

**Interview with Lee Risse, 14 February 2001, at 512 Herning Rd.** *Others speaking are Al and Bruth George. A 1953 school district map showing land ownership is in front of us. Lee continues to live on his homestead and operates a large greenhouse business there. Mileages given are all on Chena Hot Springs Rd. unless otherwise noted.*

L: .....here's McQuinn. Sherrer<sup>1</sup> had this little dinky thing up here. He had that D-2 with a winch on it and he used to drag logs down to the Chena River and they floated them down to town.

B: *Down to the Little Chena?*

L: No, they went to the Big Chena.... Fassler told me about that..... Ackerman (9 M) was here and that's about where the road quit....

B: *But they show the road up here (continuing straight east to around 9 M).*

L: Well, that was proposed at that time..... then they brought the road down..... Bernard O'Leary—the only reason he homesteaded was because there was a lot of wood there and he sold firewood.....and he also bought firewood from me a couple of times.

Kalina (7 M) never got his 160 (acres).... They went up and measured his clearing and he didn't quite get enough cleared and whoever from the BLM did the measuring didn't give any sympathy for the fact that he was almost blind.

A: *You remember, the rule of thumb was you had to clear ten percent of what you were claiming?*

L: Well, I did it by commutation or something. I paid a dollar and a quarter and I only had to do ten acres for the 160. My biggest concern was they (*the army*) were hunting gun site properties at that time. They took a gun site over by Henry's... and they went out by Dornath. They also looked off of Amanita and they didn't pick that, but they were lookin' over right on the top of the property of mine.... And as long as I hadn't proved up on it, they could arbitrarily take it and give me some other piece of ground, which I wasn't excited about, so I hot-footed down and paid the \$1.25 an acre for my 160 and I gave the U. S. Government \$200 and I got the original title at that time.

(George) Farkas had this piece of ground there next to (Les) Loud (2 M). The road runs through there on a slant, and (*made it a*) kinda of an odd ball piece of ground in there and Loud's is a little bit cockeyed like that, too..... At one time the road was just gonna come whippin' straight out here. Well, Eberhardt (5 M) and all them guys thought it was goin' come up there (*bordering their property*) but the road didn't go that way.....

..... Kruger (5 M) had the greenhouse.... He bought the boiler from Independent Lumber or somebody and the first tomato plants I bought from him, he jerked 'em out of the ground and wrapped 'em up in newspaper and gave 'em to me and I'd never seen anything like that....

---

<sup>1</sup> McQuinn and Sherrer were both located near 7 M.

Charlie Shrewsbury had 'em in beer cans. We did some tomatoes in beer cans, too. I picked up all the beer cans from that Club Car on the Steese Highway....

*B: Somebody was talking about a Mr. Betschard.*

L: Oh, I didn't remember him. All I heard about, when you come down the hill from Severn's<sup>2</sup>, he had a strawberry patch out there and a raspberry patch and I guess he was just one of these guys that tried to exist off the land.....

Carl Herning (5 M) grew some stuff, too. In 1953 was the first time I met Carl. He had potatoes on his place and I came up and helped my sister and her husband get a house under roof. They only had X number of dollars and when we expended all the money they had at the time, I still had a couple more days of vacation..... Everybody wanted someone to help pick up potatoes so Howard Arndt (*a friend*), who was in the service, took time off to help with the house and then we went out and picked up potatoes.

Well, Carl had two young guys there that were haulin' in as we were pickin' 'em up. Well, at five o'clock these guys went home and Carl still had potatoes out in the field. Carl says, "Where're the Tillman boys?" I said, "Well, they left at 5 o'clock." And somebody said, "All I saw was the taillights as they were leaving." So we were out in the dark trying to pick up potatoes, you know, with potato vines all everywhere, and, if you don't think that was something—somebody holdin' the flashlight, tryin' to find where the bags were and we fumbled around out there in the dark .... Harold (*Herning, 5½ M*) came over and we got all of 'em in....

Carl was driving schoolbus already so he dug a couple rows before he went on the bus route. Well, Carl was a fussy guy about who drove his equipment.... And it was really funny, this Arndt grew up on a farm in Wisconsin and he ran more farm machinery than Carl ever saw, so after we picked up those potatoes, Arndt dug four more rows and Carl come back and he said, "W-h-o d-r-o-v-e m-y t-r-a-c-t-o-r?" We said, "Well, we were out of potatoes."

I think we picked 170 bags of potatoes that day. And those two kids came in the morning and we helped 'em load so we weren't out there fumblin' in the dark. We put ninety pounds in the bags, that's what he wanted. You could still kinda get a hold on the bags but that was about all. John Holmes and all those other guys only put one of those big baskets in each bag and that way whoever was doing it, their kids, or Edith<sup>3</sup> or John, could lift 'em, with only one basket in a bag.

