

THIS is Larry Sprunk and the following is an interview that I had with Mr. William E. Cook of Backoo, North Dakota. The interview was held at Mr. Cook's home outside of Backoo Wednesday, June 23, 1976 and it began at approximately 9:30 in the morning. The interview with Mr. Cook is complete on this side of this cassette although we do plan to go back and talk with him in the future, but until such time this is the total interview with Mr. Cook.

LARRY: I'm a little bit late Bill. I'm sorry.

WILLIAM: Oh, that's o.k. I ain't got anything to do much anyway. I got o' get a load o' gravel, but I got a lot o' time to do that between now and night.

LARRY: Bill, can you tell me when your family came to North Dakota?

WILLIAM: God! Well, I don't know--well, I was born here, see. Mother came from Petersburg, Ontario, Canada and my dad came from Prince Edward, Ireland, Charleton. The old man was nine years old he said when he came here and then mother, I guess, she was just a slip of a girl too. 10, 12 years old I imagine. But the old man, I know, he's always talked about being nine years old when they came into North Dakota.

LARRY: Do you have any idea, Bill, what year that would have been?

Would that have been in the 70's or in the 80's?

WILLIAM: Oh, God. It must o' been back in the 70's, I imagine, because, you see, I'm 87 so it'd have to be--now, I don't remember what age it was when he died either. I think, mother was 78 though when she died, but we was always--well, my folks was always over at Neche. My Grandfather Cook lived over at Backoo all the years that I knew, see, and my Grandfather Thompson homesteaded at Neche. When I was a chunk of a boy, I'd suppose I'd be ~~7~~⁷, ~~8~~⁸ years old, the old man bought a *eighty* there right along side of grandfather's so that's where we stayed all those years. Then I drifted off by myself after awhile. Well, I wasn't too old. I was 12. I'd be 13 that fall and I didn't want to go to school. The freight train was comin' across the bridge there and goin' out slow. I throwed my books in the ditch and I hopped the freight and I wound up in Omaha, Nebraska. I got to Grand Forks and I had a cousin there runnin' switch engine. Well, I rode along with him for awhile there and then he

put me on with another fireman goin' to Melrose. I put the coal ahead. Rode in the engine and the coal ~~was~~ ^{gets} pretty far back in the coal car and I shovelled up to the front for 'em. Then he got there. Well, then he kicked me on with another guy that he knew and that's how I got to Omaha. Them days it was all livery barn stuff, see, so I hiked around and found a livery barn. I was used to livery barns, see. I got into this livery barn and there was an old guy come in there. Well, I asked him if he knew anybody that wanted t' hire a kid? Ya, he did. He was a old truck driver, see, haulin' stuff into Omaha. Oh, lettuce and onions and radish and whatnot. So I ~~worked~~ worked for him all summer. Then in the fall, why, I decided I'd come home so I got back to Grand Forks and there was a old lumberjack there by the name of Jim Canaday. He was broke. Drank all his money as far as I was concerned. He got talkin' t' me and I had a little stake, about \$180.

LARRY: Is that right?

WILLIAM: And he said to me, "Kid, if you buy me a ticket out to Cass Lake in the lumber camp, come with me and I'll get you a good job."

O.K., that was fine. I thought about it. I was a little bit leery of him, see. I ~~thought, goddam,~~ ^{thought, goddam,} he'd get my money and that'd be it. So the next day I decided I'd buy him a ticket and go with him and that's how I got into the lumber camp and from there I shipped out with a bunch of loggin' horses, big heavy stout horses, out to White Fish, Montana.

LARRY: Was that the next spring Bill?

WILLIAM: That was the next spring. After it broke in the winter in the loggin' woods, why, then these horses went up onto a railroad with a construction outfit so I went with 'em. I was drivin' 6 on a plow, you know. There was another guy holdin' the plow while I dragged the horses. We'd plow this side o' the track and cross over and plow on the other side, see, so it'd loosen the dirt so the wheel scrapers could get it. So I stayed there ~~for, oh,~~ ^{for, oh,} maybe a month, month and a half and ~~Jesus,~~ ^{Jesus,} the cowpunchers come through there ~~and, holy hell,~~ ^{and, holy hell,} that looked good to me, that saddle horses and that stuff, so I quit there and I went with them.

I put in 8 years at that punchin' cows and then I got hurt. I got my arm broke and my 3 ribs, my collarbone and my leg.

LARRY: How did that happen Bill?

WILLIAM: Horse fell on me.

LARRY: Oh?

