**Interview with Merle Allen**

**Interviewed by Doug Sillers for the Heritage Education Commission**

**Interviewed on November 21, 1984**

**Merle Allen - MA**

**Doug Sillers - DS**

**DS: Merle, we're making a tape for the use of the Heritage Society at Moorhead State University, and they've asked me to interview you as it relates to farming. I guess I would like to start--you give us when you started farming and then if you want to go on to that, tell us a little about what it was like and what your power was and how fast you moved to a different kind of power and what the economy was, and that sort of thing. Do you just want to go ahead and start out and tell us about when you started?**

**MA: I was born and raised on the farm in Glyndon township and I worked with my father until I was 20-some years old, after we were married; and he was a potato man--he raised potatoes, had milk cows, chickens, and pigs, and a few geese, and some turkeys. And you had a little of everything at that time, but the farm wasn't big enough for my wife and my two boys at that time, so I rented another piece of ground in 1932. We had the use of it in '32, but we didn't have the buildings. In the fall of '33, we got the buildings and I moved over to where I am now.**

**DS: Did you build your own house, Merle?**

**MA: No, the house was there when we moved in.**

**DS: Well, I know in the years I've known you, you've added an awful lot of buildings. But what did you use for power in those days? You were one of the early tractor users, weren't you?**

**MA: Yes, I was. We had horsepower at home until I moved over there and then I started out with an old Case tractor. I had an old Allis-Chalmers, 2035 Model E which was wore out when I got it--and we used to have to tighten the connecting rods every night on it. And it wasn't easy them days because this pan probably weighed 150 pounds and you had no way of lifting it. You had to manhandle it. And I had a Case tractor, and then about that time International came out with that little F12, and I had this F12 tractor and I put a generator on it with a battery and lights and I used to farm this section of land with this little F12 tractor.**

**DS: What time was that?**

**MA: That was in 1934 when I got the tractor.**

**DS: The next year you started with machinery. But you've been kind of a mechanic and mover of equipment as long as I've known you, and that's since 1946.**

**MA: Yes, I've always been for progress on this. I had one of the first--not the first--tractor to be on rubber; I put rubber on this F12 and then after that we got an F20, which was a bigger tractor. That would pull three bottoms. But to start with this little F12, we used to run it day and night for six weeks at a time.**

**DS: For how many bottoms?**

**MA: Two bottoms.**

**DS: I often think of the F14 and its governor. Didn't you have trouble with the governor?**

**MA: No, very little trouble.**

**DS: I used a governor. I had an F14 when I started, as late as '46, and I really did a little swearing at that governor [laughter] on the F14.**

**What makes you like farming, or do you like farming?**

**MA: Yes, I was born and raised farming, and I love it.**

**DS: And you've been successful.**

**MA: Yeah.**

**DS: What are some of the disagreeable things you did in farming that you didn't like?**

**MA: There's been a lot of things, Doug, that have been real tough, I'll tell you. I can't say what is disagreeable, but it's just been a tough battle all the way through life.**

**DS: Until when?**

**MA: Well, it's still a tough battle. If you're a good farmer, it's still tough.**

**DS: Well, but we've improved--the equipment has improved.**

**MA: With the machinery you have now, it is much nicer to work than it was then, as you know.**

**DS: What do you mean by tough farming? In what way--economically?**

**MA: Well, you've got horsepower. With that little F12 tractor the best you would do is 15 acres in 24 hours. Today you go out and do 15 acres in an hour.**

**DS: But you said it's tough farming. And what I'm trying to get you to tell us is what you mean by tough farming. What has made it tough farming. And yet you like it.**

**MA: Well, conditions--it's always been money matters with finances and everything else that went with it.**

**DS: Did you ever have any trouble getting credit?**

**MA: I started raising sugarbeets in 1934 and it seemed like if you had a beet contract, the bank always honored your notes.**

**DS: How many acres do you have, Merle?**

**MA: I started with 20.**

**DS: What did you do for labor?**

**MA: We had Mexican labor at that time. The first year we cultivated with horses, and we dug them with a single-row digger, loaded them on a high-wheeled wagon, hauled them about a half a mile to the beet dump.**

**DS: What was that beet dump?**

**MA: That was Ruthruf [phonetic] Siding.**

**DS: Oh, yeah, that's right because I hauled there, too.**

**You say you used horses originally for cultivation, but when did you put in the drainage. When did you drainage from Wiedeman's? Not drainage; I mean irrigation.**

**MA: Irrigation was in 1940.**

**DS: It was that late; it wasn't earlier than that?**

**MA: No.**

**DS: What was '35 like? Didn't you have problems in '35?**

**MA: 1935--we had a rust problem with our wheat. I had one of the most beautiful fields of wheat you ever seen in your life and made about 3 bushels to the acre with the rust. And '36 was a dry year. I had a field of beets, at 153 acres, that had they been in the conditions that we have now, they would have made 15 or 16 tons; but as they wound up, they made 3 5/8 ton per acre.**

**DS: Why do you say the conditions now?**

**MA: Well, with the addition of the new fertilizers and whatnot, this was an ideal piece of ground. It was quackgrass summer fallowed the year before, and it was just ideal conditions.**

**DS: Where did you have that?**

**MA: It was southeast of the buildings.**

**DS: Oh, on section 36. You own that whole section, don't you, with the exception of the railroad office, I suppose.**

**MA: I didn't buy that until '45.**

**DS: Who owned it before you did?**

**MA: McHose and Pardo--they were a mattress concern over in Fargo.**

**DS: When you look at your abstract on your home farm, did it show the number of times that farm went through the ringer?**

**MA: Yes, it does, but I don't know just what it is.**

**DS: Who owned it that lost it? Who homesteaded it?**

**MA: I presume Ruthruf because they named the siding after him.**

**DS: You know, I was looking at our abstract on our farm; and I think it's either two, if not four times, that it was foreclosed and rebought and foreclosed and rebought, until Margaret's dad got it, of course.**

**Well, really, what were some of the problems you had when you started in 1933. The economy was tough.**

**MA: Well, in 1933 we had a fair crop. In 1934 it wasn't a big crop, either. My beets averaged 5 7/8 tons in 1934. Well, then '35, we had the rust and we had a lot of weeds and you weren't equipped to handle these things like you are now and so I wound up with a 5 7/8 ton crop, I think it was; and '36 I've told you about that was 3 5/8 that should have been ideal; 1937 we came back with a fair crop of wheat. At that time the Ceres wheat was a brand they were using at that time. Well, then the rust got into that Ceres wheat and that was in '35; but in '37 I had Marquella [phonetic] and in 1938, I had 400-some acres of wheat at that time that averaged 28 bushel to the acre.**

**DS: What'd you get?**

**MA: With thrashing with Bill Johnk who was a neighbor of mine and I went down to Sabin--we had rain on a Saturday--and I went down to Sabin and I said to the elevator**