*B: When were George (Lyle) and Harold involved in a dealership?*

L: They had the Oliver dealership right there where Radio Shack is (*on Old Steese*). Then Lundgren Construction got into that building and Harold went out.... At one time, Harold sold Fred Stubbings (5½ M) a piece of equipment...

*B: We had it (an Oliver OC3). It came with the place.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Where Severns Rd. meets Nordale

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. John Holmes

L: You had the loader on it, the bucket, huh? You didn't have a blade, did you?

A: *Yeah, but the bucket was the narrow one. It didn't go out beyond the edge of the tracks, so you were always fightin' that.....*

L: Oh, the crooked business. The guy over at Mitchell Truck and Tractor said, "Well, it's better than a No. 2<sup>4</sup>, but not much." Don (*Herning*) had a piece of equipment, too, and Frank Fassler bought one and that thing only had three rollers on the bottom and if you got on uneven ground the track would just walk off and for about a half a day you'd be out there jacking and trying to put it back on.

Charlie Ward (*7 M*) got one of the first John Deere's that John Deere made. NC was selling them and Charlie Ward was promoting the John Deere thing at the time..... Then Yukon Equipment was handling a thing called TerraTrak (*sp?*) and that was the forerunner to the Case Company makin' a crawler tractor.....

Carl Herning at one time bought a combine from someone..... Walt Eberhardt had a grain drill from somewhere, I don't know if it was Charlie Ward's or what, but we planted barley over at my place because that was the only kind of grain anybody had around here at the time and it made over 70 bushels to the acre, which was kind of an unheard of thing.

Right after we harvested that crop, I was able to get 'em to come and look to make sure we'd done our (*proving up*)..... Originally, I went to the Soil Conservation Service and they took a wheel and measured all these pieces of ground to make sure I had enough cleared and when the BLM came out, they looked out the window and said, "Looks like there's enough there." And they signed it off and went home.

B: *I'm confused. You're proving up but Birkey's<sup>5</sup> name is on the map.*

L: Well, Birky filed on it. I didn't go out there 'til 1954. Birky signed it off and I went in and filed on it. He and I agreed that he had put the road in and we made up an agreement that I would pay for some of the improvements he'd made. Theoretically, he couldn't sell that stuff to me, 'cause it wasn't his, but he was on blind faith that I would pay him. We got a notebook out and scribbled out something that said I had to pay him \$75 a month until it was paid. We were able to pay him \$75 a month but it seemed like it was taking a long time. I mean, \$75, and I was making a big \$150 a month.

Then Greta<sup>6</sup> went in and got this little Mickey Mouse job of half a day, or somethin', or a couple days a week, and so I was trying to figure out a way she could stay home (*instead of*) two people drivin' in. It was costin' more than what we could possibly make. I hit up old Hildy<sup>7</sup> for a raise and then I went down to Johnny Albright<sup>8</sup>, because he was hiring people. He paid \$600 a month and he'd also buy you a pickup at his cost and he kept \$100 a month, or somethin', until it was paid for. But you had to have Samson Plumbing and Heating on the doors....

---

<sup>4</sup> No. 2 shovel, that is

<sup>5</sup>Merle Birky located north of CHS Rd. near 7 Mile.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Lee Risse, died in 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Hildred Haight was business manager at the Geophysical Institute where Lee worked at the time.

<sup>8</sup> Owner of Samson Hardware

When I went back to work, I told Hildy, "Well," I said, "I might as well tell you that I did put in an application," and she said, "How much do they pay there?" And I said, "They pay \$600 a month and the fringe benefits are they buy you a pickup and you pay for it at his fleet cost." And at that time, a pickup was about twelve hundred and some dollars, delivered in Fairbanks, so in one year you'd have it paid off and you'd have a new rig. So she decided that she'd pay me \$612.50....

*B: What about Bohnet (7 M)?*

L: Bohnet worked for the airline. Pan Am, I think was the only one really functioning up here at the time. We looked at his house over there where Rudy (*Domke's*) at, but in the meantime, we heard about Birky's place. See, the road (*Risse Rd*) actually goes in here 900 feet from the section line. When Birky used to be in here, he had to go past Earl Herning's (*on the current Alice Rd., the section line*) and he had to go up this hill and it's a really steep hill. He ran over one of Earl Herning's dogs, one night, and they were pretty important dogs. They got manicured and Mrs. Herning was big on grooming and showing their dogs. Anyway, then it was a lot easier for him to put that road in.....

*B: Moving the road got him away from running over their dogs?*

L: That's what Birky said, he said, "Yeah, that dog was the determining thing." Prior to that, the noise didn't bother. Birky used to drive a jeep with no muffler and he worked all hours of the day and night, he was a heavy duty mechanic.... (Tape change)

.....someday or other, they were able to pump the gravel (*instead of bailing*<sup>9</sup>) and Birky's job was to change the pipes ever so often. When the gravel went running through there, it would wear the pipes out on the bottom, and he would have to turn the pipes a quarter turn when they started leakin'. They pumped several million yards of gravel.

