

Interview with Ewald Benedict

Interviewed by Doug Sillers for the Heritage Education Commission

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Ewald Benedict - EB

Doug Sillers - DS

DS: This is an interview with Ewald Benedict who has been in this area since 1900 and has farmed in the Moorhead-Sabin-Baker area for some 60 years. In fact, his folks before him and his grandparents are part of the history of this area in Moorhead and Glyndon.

Ewald, would you just briefly give a little bit of a background of where you were born, when you started farming, and what you farmed, just briefly, and we'll proceed from there on more details.

EB: Yes, I was born 9/6/1900 near Baker, Minnesota, and lived with my folks, of course, until 1922 when I started farming on my own. And we farmed mostly grain, had quite a few cattle, and got interested in sheep also. We grew quite a few potatoes at one time, but we dropped that when we started raising sugarbeets. We started raising sugarbeets in 1928 and raised sugarbeets every year since then. Plus in 1937 we started growing onions. We grew onions for 39 years also until we couldn't sell them for our cost and we quit.

DS: Where did you farm, I mean, specifically, where did you farm? You farmed out southeast of Moorhead, but I mean, were you on the home farm when you first started?

EB: One year on the home farm and then four years on the Wiedeman [phonetic] farm and then eight years on the Barnes farm by Glyndon and then rented some scattered land for a couple of years. And then my brother and I rented the home farm for a few years until I started in with my son, and that was 1947 when I started with my son.

DS: Would you tell us something about your family background? I remember you telling me something about the immigrant place in Glyndon with your grandfather Wiedeman.

EB: My mother was born in Glyndon. Her folks ran the immigrant station there which was the end of the railroad until 1872.

DS: Would you tell us what an immigrant station was, please.

EB: Yes, it was nothing more than a hotel that took care of the newcomers to this country. They also entertained the people that came through in covered wagons. That's how Mr. Wiedeman got started in agriculture--the railroad company asked him to break some of the prairie up and seed it to oats so the horses on the covered wagons and the oxen would have some grain to eat. They had fair good luck the first year; the second year they were wiped

out by hail; the third year the grasshoppers took everything right to the ground. They said they came in like a cloud and destroyed the crop in one afternoon. And he went broke then. Sold them out but he had the courage to try farming again and that's how he got where he was.

DS: Well, now, what was the years of this? Do you recall, approximately, what years they were in Glyndon and the immigrant home and started farming and raised the first oats?

EB: No, I don't recall of knowing the dates at any time, but the railroad was extended through Fargo in 1872, so that perhaps was the end of their stay in Glyndon.

DS: But it was prior to 1872 that they grew the oats for the immigrants, or the settlers. Well, didn't they have something to do with the settling of the land, too?

EB: That I don't know, but they got that land over near Sabin and that's where they farmed all the time. And I don't know how they acquired that. It might have been railroad land that they got over there.

My father was born at Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and he come to this country in 1887, only 17 years old. And they farmed down by Baker, south of Sabin, and that's where I was born.

DS: Tell us something about the kind of equipment you used and the horses or oxen or whatever it was you used for power and when did you get into the tractor business?

EB: Well, we used horses practically all the time. My dad bought the first tractor, which was a Bull tractor, in 1913. I was the only one that ever drove that engine. I was 13 years old but I could drive a tractor then. Then, my dad bought a tractor again in 1919 and that was a used Caterpillar tractor that had been originally bought by James Hill; they put it on his farm up at Hallock, Minnesota, I believe it was. And that was traded in twice and then my dad got it and we run it until 1936. It was originally a 1914 tractor and a good one.

DS: Caterpillar? Tracks?

EB: Caterpillar tractor with a front wheel at that time. And it was strong enough to haul 12 to 14 plows. It was a big engine, ideal for thrashing. We used it for thrashing all the time, not so much for field work.

DS: Did you do any gardening in those days? Did your folks do any gardening and marketing?

EB: No market gardening at all. We always had a big garden because there was 10 children in our family and most of the time we had two men because my dad had quite a few cattle and about 35 horses all the time and the schoolteacher always boarded and roomed with us because it was right next to the schoolhouse.

DS: Well, Ewald, would you mind saying who your sisters and brothers were, and you say there were ten. Name them, and then maybe we'd like to get into something about your education.