**man, who was Bill Fridgen at that time, and I asked him what I could get for it and he said, "Well, Merle, if you'll sell it all, I'll give you $1.15. And so, you know, in a small town like Sabin that went around like wildfire. At $1.15 I could see where I could have enough money, with the good beet crop coming up, I had enough prospect that I could pay off my bills, which I hadn't done since I had started farming; but Bill Johnk stopped in that afternoon and he sat in the kitchen and waited until I came in there and he just bawled and bawled me out to the nth degree for selling that wheat at $1.15 a bushel. He said, "Merle, what in hell is the matter with you; don't you ever want to get anywhere in this world?" He said, "This wheat is going to be $1.50 a bushel." "Well," I said, "Bill, I owe a lot of people." And I can pay up most of my bills, and with this beet crop," I said, "I think I can operate pretty decent next year." That wheat started to go down, and it went down and down and down. It was three years before it got back to $1.15.**

**DS: In '37?**

**MA: In '38?**

**DS: Did it go down? I didn't realize that.**

**MA: Yeah, it did. It got down to about 85-90 cents a bushel. Well, I had a real good beet crop in '38 and after that, well then, I got hold of an International Crawler tractor, a TD35, which was a real good engine at that time, and then in '39 I rented another section of land up north of Dilworth (Section 35, I think it is).**

**DS: Must be in another township.**

**MA: It was in Oakport Township. It was where Lackmans now live, and we farmed that for four years. I had planted a 40-acre chunk of ground into onions in 1940. Had I put that in in 1941--the same thing into onions--it would have paid for the farm.**

**DS: I know all about that onion business, as you well know.**

**MA: I was going to buy that farm but I asked Frank Williams--I said, "Frank, will you give me a 150-acre beet contract?" And he said, "No, Merle, I can't do it." I knew that I could navigate and pay for it with a beet contract, so I let it get away from me. However, Lackmans got in there and bought it and they got a 150-acre beet contract right away.**

**DS: What about Frank Williams? He was very cautious, wasn't he?**

**MA: Yes, he was.**

**DS: See, I first came--I knew Frank, but he was the field man for American Crystal Sugar. Didn't he have a farm up north too?**

**MA: He later bought some land up north, yes.**

**DS: When did the beet association start? Growers.**

**MA: The Red River Valley Beet Growers Association was started in 1937, I think it was.**

**DS: Who were the prime movers? Was it Hugh Trowbridge?**

**MA: Well, Hugh was elected President of the Clay County Growers Association. I was on the board when they started, and Charlie Pake and from Clay County--that's the Clay County boys.**

**DS: Wasn't Arvid on it too?**

**MA: Not at that time. I think it was just Charlie and I. What are they restricted to--two per county or whatever.**

**DS: Oh, I see, that was the Red River.**

**MA: And Walter Ross was elected President of the Red River Association.**

**DS: Walter was from Fisher, and wasn't his father the pioneer grower up in the Valley almost?**

**MA: He was one of them, yes.**

**DS: Who was the early grower in our area; was it Kreps?**

**MA: No, the early grower in our area was Karl Brandt [spelling]. Karl Brandt had 18 or 20 acres of beets in 1921 or 22 northeast of Sabin about a half a mile.**

**DS: Towards your place.**

**MA: Yes, and it was off to the west of what is now known as "52." At that time it was "64." But he had these beets in there and my father said, "I'd never raise them damn things." He said, "You never get done hauling." At that time a team would haul about a ton and a half to a load, and these made 18 ton to the acre; and he was hauling there and they scooped them on and they scooped them off.**

**DS: Well, you must have done that.**

**MA: We scooped them on, yes, but we always had a side dump on our wagons that would dump the load then.**

**DS: But you shoveled them on.**

**MA: We shoveled them on.**

**DS: And then you had the Mexicans top them.**

**MA: Yes.**

**DS: Explain how they topped them.**

**MA: Well, we lifted 16 rows and then the Mexicans would take the center 8 rows and pile them in a row so that we had 8 rows where we had a float which we would level the ground with and then they would throw them in piles--they would top them and throw them in piles. And then we would come along and scoop them up out of this trench.**

**DS: By hand.**

**MA: By hand.**

**DS: When did you get your first loader?**

**MA: Well, the first loader we got in 1942.**

**DS: Right during the war.**

**MA: Yeah, during the war.**

**DS: What kind did you have?**

**MA: An Espy [spelling] loader.**

**DS: The back end.**

**MA: Yes.**

**DS: You had the same one we had.**

**MA: That's right.**

**DS: And you pulled the truck.**

**MA: Pulled the truck with the tractor.**

**DS: And what kind of tractor did you have?**

**MA: I had that TD35 which was ideal for that.**

**DS: Oh, yes!**

**Would you like to make any comments about the credit arrangement in agriculture as far as you were concerned with the banks. Did you ever have an emergency barnyard loan or a crop loan or seed loan or feed loan?**

**MA: Oh, yes. When I started I had seed loans and feed loans [laughter].**

**DS: Did you ever have a barnyard loan?**

**MA: No, I never had a barnyard loan?**

**DS: You know what they were? They were a chattel loan on chattels in addition to crop and feed loans. Apparently, you could get a barnyard loan or a commissioner loan. Did you use the Land Bank any?**

**MA: No.**

**DS: You never have used the Federal Land Bank or Production Credit?**

**MA: Oh, I've used Production Credit a lot; I've borrowed a lot of money through Production Credit. I've also borrowed money through Prudential Life Insurance, too, for buying these farms.**

**DS: And you have how much--you have a section and a half, do you?**

**MA: Yes. I have about 900 acres myself.**

**DS: Right there around the house.**

**MA: And that quarter that's at Rustad.**

**DS: Oh, you have a quarter down there. I thought the boys--**

**Tell me about your boys farming with you and when they started.**

**MA: Well, I've always worked my boys real hard and then in 1934 I said, "If you boys want to help," I said, "I'll give you what you get from this quarter of land."**

**DS: How old were they?**

**MA: Well, at that time they were 14 and 16; and so that fall we planted into oats and it was a very good crop. They have $5,000 from that quarter of land and two kids at that age, I said, "Boys, I'm not going to let you have this money." I said, "We will put it into what was at that time war bonds." So they put in a $5,000 bond and because if you'd give it to them you'd just spoil them. So, the next year there was a half section of land for sale adjoining my land and Al Gretter [spelling] come out and was looking for Henry Wiem [spelling] and**

**he said he had half a section of ground to sell him. And I said, "Where is it, Al?" And he said, "It's the north half of Section 1." At that time it belonged to Margaret Hector.**

**DS: Is that down--?**

**MA: That's where Bob lives now. And so he said, "Could you handle it?" And I said, "Well, what have you got to have?" And he said, "Make me a proposition." So I said, "$5,000 down and $500 a year contract for deed." And so he said, "Well, that sounds pretty good. I'll go back and see if they'll take it." So he came back the next day and said, "Merle, you own another half section of land."**