*B: Out of the Chena?*

L: No, it was out at Eielson, right near the base. They were bailing the gravel for that big hangar that's out there. That was supposed to be built in 1953, but what happened was all the trades went on strike. The carpenters were getting \$3.75 an hour and they wanted \$4.00, and the plumbers were getting \$4.00 and they wanted \$4.25, electricians were getting \$4.50 and they wanted \$4.75 and laborers were getting \$3.50 and they wanted \$3.75 and everybody went fishing in 1953. And nobody gave on it except the guys pumpin' the gravel because they made an agreement that whatever the wages were gonna be, they wanted a guy workin'. They didn't care about that 25 cents. And what was so funny, they were all tryin' to get 25 cents.....

(*Bob*) McQuinn (7 M) was a painter, he did this homestead thing,... but he was on a hill that was just unreal..... Schleppergrell<sup>10</sup> owned this piece of ground (*Billikin Sub. and west to Herning Rd.*), then Carl bought it from Schleppergrell and Harold got it from Carl.<sup>11</sup> Rudy

<sup>9</sup> "bailing" was lifting gravel from a pit by means of large equipment operating a scoop.

<sup>10</sup> Jack Schleppergrell owned the Steese Market at College Rd. and old Steese Hwy. He was the first mayor of the FNS Borough.

<sup>11</sup> Maybe. There is some question as to who owned what and when.

Billberg was down in here<sup>12</sup> and he had a little cabin there. He sold to Severns..... I think Pentacostal (*Childrens' Home*) bought from Love, or maybe it was on this Davis (*property on Love Rd, 4 M*).....

And then this old guy, Denton, had a little piece of ground right there by Steele Creek. He kept goin' after the State because they were three feet over center line on his property (*for the road*). For a long time he was arguin' about three feet, then they came along and took two hundred. He was there for a long time but he finally loaded up everything he owned in his truck, and went down the highway. He went off the road in Canada somewhere, and he lost his truck and all his belongings and the only thing he come out of there with was his dog. And then the Canadian government didn't want him leavin' his truck there.

I liked to go over to Frank Fassler's because when you went over to his place, he'd give you a cup of coffee and he always washed out the cup, even if it was in the cabinet, clean. Better than I could do at Carl Lindstrand's.<sup>13</sup> I don't think I ever got any coffee there. At McQuinn's, the cats were always lickin' the stuff off, you know. He was a good-hearted guy.

When you go back on Amanita, Jim Day homesteaded a piece of ground up in here. He and Johnny Cole went and cut the firewood off of it and then they decided they didn't want that back in there, the road was too much of a hassle.... (*Eleanor*) Reidel, she homesteaded a long time ago (*5 M*). And then that Maranatha Childrens' Home (*now Brice's on Steele Cr. Rd.*).....

*B: According to Don (Herning), Lynn Funk owned that.*

L: Yeah, he did. Then Funk went ahead and bought land down in the swamp.

*B: Must have been Lundquist's (CHS Rd. at Steele Creek).*

L: I don't know. He went all the way back in there.... I think he went more down toward the creek. I was down there one time and I thought, "Oh, how glad I am to be on the hill." Anyway, he had a whole bunch of cows in there and the water was so bad that everything was brown, the cans on the outside were brown. You know, all these guys were out here tryin' to get this agriculture thing goin' and he had cows and a guy on the Steese here— (*Marvin*) Bushey, and Horace Drury. Horace Drury had 320 acres back off of Freeman Rd. (*All were dairying.*)

*A: He's still in there.*

L: We went out there one time and he had a chopper for hay silage and they delivered their milk to Matanuska at the creamery. And there was a guy out on Chena Pump Rd. that had cows in those railroad cars. They had railroad cars down on Chena Pump Rd. at one time. I can't think of the guy's name. He had more milk than some of the other ones. Then Gadbury had a farm out here off Badger Road and they all brought their milk to the Matanuska Creamery, to the Co-op.

---

<sup>12</sup> South of the current Billikin Subdivision

<sup>13</sup> Carl Lindstrand homesteaded on both side of CHS Rd, near 5 Mile.



See, the Co-op built that creamery here, primarily to sell milk to the military, then they had the refrigeration up here so they made ice cream out of butterfat and powdered milk and stabilizer. The ice cream was good quality and they sold a lot of it. Then Carnation came in and made a deal with Art Sexauer (*who*) was the distributor for Carnation and he was a real good friend of one of the pilots for Pan American and he got a little preferential treatment haulin' milk. They hauled milk up here for eight cents a pound on the airlines. They would bring up fifteen or twenty thousand pounds a night 'cause they were comin' up with a 747 and they'd park their milk trucks out there and they'd off-load it and put it in the trucks.....and take it to the cooler.