EB: My oldest sister was Mrs. Fred Scheel, of the Scheel Hardware group, and I was next in line. Then my second sister was Mila [phonetic] that was married to a Johnny Green and his last job was President of the bank at Escanaba, Michigan, and she was killed in an automobile-train collision. The next one was Esther who married Clarence Jacobson; they lived on a farm near Sabin until they retired. Alice was the next sister; she was a home economics teacher and taught at Grafton and Bemidji and was married to Stan Axness [spelling]; they now live in Fargo. Next sister was Ethel and she took up nursing at the University of Minnesota and graduated there and was a nurse in Minneapolis until she was married to Gunnar Johnson who was born in Sweden. He was a pharmacist and did very well. They now live at Sun City, Arizona. Next sister was Frances that married Walter Altenbernd [phonetic]; they farmed for awhile and then he worked for some government agency until he retired at Park Rapids, Minnesota. The next one was a brother, Edwin; he inherited the home farm and his son lives on that farm now with a family. Edwin is retired and lives in Fargo. And the next one was a brother, George; he moved to California shortly after he got through high school and worked his entire life for Douglas Aircraft as a weight engineer. And the last one was Edith, and she was married to Harry Curtis and lived in Fargo most of the time. She'd had quite a little experience as a dental technician and worked at that quite a few years. She's gone now also.

DS: Well, tell us something about your educational experience.

EB: Well, I never had much education. I went to the grade school right close by home, but I wasn't able to pass the examination to get out of there. But later on I took some short courses out to the University of North Dakota in blacksmithing and feeding and what you would need to work on a livestock farm. That's the height of my education.

DS: Well, what was the school like and do you remember any of the teachers and what they are doing if they are in this area?

EB: My grade school teachers--I remember all of them. The first one was Isabel Stewart and she was married to Henry Wiedeman later and died as a young lady. Another teacher that I knew quite well was a Joyce Jepson, and she was married later and went to Montana and I didn't know she was there; otherwise I would have visited her. She died a few years ago. Mrs. Ernest Schoeder [phonetic] was Tessie Almquist when she was teaching school and married Ernest Schoeder later and she just passed away a few years ago. That was the oldest teacher that I had. I think she was 89 years old when she died.

DS: Well, now, you've done a lot of traveling. Well, maybe we ought to talk about your traveling. One of the fascinating things about Ewald is the number of places he's gone and how he never stops traveling, especially the last ten years.

EB: Well, I never went out of this country before 1969, and I went on a tour to the South Pacific and I enjoyed it. That tour took in quite a little country. We stopped at Fiji, we stopped at New Zealand for about a week, and we were in Australia a few days, and New Guinea, Java, and Island of Bali, and wound up in Thailand, and from there, home. And I've enjoyed the South Pacific three or four times since. I've been to China twice on the People to People program which is my idea of going to a foreign country because you visit the type of people that you are yourself and the People to People program was started by Eisenhower and he maintains that common people the world over are friendly. It's the difference in government and religion that keeps us in trouble, and it seems to be that way. Every place I've been, even in Russia and Cuba and China and South America--they are all very friendly because I went as a certified seed grower group, and those are the type of people we visited with besides research stations and other points of interest.

DS: Ewald, you said you grew onions for 37 years. Would you like to comment on when they came into this country, how they changed in the marketing and something about your house, your storage house, which was probably as modern a storage house and more efficient than anything we've ever seen in this country before.

EB: I don't know just when onions were started here, but the oldest grower that I know of was the Charlie Peterson farm, father of Hank Peterson that's quite well known. We've tried different varieties here, but the only variety that we can grow here successfully is the yellow globe for a storage onion. All onions are a little difficult to store where we have high humidity, but the onion storage that we built took care of that pretty well. We could control the humidity so we had no trouble and we had a little different method of storing at the last because we went to the mechanical harvesting of onions in 1952 and we built our building to accommodate that type of harvesting. They were stored in pallet bins. We had about 1200 of them that held a ton of onions apiece, and we could force air through them both ways and keep them dry and the same temperature and same humidity all over, which is quite an advantage.

DS: The building you built was in Moorhead, of course, and this is going down the record, but I think you ought to comment on some of the problems that you had with that building as far as the community was concerned. Now if it embarrasses you or you don't want to, that's all right, but I wish you would because this is the kind of thing we need on the record for our heritage.

EB: We designed the building ourselves and the contractor that built it drew the blueprints, but the architectural engineers that had to approve of the plans refused to do it, refused to even look at them unless he drew the plans from the bottom up; and he made comments that made me very disgusted, so we tried other ways of getting it approved and we wound up sending it down to the Wheeler Bridge Company in St. Paul, I believe it is, and the plans came back in about 24 hours approved and we went to work, but we met a lot of resistance then because we went out of his territory to get it approved.

DS: Was that a local architect?

EB: That was a local architect, and even the architects in Fargo said the plans were perfectly all right, but they couldn't approve them on account of the code of ethics. That's why we went out of town.

DS: What was peculiar about your onion house? Not peculiar, but what was different, really, about your onion house, from something in which we'd been storing before in this area?