WILLIAM: Ya. It was this morning. We was roundin' up a bunch o' beef cattle to ship out, see, and there was one big steer probably 5, 6, 7 years old and whenever we got to the river he'd always cut back and ~~you~~ ^{hell,} you couldn't bend him, see. So the old boss give orders. "Don't let that old steer back," he said, "if you have t' tie on t' ~~him~~ ^{him 3} or 4 of ~~you~~ ^{youse,} and drag him across the river. Well, he broke back on my side and I took after him and hit an alkali spot. This pony I was ridin' was runnin' kind o' careful, but he wasn't makin' much time so I kicked him with the spurs. He made a jump and when he did, his feet flew up from under him and ~~he~~ ^{Jesus,} he come down on me. Well, he just broke my arm that shot and maybe my collarbone it was. Didn't know too much about it. But then he made a jump to get up, see, and ~~his~~ ^{Jesus,} his feet slipped again and he had me down. Full weight that time. Well, that took care o' me for awhile.

LARRY: But you rode for that outfit for 8 years?

WILLIAM: Ya.

LARRY: You did.

WILLIAM: Ya. Well, it was, course, a big roundup outfit. It was the association, you know. There was Phillip & Larson. There was the Bear Paw Pool and Ben Stevens and old man Ehru and Al Schulz. It was a hell of a big company. Well, I rode from anywhere from Poplar west to ~~there~~ ^{Hovre}, from ~~there~~ ^{Hovre} over to the Bear Paw Mountains and from that north up into Wild Horse Lake. That's on the edge of Canada and all through that country, White Fish, big ~~country~~ sandy Anaconda, and Butte and all through there, little town by the name o' Zortman down--well, they put in abbit dam in the Milk River there later. I think, they were goin' to break up

a bunch o' stuff in there. Sugarbeets as much as I knew what they were....

LARRY: Ya. Did that land all belong to one outfit?

WILLIAM: W-well, yes, in one word it did and in another way--each guy. It was really.... I think, the big part of it Stevens & Schulz and old man Eruhe were in on the reservation. I forget the reservation.

Goldwann Reservation I beleive. I kind o' forgot. That's a hell of a long time ago. Then I got in up at Havre--oh, not Havre--Morgan boys up in the Bear Paw Mountains. They come back here with--they'd struck out--a trail herd o' broncs and we trailled them broncs all through the western part and down through here. We sold the last of the outfit in Neche.

LARRY: Is that right.

WILLIAM: There was 7 head and there was a fella by the name of Dan Shay that bought the tail end of the herd. Then I was goin' back. I stayed over winter down around Neche--Cavalier I mean t' say. Then I decided, well, I'd go back west again, but I was broke and that took care of that. ~~So anyway,~~ there was another guy that I knowed up at Walhalla. He had taken a job settin' up machinery for Campbell, old man Campbell and his son, so I was goin' t^o go up there and go t' work for him if I'd get a stake enough. 8, \$10 would o' got me back out there. ~~But anyway,~~ why, I come to this little town Laden. I beleive that was in 1907 or '08. I'm not really sure. ~~But anyway,~~ why, I stopped at a little store there, bought a little lunch, crackers and some cheese and that stuff, and I was goin' to hike her up to Walhalla. The guy come in there and I was settin' out in front of the store and he asked me where I was goin' and I told him I was goin' t' Walhalla, had a job up there. He said, "I'm lookin' for a man." He said, "Farm work." He asked me what I was goin' t^o do and I said I was goin' t' set up machinery. He said, "I don't think you'll like that. You'd better come to work for me. Eight months." "No," I said, "I won't do that." I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go with you for a month and," I said, "if we get along good, I'll stay and," I said, "if I don't like you, I'll walk away."

And I said, "Anytime you're not suited with me give me my check and I'll be on the road." "O.K.," he said, "I'll take ya." I stayed with him 18 months and then I wound up by landin' here. I've been here 66 years.

LARRY: When you caught that freight train, Bill, did your folks know you were....

WILLIAM: ~~William~~ N-no. My sister knew. She was with me. She was 2 years older than me. They didn't pay no attention to kids them days.

LARRY: No.

WILLIAM: If they took off, why, that was it. Oh, mother, I guess, done a little sweatin', I guess, about it. She always told me she did, but dad didn't give a dam where you were at as long as you were--that was just it. I don't know. A lot of kids that way. Hell, they'd take off and be gone for years and all at once they'd turn up again.

LARRY: When were you born then Bill?

WILLIAM: In 1888.

LARRY: 1888?

WILLIAM: Ya. 1888. God, Jesus, there's been a lot o' things happened since then. I remember the Spanish American War.