**DS: What did you have to pay for that land? Do you mind saying?**

**MA: I think it was $50 an acre.**

**DS: That was when?**

**MA: In 1946.**

**DS: Oh, in '46 after the war?**

**MA: Yeah, uh huh.**

**DS: What did you pay for your land?**

**MA: I paid $45 for one half and $55 for the other half, so mine cost me $50 an acre.**

**DS: Wasn't land selling in the neighborhood of $25 and $30 at that time?**

**MA: There could have been some land that was bought at that figure, yes.**

**DS: Bluebird Pete used to tell me that he had that quarter just across from our house, in Section 35, and he said that it was up at that time for around $25 an acre--that's that south quarter of Charlie's.**

**MA: He paid $27.50 for it, but in 1932, that same piece of ground--they offered it to Ed Fitts [spelling] for $800, at $5 an acre.**

**DS: But no money.**

**MA: No money; we couldn't.**

**DS: We could stay on this farm business, but I wondered--What did you do socially in those times? What did you do for your social function. Now you and I both belong to the Elks and we belong to the Masons and we've done all these things; but what did you do in those early days when your family was young and the money was short?**

**MA: Well, I didn't do anything but work. If I'd take the kids fishing once or twice a summer, that would be about it. Or I'd go ice skating with them, or we'd go to the basketball games.**

**DS: Didn't Clearview have some activity?**

**MA: They had the Clearview Community Club which met once a month.**

**DS: Were you active in that or did you go to those things?**

**MA: Oh, yes, I was always there as long as the kids were in school.**

**DS: Who were the people that were in that day and age, at Clearview School, who were the people that you remember the most at Clearview?**

**MA: Well, the Pakes were very active in there, and everybody in the community was active--the Karlstroms were active.**

**DS: Well, they weren't in that Clearview district though.**

**MA: Yeah, but they always attended the meetings at Clearview.**

**DS: That was Emil and Clarence.**

**MA: Yes.**

**DS: And then what about MacGregors?**

**MA: Yes, they were active.**

**DS: And the Jonses were there then?**

**MA: No, the Jonses were gone before--.**

**DS: They'd moved to town.**

**MA: Ralph--what's his name? Joe (can't come up with his last name right now).**

**DS: Where did they live?**

**MA: They lived there where Bob Olson lived. Joe Ruliffson [spelling]. He had that quarter. I forget what he paid for it. But he moved in there about 1934. And that, I think, was some of your relatives that owned that at one time. Wasn't that?**

**DS: Jonses--we'll, I think they'd lost it and Ruliffson--.**

**That was an interesting quarter of land. It teetered on almost belonging to us and then not belonging to us. And you know that story.**

**Why don't you talk about the Benedict school just a little?**

**MA: Well, the Benedict School--when I started school in 1914, I think there was about seven of us going to school.**

**DS: Who were they?**

**MA: Well, we had Ewald Benedict was the oldest, from the Benedict family and Ethel was in my grade. There were three of us in my grade--there was Elsie Litz and Ethel Benedict and myself. There were five--Earl Kuehl and Lawrence Connelly [spelling]. Well, Ethel, Elsie and myself were just a little quicker to learn than they were, so they started us up in another grade, so we made the eight grades in seven years.**

**DS: Who was the teacher?**

**MA: To start with, was Mabel Lamb.**

**DS: Who was she?**

**MA: She was a girl that came from Downer.**

**DS: Oh, there was down in that--**

**MA: There were Lambs in that area down at Downer, and she was one of the Lamb girls.**

**DS: Wasn't that a Scotch settlement down in there? Rather than Scandinavian?**

**MA: Yes, there was the Thompsons and the McEvers and--.**

**DS: McCabes.**

**MA: McCabes, and the Cookes [spelling].**

**DS: The Stewarts.**

**MA: Yes, they were all in there. They were all good friends of my father's and whenever we would go anyplace, it would be over to one of their places; but as they never had children my age, so it wasn't very interesting for me to go into any of them places.**

**DS: Were you the only? No, you had a sister, didn't you?**

**MA: I have a sister; there were two of us.**

**DS: And where is she?**

**MA: She lives south of Fargo in the Briarwood Addition or Rosewood Addition--somewhere out there; I don't know which one--Briarwood, I think.**

**DS: Is she younger or older than you?**

**MA: She's younger than I am, about a year and a half.**

**DS: Well, I don't believe--well, maybe I have.**

**Well, Merle, who was your other teacher?**

**MA: Well, then, we had Edith Waite [spelling], and she was only there for one year; and she was from Lake Park. And then we had a teacher by the name of Mrs. Riddle, and she lived over in Moorhead on Fourth Avenue; at that time it was right on the edge of town. I think it was 405 or something.**

**DS: You finished the eighth grade in 1921?**

**MA: Uh huh.**

**DS: And then you went home and worked on the farm?**

**MA: I've worked on the farm--I did get about three months in the wintertime; I went to Moorhead High one winter and I went to the State University, which was the AC at that time, in a high school deal that they had at that time; but it never done me much good.**

**DS: Why do you say that? [laughter]**

**MA: Well, I never got enough of it; I was always late getting started and by the time you would get in with a class, they were so far ahead of you that it just didn't fit in at all.**

**DS: You mentioned your father several times. When did he come to this country?**

**MA: He came to this country in 1878. He was born in Stearns [spelling] County, and as he quoted it many times that his father and four brothers went through the Civil War for the Yankees and they all came out of that without a scratch. But, however, his father passed away when he was very young and his mother remarried to a man by the name of Martell and they homesteaded from where I was born, which is two miles east of where I now live and a mile south. This other was another mile east and a half a mile south. They had homesteaded 160 acres in there.**

**DS: Did you father homestead in this area?**

**MA: No, he didn't homestead.**

**DS: Did your grandfather?**

**MA: Yes, that was his stepfather; that was my father's stepfather.**

**DS: Oh, yeah.**

**Did you know anything about tree claims? Did you have any tree claims?**

**MA: I never had a tree claim.**

**DS: I mean your folks.**

**MA: No, they never had any tree claims either. There is two tree claims in the country--one is on Ernie Krabbenhoft's farm; the other is on Jimmy Wiedeman's farm.**

**DS: Were they homesteaded by the Wiedemans and the Krabbenhofts then?**

**MA: I don't know. That I couldn't tell you.**

**DS: That was another method of acquiring land, rather than homesteading.**

**MA: Yes, it was.**

**DS: They found out early that one quarter wasn't enough to make a living and have pasture for their--, as I understand it.**

**MA: That's right. My father tells about moving into this country. They came up on the train as far as Barnesville, and they had a democrat wagon with a team on it and they drove it up to where the homestead is and he said that the water was anywhere from ankle deep until it got over--they'd have to pick their feet up off from the bottom of the buggy to put them on the top to keep them from getting wet.**

**DS: What was a democrat wagon?**

**MA: Well, that's one of these buggies that had a seat in front and a little box behind of some kind that you could put your groceries in if you went to town, I suppose.**