EB: Well, we stored in pallet bins and forced the air through them with a large fan that took 15 hp to drive it, but that took care of the drying and we could inhale cold air and warm it up to reduce the humidity on it, and we could get it just as dry as we wanted it. We kept the temperature about 35 except in the workroom; we ran that up to about 45 for working. All the discards and dirt and trash that came out of the onions were elevated out into a truck, so we never saw that or never had it piled up in there and that was quite an advantage. It was about a good truckload every carload that we packed.

DS: What was the capacity of your operation as far as sorting and sacking and putting them in trucks? What could you do a day?

EB: Well, we could do a little more than a carload a day with five men. We'd generally start in the morning; we'd have a carload done by three o'clock in the afternoon and load it out probably by 4:30 and be all done.

DS: That would be how many sacks--600?

EB: 800 bags is a carload.

DS: What about the marketing? Would you like to comment on the marketing of onions?

EB: Well, when we started marketing onions, or growing them, we had buyers that were from Chicago, Kansas City, and different terminals that would buy them and store them. But it seemed to grow out of that area, and the only market we have today is the chain stores and they've got to be prepacked for them, so the last 15 years I think we sold altogether to a prepackager that packed for five chain stores in the state of Minnesota.

DS: That was Bring's was it?

EB: Yes.

DS: And he was in St. Paul or Minneapolis?

EB: St. Paul is where he was and he was a fellow that bought good quality and he packed good quality, and his pay was good. That's why we stayed with him. He paid for everything on Saturday that he got during the week, and I understand now that he pays every night for what he's bought during the day.

DS: What was the economic contribution either, do you feel, to the community or to yourself in that onion business? And how many acres were grown when you first started, or during the maximum time?

EB: The maximum acreage, I think, was about 1500 acres around here. But because of the storage problem, they seemed to fall out of that. I don't know if there were other reasons than losing our market that the other growers discontinued. We were the first ones that went to mechanical harvesting, and that saved us for a few years because labor got short. One of the advantages of growing the onions for us is the way to keep our steady men busy over winter; we'd have something for them to do; otherwise, there was no livestock and no other interests on slack months, so we'd have to lay these men off. You can't afford to lay those good men off because you can't get them back again. And a man that's qualified to run the type of machinery that we have today, he's qualified for pretty near any kind of a job.

DS: Now, you said you've raised beets since 1928. During World War II, did you use any of the German prisoners on your farm?

EB: Yes, we used German prisoners from the camp they had here at Moorhead. We worked with Paul Horn on that. We worked together at that time, and that was a good source of labor--a lot of nice fellows among them.

DS: Do you have any contact with those people--any of them that worked for you--since?

EB: No, I don't; and I wish I did because one of those fellows drove truck for us quite a bit and he was probably one of the best truck drivers that we had and we found out later that he had a truck line of his own in Germany before he was in service. They were all nice fellows that I got acquainted with.

DS: Do you want to make any comment about the fact that you were farming and had a storage house in the city and you had some conflict or problems with the city as far as your storage was concerned. Would you want to comment on that?

EB: Well, yes, I could comment on that, not all good news. We leased property from the railroad and it happened to be in the low part of town and we couldn't get access to it hardly. They wouldn't give us any drainage, and the water stood around there. We had to go through roads that you couldn't get through with a 4-wheel drive hardly getting into our place, and that was the same for the trucks getting out; and that was probably because we weren't on the good list with the City on account of the architectural engineering part of it. I even offered to dig a ditch over to 17th Street, which was a block away, to let that water over to natural drainage, but they wouldn't let us do that, if we'd dig it with a shovel. So, the water got so high, we had to run a block the other direction and later on the beer distributor put up a nice building in there and then we got curb and gutter and a blacktop street.

DS: Do you think it was because of the fact that you were farming in an agricultural area that you had the resistance from the City as much as anything?

EB: Well, that seemed to be it to a certain extent. The railroad was very cooperative to start with, but they seemed to lose interest later on, too, and that was probably because we couldn't get any service from the railroad. This Mr. Brings that we sold onions to, he wouldn't take onions on the railroad because the service was that bad and quite a few loads that we sent by rail froze in the wintertime and we never had that trouble when they shipped by truck.

DS: Talk a little bit about your experiences as a beet grower and what some of the problems were and the transition from hand to mechanics and that sort of thing.