LARRY: Ya, ya.

WILLIAM: I guess, I can't say the world is goin' ahead any. I don't like the setup. You know, this unemployment and all that stuff. You know, the goddammed farmer is more to blame for that unemployment than anybody.

LARRY: Ya.

WILLIAM: Because this big modern machinery that they got nowadays.... Well, one man will go out here.... I got a kid was here last night and he was tellin' me that he cultivated 160 acres of summerfallow yesterday. Well, he's got one of them big versatile tractors and a 44 foot cultivator. Well, you know.

LARRY: Ya.

WILLIAM: Alright. Well, he starts there at 7:00 and he run 'til about 8:30, 9. Well, he's done the work about 4 different men, see. One guy

alone. Well, the minute they fix it so one guy has got to pay unemployment or overtime that's what's goin' t' help otherwise no because they send a man out there and he's doin' 3 men's work or 4 and they pay him straight time. O.K. When they start crackin' time and a half on him, it may change things. And look at it! ^{Start} You can just look back over those years. It used to threshin' ~~Well~~, I remember when they used to--and my grandfather--what the hell did they call it--used to have a reaper. It'd cut, ~~and~~ fall on the ~~canvas~~ ^{CANVAS}, and there'd be ~~an~~ ^{a big} arm come down and sweep it off, see. Then they took some wheat, ~~at~~ ^{twist} the heads together, ~~and~~ make a band, and put it around ~~the~~ ^{that's son of a bitch,} ~~and~~ shocked it. Well, pretty soon the binder come in. Well, that was quite a lot better, but then you needed shockers. Then the next thing, why, they quit stackin' and startin' usin' threshin' machines, bundle teams. That cut things down some. God, I can see my old grandmother and grandfather yet with a flail. They had a big blanket, horse blanket or somethin', and grandmother would throw a bunch o' wheat on there then the old man would knock it out ~~with~~ ^{stop} this stick, ~~about~~ like that and then the handle on it and a piece a leather on the center of it and that's the way they threshed.

LARRY: What was your grandfather's name Bill?

WILLIAM: Thompson.

LARRY: First name?

WILLIAM: Lewis.

LARRY: Lewis Thompson?

WILLIAM: Ya.

LARRY: And on the other side it was?

WILLIAM: Jonah.

LARRY: Cook?

WILLIAM: Ya. Jonah Cook.

LARRY: And both sets of grandparents came down from Ontario?

WILLIAM: Well, Grandfather Thompson and grandmother came from Petersboro, Ontario, but then dad came from Prince Edward, Ireland, like I say, and I

'spose--well, that don't belong to ~~Canada~~ Canada. Does it? Well, ya, I 'spose, it does. Ya. Well, that's where they come from.

LARRY: What nationalities homesteaded around ~~here~~ ^{here} Bill? Were they mostly Canadian?

WILLIAM: Yes, I beleive, they were. The majority was Canadians. Over at Neche--well, I know more about Neche. Ya-a. There was Krembis in there ~~homesteaded~~ ^{homesteaded} old Tom and Bill, and then they raised their family. Well, they came from Canada too. I can't remember. Well, goddamned it, they were from all over because there was a old neighbor right close to us and he came from Ireland.

LARRY: Oh?

WILLIAM: And then there was another neighbor just east across the track from our land and they came from England; but they might o' come through the way o' Canada, but this old Irishman I'm not too damned sure.

LARRY: What was his name Bill?

WILLIAM: Tom Kelly. And he fought in the North and South war because he used to tell us all them stories.

LARRY: Did your dad homestead up at Neche then?

WILLIAM: No, he bought 80 acres there. He bought it from a old fella by the name of Finley. He was a bachlor. I don't know where this old Finley ~~come~~ ^{old} come from. But there was ^{old} Sampy Bier and old Tom Kelly and old man Finley not too far, just around us that we--course, kids knowed them. They were all bachlors. In later years this old Tom Kelly's daughter and son come out from Ireland to stay with him. He had left his family and drifted off and got back into that country. And old Sampy Bier as much as I know about him is he had a brother and he was kind of across the fence from him. They never got along very good. Then there was old Dick Jin and Jack Jin and they had families; but, I think, they came from Canada too.

start
LARRY: Who did you buy this land from Bill?