**DS: It was a light wagon, wasn't it?**

**MA: Yeah, it was a real light wagon.**

**DS: And steel rimmed wheels?**

**MA: Yeah, everything was steel at that time.**

**DS: And that was a substitute for a buggy, only it would haul something.**

**MA: Yeah.**

**DS: Kind of like a pickup today, wasn't it?**

**MA: It would just be about that.**

**DS: A horse pickup [laughter]. Yeah, that's right.**

**What kind of magazines or papers--have you always got the daily paper?**

**MA: Yeah, we've always had the daily paper.**

**DS: Was there a time when you had a real problem even having a daily paper?**

**MA: Yes, there was. There was time when you didn't know how you were going to pay the $5 a year to get the paper.**

**DS: Did you ever trade chickens or anything for the paper?**

**MA: No, I never did. My mother used to sell chickens to some of these people that would come through the country; but I never did. We never had chickens on the place.**

**DS: Oh, haven't you?**

**MA: No.**

**DS: Nor ducks or anything?**

**MA: Not a thing.**

**DS: Did you ever have milk cows?**

**MA: I started out with six milk cows, and I said when I can see that I can live one year without milking, I said I'm going to sell every cow on the place. But I made a mistake, I kept one [laughter].**

**DS: Did you ever raise potatoes?**

**MA: Yes, I was born and raised with the potato business.**

**DS: No, but I mean on your own farm.**

**MA: Yes, I raised potatoes there; and when I got in the beet business, Frank Williams says, "I'll give you three years to get out of the potato business, Merle," and it only took one.**

**DS: What is the reason that we couldn't raise potatoes, really, in our immediate vicinity, outside of the--? Isn't it a scab problem?**

**MA: Not necessarily a scab problem. Drainage was the main thing. At that time, you would plant potatoes and if you got a 3-inch rain, you had lost three-fourths of your acreage in that area.**

**DS: Because of the soil conditions.**

**MA: Yes, because a potato will only stand a few hours of water standing on it.**

**DS: When did you really get drainage established?**

**MA: 1944. Charlie Pake and I were at Bill Hauge's [spelling] one afternoon, and Bill said, "Why don't you boys start a ditch and run it parallel with the Great Northern Railway track and hook it on to Ditch No. 41?" That is a ditch that runs through Dilworth. So Charlie and I started a petition with that in that area and we got everybody to sign it but one, and he said, "I'll sign it if I have to"--that's Olaf Safgren [phonetic].**

**DS: Oh ho!**

**MA: Everybody signed it, so that ditch was put in in 1945.**

**DS: Well, did you build a ditch yourself?**

**MA: No, that was under contract at that time.**

**DS: Was that the Soil Conservation, or was it the county?**

**MA: It was a contractor that done it. I don't remember who it was now.**

**DS: How did you get assessed for that?**

**MA: It was everybody that got drain water into it was assessed to it.**

**DS: Well, it must have been under the Soil Conservation somehow.**

**MA: No, it was before the Soil Conservation was set up.**

**DS: In '45?**

**MA: Yeah. I was on the original deal with the Conservation Department set up and it was after that.**

**DS: Were you on the SCS or the Soil Conservation Committee in this county?**

**MA: No, I was never on there, but I worked with them until they got the thing set up.**

**DS: Well, Merle, do you want to comment on what you think about government programs, like the AAA--you remember the AAA--which was then later the ASC.**

**MA: Very good programs.**

**DS: Were they a benefit to you.**

**MA: Oh, yes, definitely they were a benefit.**

**DS: In what way?**

**MA: Well, when I first started growing beets--at that time we would summer fallow for our sugarbeets and we would collect payment on the beets through the ASC Office and whatever they called it at that time. Also, they'd give us so much an acre for summer fallowing; and at that time we were plowing down the sweet clover and it would just about pay for our grass seed--the amount of money that you got for complying with the program.**

**DS: Well, now, you've talked about beets and wheat; now about wheat--have you ever been a certified grower?**

**MA: No, I never was.**

**DS: And then you've talked about onions. Would you want to comment on onions a little? It's worse than playing poker, but it's kind of fun. [Laughter]. I was at it 17 years; how long were you at it?**

**MA: Well, it didn't take me that long, Doug. I only raised them three or four years, and I never sold an onion in the four years that I raised them.**

**DS: Never sold any?**

**MA: I never sold an onion. I guess the first year I did. I sold, oh, 20,000 bushel the first year; and that's the only ones I sold and they just about broke even. I had no place for storage, and so I had to put them on the market right away in the fall. We set up a grading unit up there at the NP Depot--the freight depot here in Moorhead--and Pete Horn was running it and we graded out, anybody that had onions that fall, we graded them out if they wanted to come in there.**

**DS: When was that?**

**MA: That was 1939 or '40. 1939, I think.**

**DS: And that's the first year you grew them?**

**MA: Uh, huh.**

**DS: And you never--well, you grew them after I came.**

**MA: Yes, I quit that year because it was so hard to get labor; and then I got back into it at various times there through the '40s and early '50s.**

**DS: Well, now, L. E. Kreps made a good thing out of onions.**

**MA: Yes, he did; I don't know how--.**

**DS: And Ewald did.**

**MA: I wish I had his recipe, but I didn't [laughter].**

**DS: Well, you know, Ronnie got into it, too, pretty big. I raised anywhere from 10 to 15 acres. But you had a size 50 acres.**

**MA: Yes, I did.**

**DS: And that was terribly expensive in those days in cash outlay.**

**MA: That's right.**

**DS: Tell me about--now you were on the township board and you were on the Red River Valley board, and you were a county commissioner. Have you ever held any other offices that I don't know about? Well, you've been active as an officer in the Shrine.**

**MA: And the Elks.**

**DS: And the Elks. Were you potentate of the--not potentate, but what do they call it at the Elks?**

**MA: I was Exalted Ruler of the Elks Lodge in '60 and '61.**

**DS: And when were you on the township board?**

**MA: The township board--I served from 1951 until I resigned in '64, when I was elected to a County Commissioner.**

**DS: What was your experience as County Commissioner. I know all about what happened, and they hurt. Those things hurt, I know. But what was your experience as a county commissioner?**

**MA: Well, I wouldn't give away enough money so that [laughter] this man went out and got me beat; that was all. Being conservative, I wouldn't give away as much money as they wanted.**

**DS: I think that is one of the political shocks in that, you know, your reputation as a neighbor and a friend and a public image was so good that it just amazed us that a guy from town could beat you at County Commissioner. Was it Dilworth that did that?**

**MA: Yes, it was Dilworth.**

**DS: And what was it they couldn't get? Do you recall?**

**MA: Oh, at that time they wanted--they were trying to look out so they could get votes enough in their district so they could get somebody from Dilworth to be a county commissioner.**

**DS: Well, they didn't elect a county commissioner from Dilworth; they never have.**

**MA: No, they tried. It was real close when I was there. The Commissioner that was in run on a sticker and he almost put the Dilworth man in because every vote he got was a vote that I would have had.**