EB: Well, we started with sugarbeets in 1928 when they first started cross-cultivating. I had two mules and a 4-row piece of equipment; it wasn't very good but we got experience with it. Later we went to 6-row equipment, and in 1936 I bought a rubber-tired tractor mainly to cultivate sugarbeets with--the first rubber-tired practically around the country and I was considered not knowing what I was doing when I got rubber tires on a tractor, but it turned out all right. It was all hand work in the beets then, and probably one of the biggest changes in sugarbeets was in the seed. The first seed that we got came from Czechoslovakia and it was a regular old seed ball type of seed with probably ten-twelve germs in the seed ball and they'd grow up in a spot about as big as a quarter and you'd have to pick out a good one and chop all the rest of them off and hold them with your fingers. That's what they called finger thinning. Later on they raised the same kind of seed here, but they put it through a mill that cracked it and they called it segmented seed and then you didn't get so many seeds in one bunch like that, and it was a little easier thinning. It still had to be finger thinned. And now they have what they call monogerm seed; there's only one seed in a unit and they space plant them and you can thin them with a long-handled hoe, if they need thinning. Some of them mechanically thin them with a mechanical thinner, and some of them use a harrow and harrow them crossways and thin them down to the right population. That works pretty good and destroys a lot of weeds, too.

And there are different ways of harvesting. At one time we harvested by hand, topped by hand, and used practically all the tops of the beets for cattle feed and shoveled them onto the trucks. Then we had our first mechanical loader that loaded the top beets and that worked pretty well, but when they finally came with the mechanical harvesters that completed it. Now they top them before they take them out of the ground and elevate them in probably at the rate of better than a ton a minute when you're going down the field.

DS: Well, Ewald, you were one of the early ones to put decent housing for the migrants, I recall, and you had running water, hot and cold, and gas stoves and Frigidaires. What period of time did you do that?

EB: I would guess that would be about in the early 50s. They were buildings that they had at the State Teachers College here for officers' training and they were available and the price was right and we moved two of them out to the farm. Each one had two apartments

in and we put them on a concrete slab and furnished water and had a hot water heater in there for showers and flush toilets, and the State got quite fussy. Only one family could use a toilet, you know; two families, they couldn't use one toilet.

DS: That was the first modern housing that I'd seen for migrants in this country, which demonstrates your concern.

Now, getting away from the farm a little, Ewald, do you want to comment on your church relationship and your social activity, even in the early days when you were on the farm--what you did for recreation and that sort of thing? In particular, you belonged to what church and what church do you go to, if you don't mind?

EB: Well, I joined the church that my wife belonged to, and I dropped that church because I didn't approve of it after I was divorced. I dropped that church because they had no respect for any other faith, and I wasn't that type of a person. And I found that people have a faith all over the world--any place I've been. Even in New Guinea, where the people are so primitive they don't have any clothes to wear, but they still have a faith and you might just as well respect it when you're with them. You get along a little better. And this particular faith wouldn't respect any other faith in this part of the country. They were cliquy, so I just quit going there and I started going to the Congregational Church in Moorhead because I had sisters that went there; in fact, my dad went to that church when I was a kid. It's about the only church, I suppose he belonged to it, but he didn't go very often because we lived quite a little ways away.

DS: What about your social life when you were young? What did you do for entertainment besides go to school and work? You must have gotten into some kind of trouble once in awhile! [Laughter]

EB: Well, yes, I suppose I got into trouble. But I was the only boy going to grade school most of the time, and so there wasn't any trouble at school. And for parties that we had around the country in the winter time, why, we'd get a bobsled and a grain tank and gather someplace and have a little goodies to eat and play some games and entertained ourselves--that's about all it amounted to then. We'd go skating once in a while in a group. And I like to dance. I'd walk as far as Sabin, which was 3 1/2 miles, to go to a dance and walk home again [laughter] in the wintertime. In the summertime I used a bicycle.

DS: That was in your early teens, I suppose. Well, then, you also drove truck for awhile in the gas business. And who did you work for?

EB: Well, I went broke farming in 1936 and Mr. Pitsenberger of the Super Oil Company at that time, furnished the gasoline and oil that I needed that summer and I didn't have any money to pay for them and I told him I didn't have a dime, but if I could work some of it out I'd be glad to do that and he said, "Certainly; I've got something for you to do." So I went to work for him and got quite an education in many ways. He was an intelligent man and a good business man, and I learned a lot about running my own business from him. It wasn't easy work; it was when oil burners first got going and you had to pail all the fuel oil

in 5-gallon buckets into barrels through a funnel and everything else. There were a few places they could pump it off by hand. It wasn't measured; you had to measure it off in the tank. Then they started transporting oil at that time from the pipeline because the freight on gasoline was high and more than that there was so much shrinkage because the gasoline is loaded at the end of a pipeline onto your truck and railroad cars also by a certain temperature and volume and as the temperature increases, the volume increases and the same going the other way. When we loaded those tanks at the pipeline down in southern Nebraska, they'd be way over the marker because the gasoline is pretty warm coming out of the pipeline, and we'd get it up here where it was 10 below zero, it would shrink so it would be a foot and a half below the marker when it cooled off. Those tanks are sealed so you could sell that tank full of gas even though the volume wasn't there when it was cold. That saved enough gasoline to pay for hauling it up here at that time. It was difficult to get the banks to believe that and they wouldn't go along with the transport deal, but Mr. Pitsenberger got the Northwest National Bank in Minneapolis to go along with him and go into the transport business and it made him quite a lot of money. I asked him one time when I met him at the Post Office--I said, "How much are you worth now, John? About two million?" "Oh, not quite that," he said [laughter]. But I think he was.