WILLIAM: Jack Anderson. He was another Irishman here. His folks came in here. I don't know where they came from. I didn't learn too much

about them because I was only here a very few years when he was ready to pull out and I bought this for \$4,000, this quarter. "Holy God," everyone said, "you'll never pay for that." It was all timber just like that out there only worse because it was full o' underbrush at that time, but I cleared it up. I got it all except 20 acres. There was one 20 acre field or strip out there that I hadn't got to yet and a guy come in with a bulldozer. Well, I watched that bulldozer work. Well, Jesus, that's the boy for that. I hired him right away. Pushed off that last 20 acres.

LARRY: How did you clear it before that?

WILLIAM: Oh, by hand. Dig around those trees like that with a grub hoe, and cut off all the roots, and push 'em over, and chop and dig 'til they fell, that's all. Oh, Jesus, I used to.... Well, ~~trees like this sprout there~~ I used to figure that 4 of them a day was pretty good day's work. You had to work like hell to dig out one of them big Elms. 4 of them in a day. Oh, I cleaned most of this by hand, you know. Then I got usin' the horses. I'd hook way up high on 'em, see, and after I had the roots cut then I'd saw a block right close to the bottom of the tree, whip it over and that would jerk the little roots out.

LARRY: And you started farming here in '19?

WILLIAM: In 1910. I come in here, I think, it was either '07 or '08, but I seem to think it was 1907.

LARRY: What would you do with the wood Bill?

WILLIAM: Oh, I hauled most o' mine across the line. That was a winter job. I'd sell it to those fellas out on the prairie for \$1 a load and then I'd cut a lot of it into cordwood and I used t' haul ~~it~~ ^{it} There was a mill over north of the line there about 16 miles from here one way. I used to take a load every day across the line. Some days I'd get over across the river ~~and, Christ,~~ ^{and, Christ,} it'd be stormin' so bad you could hardly see the horses. I had a hell of a good team o' horses and they never was drove by anybody but myself. The horses knew what I wanted them to do about as much as I did myself.

LARRY: Would you sell the wood over there at the mill then?

WILLIAM: \$4 a cord. Sell it to that millin' outfit. They didn't fire with coal or anything. They used all cordwood and they were grindin' flour. I'd go over there and put my team in the barn. Well, there was a big shed there as far as I was concerned. Put 'em in the shed and then they always had lots o' ground feed there such as wild oats and that stuff and I'd give 'em a big feed o' grain. While they were eatin' I'd unload my cordwood and eat my lunch and head for home. I never seen ~~this~~ ^{hardly} place in the winter months ~~and~~ in the daylight. I'd always get home in the dark, ~~and~~ unhitch 'em, ~~and~~ go to the bush and put on my load for the next morning, drive her out there and put a couple little cordwood sticks so my sleigh didn't freeze down. The next morning I'd take off with it.

LARRY: Every day?

~~omit~~ WILLIAM: Nearly every day. When I run out o' dry wood, well, then I'd cut my wood--I went ~~every~~ every other day that way. I'd cut my load today t' take it out tommorrow. Well, then the next day I'd cut another load and the next day I'd take that.

LARRY:

~~And you~~ And you cut all that by hand with a buck saw?

WILLIAM: The axe.

LARRY: Oh, with an axe.

~~omit~~ WILLIAM: Ya. No, I never had no use for a buck saw. Well, hell, that was another thing when I was a kid, see, I'd go t' work for these fellas. \$18 a month if you want t' know. They'd generally have, oh, probably 30, 40 loads o' poles hauled up and then you could use the buck saw on them. They'd hire you the 1st o' March and then you'd cut wood for the next year, fan seed, and that kind o' stuff. That's how I got disgusted with things. I worked for one old guy there and a good day, well, we could haul straw or hay or something, put it in the barn for the feed. On a stormy day if it was too windy to do anything, well, then you'd take a load o' wheat to Neche. I worked for \$10 a month.

LARRY: Where was this Bill?

WILLIAM: Over at Neche.

LARRY: Oh.

Omit
WILLIAM: \$10 a month.

LARRY: Was this before you were 13 when you jumped the freight?

WILLIAM: Ya, I was a small kid, but ~~were~~ were a big family and they were poor. The old man was cuttin' cordwood for \$.50 a cord to make a livin'.

LARRY: Is that right? Whew!

Omit
WILLIAM: Ya, \$.50 a cord. After I came here I cut cordwood for the neighbors. The old fella out here had some. I used to walk out there, ~~and~~ cut 3 cords a day, and come back and do my chores. My old father-in-law lived over on the river over there and I used to walk over there t' cut cordwood for him--me and another fella. Well, the other fella stayed over there, but I had t' go back and forth home because of the Mrs. and chores, you know. I had 4 head o' horses then and a couple o' cows. I don't really remember.