**DS: You served what--four years?**

**MA: Four years.**

**DS: And who was on the Board with you?**

**MA: John Mansager, Orlin Pratt, Virgil Tonsfeldt, and Thornley Wells, and myself.**

**DS: I've looked at the county government for a long time. We certainly have a sense of feeling that the county belongs to us in the rural area. Don't you ever feel that, or sense that? And the struggle is now developing because of distribution of resources to the city. The city is raising its need to the country. I've always felt that we on the farm, whether it's right or wrong, the county seat is really our bailiwick, if you want to call it. What about the county courthouse--that you know about the settling of the county courthouse issue--when the new one is built. You weren't on the county--?**

**MA: No, that was built before I was on the Commission.**

**DS: Do you remember that argument on where the county courthouse was going to go?**

**MA: Yes, I remember that very well. They wanted the county courthouse in downtown Moorhead.**

**DS: Who were the advocates for putting it downtown? Do you recall?**

**MA: Oh, I don't remember who that was.**

**DS: Who was leading the parade in the rural area?**

**MA: Oh, John Mansager and Orlin Pratt--they wanted it where it was.**

**DS: Wasn't Jake Kiefer kind of in agreement with the rural people on that?**

**MA: I wouldn't know.**

**DS: It seems to me I remember that.**

**Merle, you want to take a rest. Are we okay?**

**MA: We're all right.**

**DS: I want to refer back to your folks. What's your ethnic background? You're not Scandinavian. You must be English.**

**MA: My father's mother was full-blooded English, and he said that his father, he said any of the pictures or anything that he collected or acquired, that his father was Scotch or Scotch-Irish. My mother was a full-blooded German. So I'm half German, a quarter English, and part Scotch-Irish.**

**DS: Well, that's a good mixture. You've never talked a foreign language in your family?**

**MA: No. We never have. When we were young, my father had never had a driving horse; and the closest Protestant church we had was at Baker.**

**DS: Presbyterian.**

**MA: The Presbyterian. And once in a great while the Reverend would come up to Sabin in the school house and they would put on services at the school house.**

**DS: Who was the pastor, do you recall?**

**MA: Oh, I wouldn't remember that; I was just five or six years old.**

**DS: But, then, you're not Presbyterian.**

**MA: No, we belong to the Methodist Church. My mother was a Methodist, but at that time, we didn't have a driving horse so we didn't have no way of getting to church.**

**DS: Did you know Margaret's mother?**

**MA: No, I can vaguely remember when she passed away.**

**DS: But you weren't at the Sunday School at Clearview or down at the school.**

**MA: No.**

**DS: When did Clearview come into being; that is, the consolidated school, and that took in the Benedict School, didn't it?**

**MA: No, that didn't take in the Benedict School. Clearview came in, I would say, right about 1920 and in that area.**

**DS: Before you were through the eighth grade.**

**MA: Yes, and then when I moved over to where we are now, that's where our children went to school in Clearview.**

**DS: Oh, yes.**

**MA: They all finished the--they were there as long as the school was there. They finished in Moorhead High.**

**DS: Oh, your children must have been through Clearview before they went into Moorhead.**

**MA: They must have been. It's been so long ago, Doug, I don't remember.**

**DS: It makes a difference. You forget, don't you? I do, too.**

**Now, you've been really out of farming now for what--how long?**

**MA: 10 years.**

**DS: 10 years. How do you look at all these insecticides and herbicides and weedicides and fertilizer? They are very, very expensive. The cost ratio is getting terribly high. You want to just talk about that for a minute?**

**MA: Well, you cannot farm without them. You've got to have them because if you have such a weed problem, you can't farm without them. But they are a necessity.**

**DS: Can you figure them all out yet?**

**MA: No, I can't. I can't figure them all out. I've given that up. I'm sure glad I'm not in it now.**

**DS: Are you?**

**MA: Well, at my age--.**

**DS: Oh, sure.**

**That is interesting--your availability of church, you know; when it was available, that you didn't have it only at Baker; but you were just as far from Moorhead as you were from Baker, weren't you?**

**MA: Well, we never went to Baker Church because we didn't ever have a driving horse. My father wouldn't, after the team had worked all week, why, he wouldn't hook up a team up and drive because it would take you two hours to drive down there, two hours to drive back again.**

**DS: But wasn't the German Lutheran Church at Sabin?**

**MA: Yes, the German Lutheran Church was there at Sabin, but all their services were in German; and my mother could understand High German, but she couldn't understand this German that they had over there, so it didn't do any good to go to church there. They had the Catholic Church in Sabin and at that time, if you went to a Catholic Church or had anything to do with them, it would be about like us consulting with the Russians now.**

**DS: Well, now, yet you were a great friend of Fitzgerald.**

**MA: Oh, yes, I've been--some of the Catholics have been my best friends all my life.**

**DS: But didn't you grow up with Fitzgerald?**

**MA: Yes, we would play cards during the winter. During the winter months, why, we always visited them once a week and they would always come up to our place once a week, so we were together at least twice a week plus the fact that you would have Sunday dinners together.**

**DS: And yet the church--you couldn't participate in that?**

**MA: No, you couldn't [laughter].**

**DS: That's interesting, you know.**

**MA: I don't know why the Protestants looked at a Catholic--if you went to the Catholic Church or a marriage in the Catholic, well, you were on the way to Hell then.**

**DS: Well, wasn't it two sided, though?**

**MA: Yes, it was; it was two sided. It was the other way, too.**

**DS: Say, talk a little bit about, if you will, about the Lodge. Now you've been a Mason how long?**

**MA: Since 1948, or '46.**

**DS: '46. And what part do you think the Masons play in this whole social structure, or is it losing its significance?**

**MA: Well, all of your lodges are losing what they used to be. I can remember when I was a kid, my father belonged to the Workmen and they would meet once in a month in Sabin. At that time, that was one way they would get out to socialize a little. But now with the conditions as they are, you've got clubs all over, you've got eating places all over.**

**DS: There isn't the need anymore.**

**MA: No, there isn't the need. No, I've been a Mason. I've worked in the Scottish Rite, and also I've been with the El Zagel Temple.**

**DS: Do you belong to one of the units?**

**MA: I belong to the Escort Patrol; that's a motorized unit.**

**DS: Do you feel they make a contribution to our society?**

**MA: Oh, yes.**

**DS: Or just to you?**

**MA: No, they make a good contribution to society. They're always there. Their Crippled Children unit--**

**DS: That's the Shrine.**

**MA: That's the Shrine. You've got to be a member of the Shrine to be in the Escort Patrol.**

**DS: Do you participate in the Lodge in Moorhead?**

**MA: No, I don't.**

**DS: You keep your membership.**

**MA: I keep my membership is all.**

**DS: Do you mind, Merle, going back to the political arena. Do you declare yourself as any political party member?**

**MA: Well, I've always been accused of being a Democrat, but I always vote for the party who is running on the ticket.**