DS: You drove those transport trucks earlier, didn't you? You said in '36--did you have a crop failure?

EB: Well, it was so dry, we didn't get any sugarbeets. I owed the sugarbeet company \$4200 after I gave them the crop. The year before we'd lost all our grain, you might say, with black rust; there just wasn't hardly any grain and no price either.

DS: In '35? Well, then in '37 you still went back to raising beets.

EB: Yes, I went back to raising beets because the beet company said they'd go along with another crop and try to get their money back.

DS: And was that the break?

EB: That was the beginning of the better end. My brother and Paul Horn and I rented my dad's farm. He quit farming, and we rented his farm and we had water there that we irrigated the onions with; that's when we started the onions. We got onions, and we had plenty of rainfall to get a good crop of sugarbeets then, too.

DS: Tell us about the water story that you told me the other day about the railroad.

EB: Well, in '36 we had practically no rain that summer and the rivers were all dry. You could walk across the Red River here at Moorhead or you could walk across the Buffalo River out here. The Buffalo River was so dry that it was all cracked. At that time the steam locomotive was on the railroad and it took a lot of water, about 400,000 gallons a day. They were quite desperate; they were trying to haul water from Detroit Lakes, which was uphill business, and I contacted railroad men in Fargo, but they thought that I had a kind of a pipe dream because I thought I could pump water out of the gravel pit which was

unlimited and pump it into the river and they could pick it up when it got up to their pumping station and put it in their lines. They kind of laughed at me and a few days later the superintendent of the railroad up at Grand Forks called me, and he got real interested and thought about it, and we couldn't get started quick enough. They sent crews of men out there to survey to see if I knew the water ran downhill and everything else, but we got going and made a little money at it. Could have had twice as much, I'm sure.

DS: Well, now, you pumped that water out of the pit, and the pit was the gravel pit on your father's farm, wasn't it? And how long has that pit been there?

EB: Well, that was a little pit when I can first remember, and I think when my dad bought that farm probably there was a hole there. It was an Indian burying ground, and it was the highest part of the farm by a couple of feet. They found out that there was gravel there. They hauled from there to Moorhead and Fargo with horses when I was a kid, mostly in the wintertime, on sleds.

DS: To fill cisterns, I suppose.

EB: Well, concrete work and stuff like that.

DS: They must have had water in Fargo and Moorhead in those days.

EB: They had water, but not gravel.

DS: Oh, you're talking about hauling gravel.

EB: Yes, and that's what started the pit. It was a fair sized pit there when they started graveling roads in 1923. I worked in that pit with 12 horses scraping gravel and they graveled the road from Moorhead to Glyndon in 1923. In 1925 they graveled Hiway 52 from Moorhead to about Baker out of there. And in '26 they graveled 75 and a little bit of 81 out of there and at that time, the country roads were all dirt roads and they couldn't haul on them with trucks until they froze up in the fall; otherwise, they'd go to pieces, so that was winter work. And in '26, we worked night and day. I ran the engine in the crusher plant from 6 in the evening until 7 in the morning.

DS: That's a rock crusher you're talking about?

EB: Yes, a rock crusher and screening plant. We screened it down to about three-quarters of an inch size.

DS: What do you know about that streak of gravel, where it starts and where it goes, and is there any limit--location of it? Do you know the section it's in in Glyndon township?

EB: Well, I can't tell you the number of that section in Glyndon township, but that gravel is in more or less hills underneath. But where the gravel pit is it came within 12 inches of the surface and down at the house, only a quarter of a mile away, it's 80 feet down to the

gravel. And then going further south, they never could get a decent well over there because of such fine sand at ordinary depths. Mr. Conley [phonetic] had a big rock out in the field [missing words as tape was turned]

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

EB: 'cause the boys skipped out one day and went hunting, I guess, and came home late for work and he penalized them by making them dig that rock out. When they dug that rock out, there was gravel under it. The gravel came to the surface there; that's what started the pit over to the Conley place. They are about a half a mile apart, but it's 80 feet or better down to the gravel right where the houses are.