LARRY: And you cut that cordwood with an axe?

WILLIAM: With the axe.

LARRY: And you could cut 3 cords a day?

WILLIAM: Ya, ~~easy~~ easy.

LARRY: Is that right!

WILLIAM: I could go to the bush ^{with} ~~it~~ it and no matter how cold it was I'd throw my jacket on the brush pile and went to work. Oh, I could go out there and get there about 9:00 and by just the edge o' dark, why, I had 3 cords cut and piled. That was \$1.50.

LARRY: ~~It~~. Would that green wood burn or would you cut ^{just} ~~the~~ wind ~~fall~~ //

WILLIAM: No, you had t'--well, a lot o' people burned it. It depended on what kind o' wood it was. This green Poplar don't burn very good, but green Ash or green Oak burns real good. Green Ash especially.

LARRY: That's hard for me t' imagine, Bill, cutting 3 cords o' wood a day with an axe.

WILLIAM: Ya. I know it's hard for these kids. ^{They'll as much as say} ~~as much as they will~~ you're

liein'.

LARRY: How much land did you clear here then?

WILLIAM: Well, there's a quarter here and there was 7 acres cleared here when I came and I cleared the rest.

LARRY: And it's all cleared now?

WILLIAM: All except this grove and I have a hell of a time to keep them out of it. They go and cut trees. It don't take a smart man, you know, t' cut a tree down, but it takes a hell of a ^{Smart} ~~man~~ man to get it back.

LARRY: Ya.

WILLIAM: So that's the way that worked.

LARRY: Did they use ~~this~~ oak for anything but firewood?

WILLIAM: O-oh, ya, some of them over by the river where they got good Oak, why, they.... There was a old man Fitzsimons over here. He had a saw mill and he used to saw it. They used it for inside of the barn like floor ^{joists,} ~~joists,~~ and studding, and all that stuff. It was really good. When you built a barn with the bottom part of it oak, by God, it stayed there. Well, it's not too far. Over here a couple miles. There's a guy over there that had oak sawed out for the bottom part o' the barn for floor ^{joists} ~~joists~~ and all that stuff. Jesus, that's as good yet as it was. Well, I was over there last summer. Hell, that barn is standing just as good as when they put it up. But I got a bunch of ^{Elm} ~~elm~~ and ^{Cottonwood} ~~cottonwood~~ sawed out for this barn o' mine out here, but I'd been better off sleepin' because that stuff wouldn't take it in a barn where there's steam and wet, you know. It rots out too quick. This barn out there is ruined right now. ^{Stop} I don't know really what I'll do. I think, I'll take the bottom part off of it and set the roof down and make kind of a Quonset out of it. A couple weeks ago we bought and pulled in a coal shed from up there at Walhalla. They don't handle anymore coal. We bought it and pulled it ^{put it together t'} If a kid in here, cut it in two, and we're goin' t' make a shop out of it. ~~It~~ ^{It} wants a shop and, oh, he does a lot o' welding, monkeying around, no place to put any tools or anything. Oh, I had a good log building here that we used for a shop and a chicken coop, but a kid got monkeying

in there cleanin' up a old snow machine or some darn thing, had a can o' gas and had a fire in there. First thing you know it got too close and exploded and, hell, burned up.

LARRY: Were there a lot of log buildings around here in the 80's?

WILLIAM: Oh, ya! Hell, yes, they were all log. There's an odd one left standing but not too many. They were all logs. Them old fellas that hued out.... I don't know whether you know what a broad axe is?

LARRY: Ya, ya.

WILLIAM: Well, they used to... My old grandfather used to stretch a chalk line along the wall. Cryps, he'd peel her off. And he had a old big oak log ^{way bigger than that basket there} for a water trough and he had chopped all the center out of it, see.

LARRY: Is that right?

WILLIAM: A big old trough about 16 feet long and, oh, I imagine, it would be--didn't pay too much attention to it when I was a kid--hold 50 gallons o' water in that neighborhood. All the pig troughs and that stuff were little logs, you know, like that and chopped out and that was pig troughs.

LARRY: Were most of these log cabins built out of oak?

WILLIAM: Practically all oak. The one that I built here I built out of poplar, out of poplar logs. I got a little log building standing over there we used for a noye a lot. I did use it in the early days for a milkhouse, see. We used to have a cream seperator out there and then that grove was all fenced off good and that's where I used to shut the calves in. After we seperated we fed them there. We used to milk 8, 10 cows here.

LARRY: Now, you moved here in 1908. How long did it take to get kind o' ahead of things, you know, and get yourself established?