**DS: But you've been a nominal Democrat.**

**MA: That's right.**

**DS: But you don't vote a straight ticket.**

**MA: No, no way.**

**DS: And do you contribute to political party or to individuals?**

**MA: To individuals, yes. Not to the parties, but to the individuals.**

**DS: And do you think the parties are necessary? Are they a necessary part of our system?**

**MA: Well, I don't know, the way things are going now, it doesn't make any difference what you are [laughter], the way conditions are. It's set up so it's kind of a business that's got to be run that way.**

**DS: Yeah, but you participated in the REA, too, didn't you?**

**MA: Yes, I was a member of that board for 21 years.**

**DS: What happened, Merle, when--what was the change in your living standard and your activity when REA--you were a member when REA came in.**

**MA: Oh, yes, I was a member of the REA. I wasn't on the board for ten years. To start with, we have had electricity in our family since 1918 or '19. The Northern States ran a line down what used to be the old K-T Trail which is now County Road 11 that goes to Sabin; and Sabin wanted to get electricity. Peg Holden was very instrumental in that.**

**DS: Who is Peg Holden?**

**MA: Well, he was married to a Poehls [spelling] girl and he was a rural mail carrier and he ran a garage in Sabin, and he was very instrumental in getting the Northern States to extend their line from Watts Siding to Sabin. In order to do this, they had to come down past the farms there. They got Albert Carlson and they had Ed Shoeder [spelling], Albert Carlson and Gene Grant, Fred Kuehl, John Connelly and Ed Benedict and Henry Wiedeman, my father, and Ernest Rosenfield and Frank Fitzgerald, Bill Johnk--did I say Ernest Krabbenhoft--and these men all put in at least $1,000 a piece to get to pay for the line.**

**DS: Was that for REA or for Ottertail? For Northern States Power--I'm sorry.**

**MA: Northern States. So when they got that line built that fall; however, you had to build your own line from that line to wherever you lived, which is a half a mile, about a half a**

**mile. But after this line was built, these people sold their stock to Northern States for $1, which they paid a contribution of $999.**

**DS: They bought stock--.**

**MA: They in turn turned it over to Northern States for $1.**

**DS: Why?**

**MA: Well, because that was the only way Northern States could get this line to come down to Sabin.**

**DS: By having voting stock, these number of farmers bought--.**

**MA: They just made a contribution. They bought the stock for $1,000, or put up $1,000 and sold it to them for $1.**

**DS: Sold it back to the company?**

**MA: Sold it back to the company.**

**DS: And then they've got electric power.**

**MA: And then they've got electric power.**

**DS: And what did that electric power amount to--just lights?**

**MA: No, at that time my father had a horsepower motor that we used in the elevator and the potato cellar. Mostly lights. It wasn't for electric stoves or electric refrigerators. A few had refrigerators.**

**DS: When was this, Merle?**

**MA: Back about 1919 or 1920.**

**DS: That was right after World War I. And I suppose the farmers had the money to put into it then?**

**MA: Yes, they did.**

**DS: But then you had a monthly pay to make?**

**MA: Yes.**

**DS: What happened then in '24, '20s and '30s, then, when this power line was still in. Did some of them lose their power because they couldn't pay the--?**

**MA: No, I don't think anybody lost power that I can remember anyway. And then when I moved from the home place to where I live, well, then I went back to carrying a lantern around again.**

**DS: Quite a shock.**

**MA: Yes, it is. And where we used to have an electric motor on the pump, you could go over and throw the switch and let it run for a few minutes until the tank was full of water. I had to have an engine and the switch was sitting out practically in the snow. The belt would never stay on. You had to fight every bit of it to get water.**

**DS: Single cylinder.**

**MA: Yeah.**

**DS: Motor.**

**MA: Uh huh.**

**DS: Well, then tell me about the REA. How did you come to get REA? How did you get it?**

**MA: Well, that was a grant made in 1935, and all you needed at that time was to get your members--somebody to sign up the members, all you had to have was somebody that would supply you power, so the Halstad community, or the village of Halstad put in a diesel plant and they agreed to furnish power for the consumers on the REA line--Red River Valley Co-op Power Association, which at that time was very few. But then as it grew, they were short of power. Then where they crossed the Northern States Power between Dilworth and Moorhead they got a hookup with Northern States to have Northern States supply the power for the area south of No. 10 and that went on for awhile, but Hugh Trowbridge was on the board for the REA and our area and at that time they were building a plant in Grand Forks, and he held out for a coal plant. But they started out, they had a bunch of diesels up there and they were too expensive to run, so they finally got--I was on the board in 1950 or 1951 when they got the coal plant going.**

**DS: That's at Halstad.**

**MA: That's in Grand Forks.**

**DS: Grand Forks, because Halstad doesn't--.**

**MA: Minnkota is the supplier of power for twelve other, or eleven other electric co-ops.**

**DS: In those early days when you got REA, were you limited on the amount of power you could use?**

**MA: You weren't limited. You paid a minimum and in order for me to get power where I was, I had to sign up for two memberships and agree to pay a double minimum; and in my lifetime, I've never been down to that.**

**DS: You mean, down to one membership?**

**MA: Down to one minimum; my bill has always been better than double.**

**DS: I know all about that and it's getting higher, isn't it. Were there any limitations on the power? When did you start getting Frigidaires and--.**

**MA: Well, we had Frigidaire the first year, and I had an electric stove; also I had a welder that I got in 1940.**

**DS: Washing machines?**

**MA: Washing machines. We had electric motors on our washing machines. The dryers and that began to, as times advanced toward the '50s, well, that's when all that come in. But the war years curtailed it for quite a while because of the shortage of copper and the materials to go ahead and manufacture the necessary things that you wanted.**

**DS: One question that I was wondering about, Merle, when did you get a combine? You must have got a combine awful early.**

**MA: I had a combine in 1939, I think.**

**DS: Yes, because it was up in North Dakota at that time. I remember that. And did you ever do any thrashing with a steam rig?**

**MA: Yes, I've thrashed--when I was at home, we thrashed with a steam rig. Jim Connelly--we always used to work around the engine all we could and what not. He got to the point where he would let me line up the steamer on the separator.**

**DS: With the old chain steering operation that you see.**

**MA: Yeah, that's right.**

**DS: How big an outfit was it?**

**MA: I suppose about a 36- or a 40-inch separator and it was a 25-horse or a 30-horse steamer.**

**DS: You didn't have those 42- and 43-inch cylinders on your separators. They were the big ones, weren't they?**

**MA: Yes, they were the big ones.**

**DS; But you had one of the smaller ones.**

**MA: I don't remember how big this was, but the Connellys had it and it was a U pitch from both sides.**

**DS: Two pitch. Who did they thrash for? I mean, how long did thrashing last?**

**MA: They had a run there, see--John Connelly and Jim Connelly, Bill Connelly, Frank Fitzgerald and my father; and thrashing they would be generally a day at our place and a day at Fitzgeralds. Connellys would have three or four days because his land was scattered out; they would have to move. Jim Connelly--they had a day and a half or two days; Bill Connelly always had a couple of days. It run about two weeks.**