DS: That means they have been taking gravel out of there since the early 1900s until today and they're still taking thousands and thousands of yards of it out every summer, aren't they? And how deep is that now, about a hundred feet deep?

EB: I don't know how deep that is out there in the deepest part. I'm sure it's that deep.

DS: That streak runs almost where it did. That's the northwest corner of Glyndon township, isn't it? It's got to be.

EB: Oh, I think Glyndon township runs up--isn't it a mile north of #10?

DS: Oh, that's right. It's really not the northwest corner, is it?

EB: It's more or less the southwest corner.

DS: Southwest corner of Glyndon township. I made that mistake. I was thinking the other way. Yes, and it's about four miles south and two miles east of Moorhead, isn't it?

EB: It's about six miles east of Moorhead and four miles south. It's two miles east of Dilworth.

DS: Yes, but from that railroad track and 52, it's three miles?

EB: Two and a half miles from Merle Allen's over there, but you see that's quite a ways over to 75 yet.

DS: I'm thinking of 52; when you come out 52, it's about five miles out of 52 and three miles east, isn't it? Just for a matter of record, I just wanted to get that straight.

Who were some of the people that lived in that area where you lived and you farmed? What are some of the neighbors? Besides Conleys, of course.

EB: Well, John Conley lived right across the road from us, and he was the closest neighbor. He moved in there when I was a kid; of course, he's gone now. And then Henry Wiedeman,

who was my uncle, lived about a mile west; and Fred Kuehl [spelling] was an active farmer there and lived about a mile across the field northwest. E. D. Grant lived two miles north of our place.

DS: Now, you are related to Donald, too, aren't you?Y

EB: Yes, Donald is my cousin. Mrs. Grant was my mother's sister. And my mother and Mrs. Grant and Henry Wiedeman were from the Wiedeman family.

DS: Let's see, what else can we? But they were pretty well related there--the Wiedemans, the Grants, and the Benedicts, weren't they?

EB: Yes, they were all related.

DS: Now, you were married? When were you married, and you have one boy.

EB: I was married in 1921 and had a boy born in 1924. That's all the children I have. On my father's side, my grandfather was a Civil War veteran and died before I was born of a heart attack. My grandmother remarried, and she married a man in California that went to California in the Gold Rush in '49 in a covered wagon. He was an orphan and 13 years old--probably didn't realize the hazards. But the neighbors went and he went with them.

DS: From where, Wisconsin?

EB: I don't know where he was born. I think he was from one of the southern states; that is, Missouri or someplace down in there--Missouri or Kansas. And I was well acquainted with him--visited with him many times because they would come and visit us and stay two weeks at a time. He was a humorous fellow, bright eyed, and the last time I visited him was in 1922. He was 96 years old then, didn't wear glasses, walked five miles every morning, a good brisk walk, too, and about a year later on one of his walks he was backed into by an automobile backing out of a garage and he wasn't killed at the time but he didn't get over it.

DS: You must have some of those characteristics, as good a health and the way you move around at 85 amazes me, particularly when I've seen you walk into the Post Office a couple of times. I think you're at a half run.

EB: I'm grateful that I can get around as good as I do. It don't bother me at all to walk fast. I can't run since I had pneumonia the last time. I've had pneumonia a couple of times, and the last time it did a lot of damage to my lungs. I don't have any capacity like I should.

DS: Well, you ought to be able to run at 85 without any trouble, at least a hundred yards [laughter].

Do you want to comment on Phil's situation--what happened? I know that's a sad portion, but it would good to have it in the record.

EB: It's a sad story. His whole life, when you think of it, is not good. He got his arm broke the second day he went to grade school and it broke in the elbow in three pieces, and his arm has never been quite normal. It's a little bit crooked and it's turned about 90 degrees. His hand is about 90 degrees from where it should be, and that stopped him from going to school during the war. When it was his turn to go to school, they wouldn't let him go to college. They sent him down to Ft. Snelling for examination a couple of times, but of course they always sent him right back, and the doctor down there didn't know what kind of a Board we had up here that sent him down there all the time when he had a physical handicap. But they wouldn't let him go to school, so he wasn't very happy about that and after the war was over, I suggested he go to school then but he didn't--he thought he was too old, which I didn't think so, but I don't know if his mother had something to do with that or not. She seemed to run his life.