WILLIAM: Well, it took quite a little while. First startin' thing, see, when I first bought this thing, I didn't have any money and I had to give a \$500 down payment on it. Well, I made the deal and my dad financed me for the \$500; but it was an estate, see, and this fella was gettin' ready

t' go to the coast, him and his sister. They were ~~two~~ a old couple, him and his sister. So it took quite awhile before I got the thing straightened out so I had a clear deed of it so, anyway, why, in the meantime me and the Mrs. went out threshin'. She worked on the cookcar and I hauled water for them steam engines so we got our \$500. When the time come, we had our own money to make the payment and the \$500 that dad had put up for me was in the bank. We never drewed ^{it} out. So it went on that way for, oh, a number o' years and I got a loan company to back me up for the balance of it. I paid so much every fall, see. But in the meantime, why, dad died and our stuff was in estate. So he had this land over at Neche and one of the brothers got a hold of ~~the~~ ^{the old man's} papers and stuff and they were goin' to clip me for the.... You see, my share of it after it was settled--now, I'm not goin' to say--~~come out~~ 1,300 or 1,800. I don't remember which; but, anyway, they were goin' t' clip me for this note. Well, God, I had never drawed it out o' the bank. Well, we'll go to the bank. I ~~never~~ took that money out. Go and see what we can find out at the bank. There was a young fella at the bank by the name o' Jimmy Simonington. still over at Neche yet.

LARRY: Oh. That was the Bank of Neche?

WILLIAM: M-m-m. So we went to the bank and he dug out the papers. He said, "No, he never got the money. Mr. Cook drawed it out," he said, "and put it back in his checking account." So I got cleared of that, but I come damned near to payin' that note that I didn't owe, see.

LARRY: Ya, ya. When did you get married Bill?

WILLIAM: 1910.

LARRY: And you were living here then?

WILLIAM: No, I was livin' just a half mile east o' here on that next quarter down there. I had farmed that for a few years, see, before I bought this. But instead o' goin' ahead it looks t' me like the country's slippin' back. You know, one of the worst things that happened here that I can see is when they took the little schools out, when they started busin'. Course, it's easy t' understand that. Now, we're in Walhalla.

Well, they got so damned far behind up there with their taxes and stuff and then they come out and got the farmers t' pay their taxes for 'em. That's what it added up it. Course, they had a vote on it. Well, you know damn well there wasn't enough people in the country in these areas that it was easy for them to out vote us so that's the way the schoolbuses got started. But this little school right down here on the corner of this quarter when they went t' school, they didn't go run and play football and basketball and runnin' the buses all over the country. Oh, I don't like that not a bit. I don't think that was a good move. In fact, I know it wasn't because this little school there was 4 different girls that I know graduated from that school and went teachin' school. There was a girl by the name of Bernice Wicks, there was Rose Liléco, and there was old Clifford Twins and there over^{north of} here a couple miles. They still live there and they're done teachin' school now. They're too old.

LARRY: Were there any small country stores or post offices around here that are gone now?

WILLIAM: Oh, God, yes! Oh, Laden's gone now, Backoo is gone, Hyde Park is gone, Bay Centre is gone, Tyner is gone. God, them little stores all faded up. Ya, ya, so that's what I say. And you know what done that. The land hogs.

LARRY: Ya.

WILLIAM: Land hogs only because they grabbed all the land and farmin' it now. Big farms. Well, they drove all the.... There^{was} more people.... on homesteads when I come here than there are now, a whole heck of a lot more.

LARRY: Ya. What was the average sized farm, Bill, in 1910 or '15?

WILLIAM: A quarter and an 80, a quarter, mostly quarters. This in here right where I am was a swamp at that time. Heck, you couldn't.... Well, if you come into this yard with a load, why, 10 to 1 you'd get stuck, wagon'd drop right through. All this road, blacktop, here was all corduroy, willows cut and laid, you know, and then dirt throwed over

it.

LARRY: Oh?

WILLIAM: That's how that road got through here and then it only went up here a half mile and then from there on it was--oh, they could get through there in the wintertime and dry times in the summer. On a average you couldn't go that road. This road out here a mile east o' me was the same thing.

LARRY: Oh, and that was all built up by cuttin' willows and....

WILLIAM: Cuttin' willows, layin' 'em crossways on the road and dirt on top of them and the dirt was put on top with a shovel.

LARRY: How many kids did you and your wife raise Bill?

WILLIAM: 6, 22 girls and 4 boys.

LARRY: Do you think if you were 25, 30 years old today and if you and your wife had 6 children that you could still raise them on a quarter section of land or half section.

