A. Well, yes, you see, we had a table. Well, we hung the hog up and then we laid him down on the table. We took the spareribs out and the backbone. Then we took and trimmed the hog, and all of the fat around on the sides and the shoulders and the hams; well, we cut that fat off, you see, and then we cut it up in little small pieces. And then we'd put that in this big black kettle and start until it made the lard. That's the way we produced it. And then we'd hang . . .

Then, back then, they'd take the meat after it had cooled out, and if we didn't have a place, a table or something, they generally had a big box in the smokehouse or somewhere, that they'd take and put this meat in; and they'd take pure salt and cover it all up in salt. Well, then

it'd go on so many days, so many weeks, and then they'd take it out of that, and they'd hang it up in a little building they called the smokehouse. And then, well, they'd take an old black kettle and put in there, and then carry stuff, you know, and build a fire in there. And then they'd just keep chips or something would keep the fire down, only it made a smoke. And then, they'd smoke that meat after it had come out of the salt, you see. And then it was kind of like cured.

And that's the way they took care of the meat back in them days. But after they got that completed, why you see, they go to this smokehouse. And they'd hang this meat all up, and when you wanted a ham or a side or something, or a piece of a side, you took your butcher knife and went out there and cut what you wanted and brought it in. And that's the way people took care of their meat in those days.

Q. When you butchered the hogs, did you leave the skin on?

A. Yes, you see you took and what we called scalding the hogs. And we had a barrel there that you'd had setting kind of on angle. And you'd fill that half-full of boiling water. And then we'd just push him in and then we'd pull him back out. And had a table. And then we'd let the other end go in as far back, and then two or three fellow would get on to the hog with the butcher knife, you know, and just kind of scraping it. And then the hair would all come off. Then, we'd take his hind legs and strip down, and get that muscle and you'd pull it out so they'd call it. And you'd have a stick about eighteen inches long and put it into each leg and then hang him up on a pole. Then another fellow, or the same fellow, would take and sharpen his butcher knife and then he would take and start up between the hog's hind legs and come on clear down and open him up, and then take his entrails out and all that.

And then, the majority of people back in those days went all over that, and got all of the fat and everything from the entrails of the hog, and then, of course, they put that in the lard. But it was just fat, you know. And I don't know whether they do that now. Nobody butchers, and the neighbors, they altogether different. They go to the butcher shop and buy theirs ready for the skillet.

Q. What did the women do on butchering day?

A. Well, they would all meet, and, of course, they'd get dinner for the whole bunch, you see. And then, of course, they would help, probably some of them would, with the sausage meat, you know. They'd help maybe cut up some of that or do something like that, after they got through with the dishes or something. And then they'd get like they was going to put the sausage in, they'd get things ready. Like they was going to make the lard, they'd get things ready for that, you know. And of course, they worked kind of along, all worked together, you know.

Of course, they all seemed to enjoy the days when they butchered, you know. They'd kind of get together, and they'd tell jokes and things like that and all and have a big day of it, you know. And, well, when

we got through with this neighbor, maybe the next week another fellow would be ready to butcher. So that went on until they'd all had their meat hung up in what they called the smokehouses.

Q. It was a social get-together then?

A. Yes.

Q. Were there any other work activities that were social gatherings on the farm?

A. Well, it was like threshing wheat and oats and things like that. Now just like, you see, they had a steam engine and what they call a separator, and then they hauled the wheat in to these, and they pitched it off from one wagon on each side. And they had a fellow that fed it into this threshing, they called it threshing machine, you see. Well, then they had a spout come out here and then people caught it. Back for years there, they took and sacked a lot of that grain, but then they got to catching it in wagon boxes and hauling it off that way, hauling it to the elevator or the bin that they had built for that, you see. And that's the way they harvest the wheat.

But, you see, first you took a combine, I mean a binder, and you cut this wheat into all them bundles, and then they had fellows follow that up. They shocked it, put about eight or ten bundles together, you know, and then one on top. And they let it set there until it cured out good, and then the threshing machine come. And then you asked all your neighbors around that they was going to start threshing the wheat. And then they started. And they went from one neighbor to the next one until they all got through, you see.

Q. So that was a social occasion too?

A. That's right.

Q. Why did they put one bundle on top of the ones they set up?

A. Well, that would protect the rain, you know, something like that, you see you set them up there and they kind of spreaded this top bundle out. They called that topping, you see.

Q. They had the grain up?

A. The heads all up, you see, and set together. The top was all together. Well then, they just took and kind of bent the top one, and then they laid it up on top. And then, when they went to threshing, well of course, they just throwed that on the rack, they called them rack wagons, just big flat frame wagons, you know. Had two horses, one man loaded it, and the others pitched it on to him. That's the way they threshed the wheat and oats.

Q. This would be a summertime activity that the farmers got together--threshing?

A. Well, it would be, yes. You see threshing would be in the summer along about the, well, July the fourth, along the first of July, something like that.