**DS: Well, did you ever stack thrash?**

**MA: No, we never stacked thrash.**

**DS: Always out of the shock.**

**MA: That's before my time--the stack thrashing.**

**DS: Oh, was it? You shocked your grain and cut it with a binder.**

**MA: Cut it with a binder and shocked it.**

**DS: But you must have cut with a tractor-converted binder early.**

**MA: After I got that F12, that's when, in 1934.**

**DS: Well now, you had quite a close relationship, as I recall, with Kelly Brothers when I came; and can you tell us what contribution Old Man Kelly made, in your judgment, to the agricultural economy of our area. Or did he, or was it just a matter of sales?**

**MA: Oh, it was a matter of sales with him. The Kelly Brothers came from Wahpeton and they had been with the International Harvester; they had been selling the reapers and as the times progressed, well, they had the machinery as it developed. Well, they were always instrumental in getting it out to help you out.**

**DS: Well, you did some business, I suppose, with Harris Brothers, too, didn't you?**

**MA: Oh, yes, I done a lot of business with Harris Brothers. I done business with practically everybody, at that time, in the two towns.**

**DS: Who did you do your banking with?**

**MA: To start with, I had money in the Sabin State Bank, to start with, when I was just a small boy. And my father had money in the Sabin State Bank; so when that closed, he had $5,000 in there and he was getting about ready to build a house or a barn and he said whichever would talk the fastest--my mother or he could outtalk her, why, they were going to put up a barn or a house. Well, the bank closed and they reorganized it and they salvaged $2,500 of that. He had been doing business at the Moorhead National Bank and the First was just across the street from it. So at that time he put the $2,500 in the Moorhead National and then the Moorhead National and First National got in trouble and so they organized into the First and Moorhead National Bank. Well, he lost another half of that, so he had $1,250. At that time he put it in the Merchants State Bank, which is known as the American Bank and Trust now. And that was at the corner of Fifth Street and Center Avenue and that is where I've been doing business ever since I started. When I moved over to where I live, unbeknownst to me, why, I had bought six cows at $210, $35 a head, and I had signed a note for it, but unbeknownst to me, he had countersigned that note and I never knew that until after I got the note paid.**

**DS: Who was that, your dad?**

**MA: Yes.**

**DS: Oh. With the American Bank and Trust?**

**MA: Merchants State Bank at that time.**

**DS: Which was later the--**

**MA: American State Bank and then it's American Bank and Trust now.**

**DS: Who were the early people in those banks?**

**MA: Pete Erickson was the manager. Pete Dwyer was the cashier. Oscar Westland was the Vice President.**

**DS: Who owned it?**

**MA: Really I don't know who owned the bank at that time. I think Dr. Bodelson had money in the bank and I couldn't tell you.**

**DS: Didn't Peterson--didn't Hank's father have some--he was later in the American Bank.**

**MA: Yes, they were.**

**DS: And the Scheels and Memford Nelson and I remember Bolly [phonetic]; do you remember Bolly, the English teacher at Concordia? He had 100 shares, I know. He used to tell me that after he retired.**

**Well, I think, Merle, we've done pretty well. Would you like to just make some general statements of experiences or some of the things that stand out, like for instance, well you've talked about the politics, and your education, and your social life. And you said you were a Methodist and how in the early days you didn't have much religious training, and you've talked about. What farm organizations do you belong to? Have you always belonged to--?**

**MA: I've always belonged to the Farm Bureau.**

**DS: Do you still belong to the Farm Bureau?**

**MA: No, I don't; no, I don't belong to the Farm Bureau any more.**

**DS: Were you a member of the Farmers Union at one time?**

**MA: Yes, I was one of the first members of the Farmers Union. I served on the Farm Bureau board when we built the fertilizer plants out here at the east side of Moorhead.**

**DS: That's right.**

**MA: That was the building we put up and the Farm Bureau used it for a salesplace for many years, but I don't know if it's empty now or not, but it looks pretty well deserted.**

**DS: It's been sold; I mean, not sold, but it's been closed. What is it--I'm trying to think. The one that has the anhydrous plant down at Barnesville--who has that? FarmLand's the one that bought it. Don't you remember, we liquidated the Clay County Farm Bureau. They couldn't make a go of it and then they sold the State Farm Bureau Service Company to FarmLand, which in those days had a different name that FarmLand, so then it became FarmLand's.**

**And do you remember the fertilizer--picking it out of the cars in those days?**

**MA: I suppose I had the first carload of fertilizer shipped into Sabin and I probably unloaded it myself.**

**DS: Did you use a whole car?**

**MA: I've had carloads of fertilizer.**

**DS: And you used a whole car yourself.**

**MA: Yes.**

**DS: What would that be, about--.**

**MA: At that time we were using--what was it--just phosphate.**

**DS: You weren't using any nitrogen.**

**MA: Very little. And I have the Peevee Elevator--the Farm Bureau couldn't ship to Sabin anymore, so they shipped me in a carload at Felton. I had the first carload of fertilizer that ever had come into Felton.**

**DS: Weren't you in with the group that bought the fertilizer from Farm Bureau and Emil Karlstrom distributed it?**

**MA: Yes.**

**DS: But that was more than one car, I suppose.**

**MA: Yes, that would be more than a car.**

**DS: And I was here when we started the Service Company.**

**MA: I was instrumental in getting that going and they had an election and after my wife voted, I lost the election. [Laughter]**

**DS: How do you feel about the relationship between the city and the rural area; that is, the farming area of our community. Do you have any hangups or do you feel there is a lack of relationship?**

**MA: No, I never felt that way, Doug. I've always worked with the businessmen and I've always contributed to whatever they had asked me to if I was able to; but I never felt that there should be a difference between us because this is an agriculture area and if your agriculture isn't good, your business isn't any good.**

**DS: Well, do you think there is an understanding of the agriculture economy amongst the businessmen, say, in Moorhead?**

**MA: Oh, yes, definitely.**

**DS: You think they are very conscious of that?**

**MA: Yes, I do.**

**DS: Can you name some of the early businessmen that you did business with besides Harris Brothers?**

**MA: Oh, Harris Brothers and Leo Wright was a great promoter for this country. He passed away this last year at the age of 90-some years old. To start with he married--I just can't remember--but he is a very prominent--he started the store in Sabin in about 1918, then they had a garage there and he later moved to Moorhead and when they had the potato growers association, they had a big building--whether he sold it to them or not, I**

**just can't remember now. He had this warehouse in Moorhead--storage and transfer--and then he sold that to the potato growers association. Then he went ahead and built up the place where the Chamber just moved out of that corner there. He had a potato warehouse.**

**DS: Next to Bombers [phonetic]?**

**MA: Yes, next to Bombers in there.**

**DS: East of Bombers.**

**MA: Yeah, east of there. He built that up and they had the potato exchange in there and later he sold that and built up that one where they just tore down this summer and rebuilt at the corner of 11th Street and Center Avenue and across the street there, in there west of the Masonic Temple, they used to be a kind of a cooperative potato grower association in there that the Probstfields and Ray Gozelle [phonetic] was very active in. Andy Probstfield used to sell this stuff--he would have consigned potatoes and then ship them and they would take out so much for a carload for handling charges.**