WILLIAM: Well, we never were hungry let's put it that way. We didn't have all everything so fancy, but we always had lots to live on as far as that's concerned, never were short that I know of. The first winter that we were together that was the toughest one. We had pretty tough scratchin' then; but, like I say, I was cuttin' cordwood and then I got a job for old Charley Saylor up here balin' hay, \$1 a day.

LARRY: They had a hay baler in those days?

WILLIAM: Ya.

LARRY: Is that right?

WILLIAM: It was run by horses. It went around like that, see, and then that big rod and that's the way they used to bale hay.

LARRY: Oh, I see. It was a horse power?

WILLIAM: M-m-m. Threshin' machines first was horse power too because cause--God, I must o' been pretty small--I can remember. There was a place up on the top of it, a guy used to sit up there, and you had a arm went out like that and you tied the horses to that and they went around. Some of 'em used to git lazy and they'd stop, see, and, o' course,

when they'd stop, they'd stop the threshin' machine and the whole works. I had a job at that one time. At grandfather's I stood up there and I had a long gad and if they stopped, why, I liked to give them a crack across the butt with that gad. Oh, you go back over things.... And the elevators, you know. They had an old blind horse in a shed there and he went round and round and elevated the grain and that stuff. They hauled all the grain in them days in sacks. Jesus! It sounds comical.

LARRY: No, it doesn't Bill.

WILLIAM: But, you know, all the graneries.... God, it's ~~too~~ too bad it's just a few years too early. ^{There was} ~~an~~ an old guy over here, a guy by the name of Johnruh. Well, he wasn't just an exception. He was an average.... Well, everybody was the same. But they'd carry the wheat up in the sacks and there was a hole in the floor upstairs and you dumped it down t' fill the bends.

LARRY: Is that right?

WILLIAM: Fill the bends in the bottom. Now, it's comical but it's the truth.

LARRY: Ya.

WILLIAM: Goddamn it. Course, there wasn't much but there was quite a lot, too, because we were kids and they had the threshin' machines, the first ones, they had a place that elevated it up, see, and then it spilled into a little shoot and come down. Well, they always hired a man. They'd borrow sacks from one another, you know. Everybody had a bunch o' sacks, but he had his name printed on them. I'd borrow your sacks and the ^{maybe} next neighbor's sacks when they were threshin'. Well, then they'd go to your place then they'd get my sacks, see. When we were all done in the fall, well, pick out the sacks with the names on. They'd get back to where they belonged. This threshin' machine had 2 half bushels--or were they bushels. I don't remember. But anyway, there was 2 little spouts there and there was a little board. You pulled it up, see, when your half bushel was full, you shut it down, somebody held a sack and a guy dumped it, see. Well, then he'd pull up the other

little board and that would be full, well, he'd dump that one. Well, that's the way they handled their grain. Then they drove up into the elevator and you drove up along side a big hopper outfit and threwed the sacks out of the wagon over into this big hopper outfit. There was no loose grain. It wasn't handled. Then later years they got a hole in the floor. You could haul loose grain, dump it down.

LARRY: Ya. Bill, in those early years when you first came here was most of your income from cutting cordwood or would you sell butter or....

WILLIAM: Oh, ya, we sold butter and eggs. It was all butter at that time and then a few years later we got t' shippin' cream, see. Shippin' cream out.

LARRY: Where was your nearest store then? Backoo or....

WILLIAM: Laden.

LARRY: Oh. How far is that from here?

WILLIAM: Oh, 3, 400 yards.

LARRY: Oh, is that right?

WILLIAM: Ya. In fact, just out there and across the....

LARRY: Is it gone now?

WILLIAM: Oh, ya, it's all gone. There was 2 elevators there when I came here, 2 elevators, a lumberyard, and a grocery store, and a drug-store.

LARRY: Is that right?

WILLIAM: A blacksmith shop, and a machine shed where they sold machinery.

LARRY: It's all gone?

WILLIAM: Sure, it's all gone. Every bit of it.

LARRY: When did that happen? Gradually or....

WILLIAM: Ya, gradually. The elevator was the last thing to go. They burnt the last elevator here 4, 5 years ago. The drugstore and the grocery store burned down. After old Charley Sayler died, why, his son took over. There was a post office there and all that junk, but it just eventually drifted.... I've changed mailing addresses, I think, 4 times now and never moved once.

LARRY: What other ones have closed?

WILLIAM: What other stores?

LARRY: Ya. Why have you had t' change 4 times?