Q. Then butchering would be more in the fall or winter?

A. Yes, that would be when it got cold enough that it didn't thaw out any, you know, so they'd be sure to save the meat, you see. It would be, well, they'd want it down anyway where it didn't go above forty degrees, something like that, you know. And when it got up in the winter part, you know. And then, of course, it gets colder at night. But they'd kind of pick days that well, you know, along up in December and January when there would be some days they'd pick for those days. If it was too bad, they called it off. And then, a lot of times they'd start back there, some of them, it would be in the last of November, December when they'd butcher. It just depends on when you got ready and the weather was right.

Q. Did you have any other social activities the rest of the year with your neighbors?

A. Well, we'd visit and get together, you know, like on Saturday nights. And then we'd go over . . . Now when I lived there at Bates, well, the elevator man and his wife would come over, and the depot man, they'd come over nights.

Q. Who was the depot man?

A. Pete Metz. He stayed there a long time. Him and his wife would come over and visit us.

Q. Who was in the elevator at that time?

A. Well, Noah Twist owned one. But, Ed Abell was operating it. Ed Abell, that's right, he was operating it. And the other one, I just can't give you the name that operated the other one.

Q. Did you visit on Saturday nights or play cards?

A. Oh, yes, they'd come over and we'd visit and sometime we'd play cards. And maybe they'd come over to our house one night, and then in a night or two we'd go to theirs. And there'd be one or two more families there, you know.

Q. What card games would you play?

A. Well, I don't know. There wasn't nothing played for money, I know that much. They just played with partners, you know, Rook and different games. It's been so long that I've forgot just exactly what. But I know that things like that went on, you know, and, of course, I was in them, my wife and me was.

Q. What did your children do?

A. Well of course, you see, we had the one girl before the second boy. Well, they'd go along, too. Like we went over at Ed Abell's. He had two boys, you know, pretty good-sized. And, Pete Metz had two girls. And the kids played just like . . . They'd get off in the kitchen or someplace and the grown-ups in the living room. And that's the way it operated. And they never, it seemed like we never paid much more attention to the kids, you know. And now they got to have a baby-sitter and all that stuff, you know.

Q. You just took yours with you?

A. We did. Everybody just took them with them, you know. They never thought nothing about getting somebody to keep your little baby or something. They'd just pick them up and take them with them.

Q. Does all your family live fairly close to you here now?

A. You mean my family?

Q. Your children?

A. Well, no, one's in Morris, Illinois. That's 150 miles north. And then, of course, one in Springfield. And then the third one is out on the farm. Of course, our oldest boy--he's next to our oldest daughter--he got killed a year ago, two years ago, I guess, this summer, by a truck accident on the highway there next to Auburn, Illinois. He drove one of those big trailer trucks, you know. And some way or another, there was a little Volkswagen was up on that bridge that you come to the overpass, I call it, in a way it looked like he tried to save . . . This little car had stopped, and I imagine there was another truck beside of him going on through, you see. But he aimed to save the, it looked the way it was, of course, nobody knew; there wasn't nobody there.

But I looked at the place. It looked like he tried to save hitting that little Volkswagen; and the little Volkswagen had went dead on him there, you see. And you see, if there was another bus on that side, well, he had to hit him right solid. But it looked like he thought maybe he could get around him, you see. And of course, when he done that his wheels and front end started and went off over that and they just kept going over and killed him. But nobody seen it. And this fellow, well, in the Volkswagen, he seen the truck go off but don't know what caused it.

Q. Did the other truck hit him?

A. No, there wasn't no truck hit him. It's a four lane drive, you see, and he was coming from St. Louis. And it was there near Auburn, Illinois, and it's a four lane drive. Well, right up on the top just as you start over, or before you did, this little Volkswagen went dead. And he was setting right, well, if another big truck was running the same direction, and say he was just ahead of him a little bit, well, he couldn't pull over there. You see, he didn't have a chance. Of course, I don't know.

It might not have been. But that's the way it looked like. And he tried to miss that little station wagon the way everything looked. And his truck got out of control, and he went over there and killed him.

Q. Your other son lives on the farm now?

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. Do you happen to know, or did you hear any discussion why they chose to build that Experimental Road out at Bates?

A. Well, of course I don't know exactly, but I heard some talking. Back when the road, the Experimental, they said it was out of the way of all other country roads; and it was close to the depot where they could get the supply brought to them. Now I heard them talking that when they was building, some fellows there was talking that. That's the only thing that I know.

Q. The road then was not built on an existing road?

A. No, there wasn't. This was just up the railroad, you see. There wasn't no oil roads or anything like that along in there, you see. It turned right there before you start to Loami and go north. That road went through. But going east, there wasn't no road.

Q. It went right through a farm then?

A. Yes, it went right up the railroad, you see. And if you've ever been up that and noticed, well, when you get up there at the end of that three mile, the road now had pulled out, I'd say ten feet, made the little curve there. That's where the end of the three miles went, you see.

Q. Do you know who farmed the land that the road went through?

A. Well, George Colburn now started there, and he didn't go all the way. I know just the west part of it, over halfway there, George Colburn farmed that farm there.

END OF TAPE