DS: Well, now Phil is in--

EB: He had a heart attack in '77 and he was getting along fairly well after a couple of days, and then his heart went into a condition they called ventricular fibrillation, and that's when it beats so fast it doesn't really pump. They got that under control, but it did enough damage so that he couldn't do much of any work that summer--this was in the spring--and the next year he got along pretty good. He could do anything but heavy work. He wasn't supposed to do any heavy lifting or anything like that. And in 1980 the same thing happened, and he went to the cardiologist about once a week for about five weeks, starting before we started spring work because I was out in California when it started. We got through seeding grain, and we were just getting ready to plant sugarbeets and he had a heart attack like that at one o'clock in the morning and his wife took him into the clinic in Fargo and they sent him home about 3:30 that morning because I went to breakfast at 5:30 and the girl that waited on me said that they had just been in there and had tea and toast and he was on the way home from the clinic. That day he was having trouble and he was taking pills, nitro pills I believe they were, more than I thought he should. So I suggested he go home and rest, and he went home and went to bed, got up for supper, and went back to bed again, and at ten o'clock that evening he had the second one of those spells and I called the ambulance out and also the police from Dilworth which is close by where he lived. They brought oxygen over there, and the ambulance crew had a monitor on him and said his showed pretty bad taking him into the same clinic again. And they still sent him back home again a little after midnight. Then that morning about 5:30 he had the third one and they called the ambulance again and it was so bad then that they didn't think they had time to get him over to Fargo and they took him to Moorhead which is a little closer and they alerted them and they were ready for him when they got there, but it was too late; the damage was done, so that he was in a coma. And since then he hasn't been able to walk or talk or feed himself. And now he's in a nursing home and has been there five and a half years.

DS: Ewald, that is some of the pain I know you've been through.

On a lighter note now, it wouldn't be a good interview with you without talking about airplanes. [Laughter]

EB: Well, Philip is the one that got me interested in airplanes because it was his whole life. He just loved airplanes, and that is what he should have been doing. He had a home-built plane about two-thirds built when he got handicapped now, and a little about the expense of being in a nursing home and taking care of him. It takes all the money that comes off the farm to take care of him. The farm isn't all paid for yet, so I pretty near have got to live on social security because we were in a partnership deal there. But Philip and I both took ground school together and started flying in 1945. We both got our license the following year and I've carried my license ever since and I've flown all over points in the United States and some in Canada and really enjoyed it, not only for pleasure but 70% of my flying was for business because I had business out in Montana that took time and it's a nice way to go. And I had no more fear of flying than I did going out with a tractor if the weather was good and if the weather was bad, I stayed home or went on the train if I had to go someplace.

DS: Now you still have your license, but you aren't doing any flying really, are you?

EB: I sold the airplane when Philip got so he couldn't fly. It was just too much money invested. We sold that plane for \$41,000 and we can't have that kind of equipment standing around and not using it.

DS: Well, do you have any comment about your flying other than that you did it and number of hours [unclear] and used it for business. You belong to the Flying Farmers? What are some of the associations you belong to, now?

EB: Flying Farmers is really the only one in the line of flying. I belong to the National Onion Association that I really enjoy, meeting the people that are successful people--nice, successful people. Good friends to have. You learn something from those kind of people all the time. I used the plane for observing crops quite a bit because you can tell more about a crop flying over it than you can from the road driving by it, if you're used to seeing them from the air because you can tell how thick they are, you can tell the color, and whether you've got weeds in it and everything else and do it pretty quickly. And it was especially good when we had those farms up near Thief River Falls. You could up there and go across three quarters and be back home in less than two hours and it took all day by car.

DS: In other words, you did farm up at Thief River?

EB: Well, we had that on shares up there.

DS: You also farmed north of Moorhead, too, as well as east of Moorhead.

EB: Yes, we had rented land and we got land out in North Dakota now and that was a good experience. We bought that land cheap and it was some of the best land in the valley here as far as that goes. It is well drained and deep, black soil; and it's not the heavy soil, it's the sandy loam like around Casselton.

DS: We've spent some time with your early life and your family and Phil and your airplanes and some of the history. Do you have any general comments you'd like to make about the community or the area or your life purpose?

EB: I lived in a pretty interesting era. The first automobile that I remember was a steam automobile in about 1906; I think I was about six years old. That was at the township election; it might have been county election, too. It was at an old school house up north of Grants'; there used to be a school house up there. The old Barnes farm--they had a steam automobile.

DS: Now, that Barnes' farm was later owned by Hank Peterson and was it east of Glyndon, wasn't it?

EB: West of Glyndon. Just east of Dilworth.

DS: Just east of Dilworth and right on the Buffalo there. On Hiway 10.