WILLIAM: Well, first, they took the post office out o' Laden. Well, then the mail route come in. We got our mail from Backoo. Well, now they're closin'.... They haven't done it yet; but they're goin' to take the post office out o' Backoo and when they do, well, then our mailin' address will probably be Walhalla or Cavalier one of the two, but I sooner think Walhalla maybe.

LARRY: Who had the threshing machine around Bill? Was it a company machine or....

WILLIAM: Oh, they were privately owned. We had one at home. My dad had a threshing machine and his half brother had a threshin' machine and over at Leroy there was an old fella by the name of Louie Marquette. He had a threshing machine. Walter Gardner had a threshing machine and Jack Fitzsimmons had a threshing machine. Oh, there was quite a few of them in here.

LARRY: Would there be enough sons and farmers to make up the crew?

WILLIAM: Well, some of the stuff that used to come in here was lumber-jacks from Duluth and Minnesota. They'd come up in the fall, you know.

LARRY: Did you guys ever have any trouble with the IWW?

WILLIAM: Yes, we did.

LARRY: Tell me about that Bill?

WILLIAM: Well, that was pretty much ahead o' my time. I don't remember too much about that, but I heard them talk about the "wobblies" they called 'em. They'd stick for bigger wages or some damn thing, you see, and if they shocked for ya--I heard 'em. Now, I don't know this; but I heard 'em say that if they couldn't get the wages they want, why, instead of shockin' 'em with the butts down they'd shock 'em with the heads down. Christ, if you got 'em shocked with the heads on, come a ~~rain~~ ^{rain} which we always got, well, God, that would all grow to the ground

and a hell of a mess.

LARRY: Ya.

WILLIAM: And then after that come the combine. That done away with somemore labor and help, you know. Well, that didn't work out real good because if you got rain enough, why, that grows to the ground to this day.

LARRY: Ya. Do you kind o' miss the old threshing days?

WILLIAM: Well, they were so much better. So much better. You know, you could take a grain field and, cryps Almighty, you shocked it good and, damn it, you could thresh it way out in Christmastime, and now you've got a certain time to get it and if you don't get it, you know what happens. Well, not too many years ago we had a crop here and my son was up.... Well, he had gotten appendicitis and he had to go to the hospital. His wife was kind o' a little bit snotty so I was goin' t' thresh it. No, you're not goin' t' thresh it. No, you're not goin' t' thresh it. Chuck said not too thresh it. I listened to her for awhile. "Now," I said, "you go to the house," I said. "I'm runnin' this thing," I said, "and I'm goin' t' thresh this crop." We had it on shares, see. So we pulled in on Saturday. The land was tough and wet; but, God, we threshed it anyway. One of the neighbors down here had a dryer and I hauled it down the dryer and dried it out. That was on Saturday. Sunday it started t' rain and the neighbor acrossed from me didn't get his threshed, see, and it laid there all winter under the snow, see.

LARRY: Is that right?

WILLIAM: But he threshed it in the spring, but it was in pretty poor shape and if I hadn't taken mine in on Saturday, why, I wouldn't o' got it and that's not too many years ago. So that's what I say. Right now, why, it don't make any difference whether it's Sunday or Monday or what day it is. ^{If it's} ~~fit~~ fit t' thresh, well, let's thresh, git her up.

LARRY: Ya, ya.

WILLIAM: 'Cause all it has t' do is the weather has t' change and you've lost it, that's it. Right now, why, the crop looks bad here. That

goddamned 3 inches o' rain does us more harm than it done us good, I'll tell ya, 'cause we had a pretty good stand o' stuff out here. Holy Moses, when I went out there the next morning after that rain, it was beat right into the ground and it still looks rough. Oh, I would say if things breaks real good, we might get 10, 15 bushel to the acre.

LARRY: In the days of the horses, Bill, did each farmer breed his own stock or were there horsetraders around here?

WILLIAM: No, each guy.... Different guys had stallions and they made a business of just travellin' through the country and breedin' mares. You had a choice. I had one here. Well, in fact, I had 2, I guess. I had a bay Clyde stallion that I had got. A young horse and a pretty nice lookin' horse. Then I brought in a carload of broncs in here from up in Montana and I had that bunch here. There was a little bay stallion among 'em and I kept him. God, I raised some good--I had a bunch o' little Clyde mares. When I crossed 'em with that little bronc, boy, did I have some tough horses.

LARRY: Oh?

WILLIAM: God, you had t' watch 'em all the time. The boys got big enough so they were drivin' horses and stuff and, Jesus Christ, they used to let 'em away every once in awhile and, boy, they'd really strip things.