**DS: Merle, there's a couple of personal things I think you ought to add and that's your family. What are your children's names and whether they are boys or girls. I know, but I think we ought to make a record of them.**

**MA: My wife was born in Illinois.**

**DS: She was.**

**MA: She moved to this country when she was a year old. Frank and Lottie Rice were her father and mother, and she moved on to Judge Nyhus' [phonetic] farm, which is what Pioneer Seeds have north of Watts Siding now.**

**DS: Doesn't a fellow by the name of Driscoll own that?**

**MA: I don't know who's on there now. Bob Ziminey [phonetic] used to be on there; I don't know. They research farm there.**

**And she moved into our area in about 1925 and we were married in 1928. We've got four children--two boys and two girls. We've got 17 grandchildren, and we now have 18 great-grandchildren.**

**DS: What are the names? Give us the names of your children.**

**MA: The children are Francis and Robert, Laura, and Lois. And they all have a Moorhead mailing address.**

**DS: All of your grandchildren?**

**MA: Outside of three, the grandchildren all have a Moorhead mailing address; there's four.**

**DS: Well, do you want to talk about the riding horses you've got at home? [Laughter] Merle has a little soft spot in his heart and his grandchildren take advantage of it.**

**MA: That's up to them.**

**DS: I notice you have the horses there.**

**Tell us about your shop.**

**MA: Well, Doug, I've always been interested in building things, and I have made so many things that, as Judge Garrity said, if he had a penny for every welding rod I burned up, he said he'd never need to work again.**

**DS: That's the truth.**

**MA: I was always aggressive. During the war years, we had beet drills and I was walking by it one day, and I said to Charlie Pake--he had another drill just like it--I said, "You know, Charlie," I said, "if you're willing," I said, "I could take that beet drill of yours and mine," and I said, "we could put them together and make a twelve-row out of it." That was the first twelve-row drill that was in the Valley. And the next week they were all up and down the Valley.**

**DS: That happens yet, Merle, as you well know. It doesn't take long for any new idea. I think so often of the dirt strippers they put on the trucks this fall to keep the dirt off the-- and I think it saved, it must have saved the county thousands of dollars from dirt removing. And I think so often of the row finders and the spike--you must have been early using the spike to make the rows so your front tires would follow the row.**

**MA: No, I wasn't the instigator of that.**

**DS: But were you out of beets by that time.**

**MA: No, I was still in there. I still had that. I have rebuilt so much machinery.**

**DS: Well, I know, you had one of the early beet harvesters on a road grader.**

**MA: Yes, I reconstructed that until I practically rebuilt it all.**

**DS: Tell us about your cooking.**

**MA: Well, I've just done a lot of barbecuing for the grandchildren so I set up a barbecue for the Sabin Centennial. I said to Harry Buth one day, "Would you like to have a pig?" And he said, "Yeah, it would be great." So I went ahead and I fixed up a barbecue for a**

**pig. Well, it goes, one isn't quite enough--you've got too large a crowd for that, so I started building some more and then I kept on adding. I've built it up now to the point where I have seven machines of my own; I've built a couple more for other people. This summer we've had the pleasure of cooking for the Midwest Shrine when it was in Fargo, which we served over 4,000 people. And we had meat enough for another 500. I had the pleasure of cooking at the Concordia College when the Lutheran ministers were all in town. We served over 1200 there.**

**DS: Was that just recently?**

**MA: That was recently.**

**DS: That was the Lutheran Conference.**

**MA: That's right.**

**DS: National Conference.**

**MA: And at the same night we served 300 over here at Neumaier Hall, so I've cooked over here at the college.**

**DS: Who's your chief assistant chef?**

**MA: Well, Jim Garrity has got to be the [laughter]--Judge Garrity is my number one man that I call on.**

**DS: At least he says so. Tell us how you make those, what you make them out of?**

**MA: I take a 265-gallon oil drum, cut it in two, and I put a--**

**DS: Cut it in two lengthways.**

**MA: So the top half will be a cover about like a suitcase of some kind that you can fold it up and down. And then I put in a rack for the coals, I put in a pan to catch the grease, and I put in a table that you fasten the meat to, and then I use a motor with a gear reduction that the shaft comes out of the motor at 6 rpms and I gear it down to the point where this rotates at about one revolution in 40 seconds.**

**DS: As a spit.**

**MA: And it is so made that I have a door on the side and I can add coal and wood--I use a lot of wood, maple wood, when I am cooking this to give it a smoke flavor.**

**DS: How far an area do you go out, Merle?**

**MA: Well, I've been anywhere from Grand Forks to Colfax and from Detroit Lakes to Casselton.**

**DS: And you served for some function out at Casselton last summer.**

**MA: Yes, three years I've been at Casselton. They have the Casselton Days every year.**

**DS: And you serve for the Elks too, don't you.**

**MA: Yes, anybody that--**

**DS: wants you?**

**MA: If they contact me.**

**DS: It's kind of your hobby, I guess.**

**MA: It's a lot of fun now. I enjoy it very much.**

**DS: Where do you get your supplies. For instance, where do you buy your meat?**

**MA: Wherever I'm going to be--if they have a preference, I always let them get the meat; but if they don't, they always want me to get it, I get it at McDonald Meats in Moorhead.**

**DS: Do you cook a whole pig?**

**MA: Yes.**

**DS: Do you take a whole quarter of beef, or a side of beef?**

**MA: We take rounds of beef. That's the best on the beef. However, I've cooked other parts of them, too. But the inside round is the ideal meat to cook.**

**DS: You don't cook for the Methodist Church dinner, do you?**

**MA: No, I haven't.**

**DS: Of course, they handle it a little different.**

**MA: They use a different method altogether, but I ain't so sure that one of these days they will be calling on me because I cooked for them over at a picnic one day and they like their meat well done and as it happened, one of the other guys was cutting it and I had it a little on the rare side and instead of cutting off well-done meat and giving it, why, he gave them a lot of rare meat and it put a bad taste in their mouths.**

**DS: So they're going to have you do the cooking from now on.**

**MA: I cooked for the Men's Club here last week, and they were all very enthused over it.**

**DS: Do you mind saying how you finance that or what you charge for that? I know you make a tremendous contribution to everybody, but how do you cover your overhead?**

**MA: Well, I charge $25 for the use of the machine, which costs you about $800 in parts to build, plus your own time, which it takes 100 hours to build that, and I charge them $25 for the use of the machine, $15 for coal, and $10 to clean it up, which is $50 and I get $50 for myself.**

**DS: So really $100.**

**MA: A hundred dollars.**

**DS: You'll do it for $100, regardless of size.**

**MA: In the area I do it. And if I go any distance, well, I expect mileage on that.**

**DS: Well, you don't make much money at it. It's kind of a contribution to the good of society, I think, as I see it.**