EB: I lived there ten years and I farmed that land. A. D. Grant was the administrator of that Barnes estate and that's how I got there, and that's where I started growing sugarbeets. I saw almost all of the automobile age back to about 1906. I saw a 1902 Cadillac here a short time ago over in Wisconsin, and I'm going back and get a good picture of it when it gets fixed up a little better. It's a one-cylinder. It has leather fenders on it and just two passenger, single seat. The seat looks more like the seat we used to use on a spring wagon seat, and the fellow that owns it said that Cadillac only made six automobiles in 1902 and that's number three. It's rare, but he said the engine runs all right, wheels are all on it, no tires on it the day I was there, but he'll get them on there. I don't know if he'll get the fenders releathered or not, but the leather shrunk so that it doesn't look very good, so he might just give them a coat of paint and leave them like that. And the same with airplanes. The first airplane that I saw was in 1911 at the Fair down at Wahpeton, and I have a pretty good picture of it and it may be the same airplane that's in the Smithsonian Institute that's hanging up on the ceiling in there. I've got a pretty good picture and if I ever get to the Smithsonian Institute again, I'm going to take that picture along and see if there is some special mark on there if I can tell if it's the same airplane. It was an unusual airplane, too; it had a water-cooled engine in it and two propellers that were on the back side of the wings that were the pusher type and they ran with a chain to each propeller from that one engine, and the fellow sat out in front and it had wheels about like a bicycle, but it flew good. He put on a good demonstration there. The fellow that invited my sister and I down there for that week grabbed her and he was going to chuck her under the automobile if that thing fell [laughter], but he put on a good show.

DS: You've had some honors both from the Flying Farmers and Agassiz Club and now with Northwest Farm Managers. Comment on your Northwest Farm Manager.

EB: I've never been very active. I knew the fellows that were at the head of it usually, and I enjoyed it because there was always something to learn there. I was quite interested when Cap Miller had his gadget program there; that was always interesting to me. I was

fortunate to know Cap Miller quite well and I was invited down to Keokuk, Iowa to the 50th anniversary of the 4-H. He was the beginner of the 4-H and it started out as a girls' and boys' service club--no that wasn't it; it wasn't a service club. It was a girls' and boys' club anyway. He was superintendent of schools down there and he started it, and they have him quite an honor when the 50th anniversary came around. He invited me down there, and I flew down there and he was so elated that I would fly down there. The morning I left he asked me what time I was going to leave in the morning. I said I would get up fairly early and get out of there because I had a sister visiting in Des Moines and I would stop and pick her up. I came down about six o'clock in the morning and he was down there waiting for me. He wanted to be sure and talk to me and tell me how much he appreciated me coming down there.

DS: Northwest Farm Managers, for clarification, is a farm organization that members belong from probably the three surrounding states and Canada, meets in February, and each year in about the last 15, they have honored a pioneer farmer; and this year in 1986, Ewald was chosen as the pioneer farmer of the year. I suppose you've been a member, I suppose, as long as anybody in the business. You've been there as long as I can remember, I know.

EB: I've probably been there as long as anybody that's living here now unless it's Hugh Trowbridge.

DS: Hugh's still alive.

EB: Yes, he's still living and he might have been a member before me; I'm not sure about that.

DS: And then you were also honored as an honorary member for Agassiz Club, which is another agriculture organization that was started about some 30 years ago by a man by the name of Tony Meeson [phonetic] which has a motto that we know what's going on in agriculture today but we want to know what's going on tomorrow. Ewald is one of the pioneer members there and has been given an honorary membership to it. Now did you not get some honor from the Flying Farmers, too?

EB: No, I've never had any honor from the Flying Farmers except I got the most members of anybody in about 1958. We had the Minnesota annual meeting here; they landed out at the farm on that strip. There was about 23 planes out there, and some of them landed at Fargo that needed to have fuel. The meeting was at the F-M Hotel here in Moorhead. And for getting the most members that year, I got this watch. It's really the best watch I ever had. I never heard of one before. It's a Croton and it runs almost on the minute all the time, self winding. I've had it cleaned twice, but it still takes a lot of abuse on my hand, working in the shop and stuff like that. It takes a lot of abuse.

DS: You talked about your shop. You did a lot of your own work, didn't you, both the motors as well as the general repair of your equipment on the farm?

EB: We've done practically all of that. The machine work that we had to get done in the shop is about the only thing that we didn't do. It was easy for me to do and I enjoyed it.

DS: Well, you had one of, by today's figures it probably isn't as modern, but in its day when you started, I remember you had a very modern shop with all the necessary tools, as I recall.

EB: We tried to keep everything up as good as we could because it saves you trips to town and this and that.

DS: Well, Ewald, it looks like we've had quite a session, and I'm sure we've been here now almost an hour and twenty minutes.

EB: Oh, my goodness.

DS: It hardly seems that long, but you've done a good job, and I appreciate your taking your time; and I'm sure the Heritage Society does too. And thank you very much.

EB: Well, you're welcome. It was my pleasure.

[End of Interview]