This was about 1958, when I went to work there, then in 1959 I got fired. I smiled when the boss came in with two black eyes. I worked at the University until then. Hal Hume was working down at Matanuska Creamery and he was gonna go to college and there was an opening down there, so I went down and applied and got the job.

During the course of the summer, the manager quit and went to work for the city, Dar Heine was the manager down there. He was a chemist by going to school at the University of Michigan, or whatever, and the city needed somebody at the water treatment plant. Also he did the tests on the coal, how many BTU's the coal had. So that job at the creamery was only an interim job.

Then the Co-op sent up one of the sons from the board of directors (*in Palmer*) to be the interim manager. Well, he was a really good \_\_\_\_\_ operator, but he wasn't a manager. I went to all the trouble to make the inventory up for him and he'd just arbitrarily order whatever he felt like. I also had the opportunity to change about fifty cases of milk out of that little dinky cooler and put the new in. They got milk three times a week and everyday when we got milk in, I'd have to haul these out, put 'em on a cart, put the new in and set the others ones on top. Back and forth in there. And then we had cardboard boxes at that time, so we had to lay plywood on the boxes in each layer so they didn't mash down. The waxy cartons leaked half the time and if they leaked we'd put it back into the milk and re-pasteurize it because they couldn't sell a leaker.....

*B: Did you know Dr. Fitz?*

L: I only met him one time. I went over to Bert Stimple's place and I met Dr. Fitz. This Dr. Fitz was a missionary in China, I believe.... He was a real good, non-alcoholic person and Bert Stimple was full of practical jokes. One time, Dr. Fitz had some potatoes and he agreed to get somebody over to help dig 'em.... Bert Stimple and somebody else went over and they got a couple hundred beer cans and they buried them in the row so when they started diggin', here come beer cans out of the row. Everybody's over watchin' this demonstration of this new potato digger. And they went into one of Bert Stimple's rows when he was gonna show how much he got, and they had rogued out all the potatoes that they could reach and they very carefully mounded the dirt again and it had drizzled a little bit so it looked natural.... Well, they started diggin' and there wasn't a peanut for the first forty or fifty feet. They had rogued 'em all out of there.

*B: And who was responsible?*

L: I think that was the Mad Russian, Zozula. Because Mrs. Zozula worked over there raisin' potatoes for Bert.... Cora Gamble helped, too. Somebody rigged up a bucket of water and when they went into Bert's root cellar, water dumped on their heads. They were told it wasn't for them, it was in case somebody broke in and stole potatoes....

Bernie Rinear, he had that little amusement thing back in there (*Rainbow Valley Ranch, 1 M*).

*B: When did the road from the army's gun site (near 3 M) continue on over here (to Steele Creek Rd.) ?*

L: ..... they use to have a problem over here by Farkas place (*CHS Rd. and Bennett*) with that creek through here. Who the heck was it? The Bureau of Public Roads? They used to call it the Bureau of Plural Ruts. Anyway, they finally made it so they could go through. But I remember Mattie Herning saying how they'd have to go all the way over on Steele Creek Rd. and come back on Bennett Rd.

*B: Well, when did Bennett Rd. go in?*

L: .....I don't know exactly. I just knew that old Bennett was up there (*on Steele Creek Rd.*) and I went up there one time and he was a grumpy old turkey. He wouldn't pay very much because Anne (*Lyle*) and somebody went and picked potatoes for him one time and they didn't go back.

*B: What about Kasalek's? They don't show here (on the corner of Steese and CHS Rd.)*

L: Kasalek owned up the hill here and he had some down in the swamp there, too..... he also owned some on the opposite side of the road because the Steese ran through his place.

*A: Had some real bad permafrost.*

L: Where (*Kasalek's*) house is, is all decent, there and up the hill, but they went down in the swamp there, one time, they were clearing some land there where the CHS Rd goes now..... They were in there in the spring time and there was a thermokarst big enough to put all the brush in. They were pushin' it along and all of a sudden the snow came out of the ground like this (*indicating an explosion*). That hole was 15' to 18' deep in there.....

Well, the Matanuska Creamery bought out the Farmer's Co-op after while, and the only reason they bought that building (the root cellar on old Steese) was they was gonna bring up their potatoes from Palmer and sell 'em....

.....You see, Brockman<sup>14</sup> started down at the copper mine, Kennecott, down there by McCarthy. Tilly worked in town, she worked for the school district for a long time and I don't know if her employment with the school district was at the end or the beginning because she ran the Peerless Café for a long time. And I remember her and Henry getting in a disagreement about something, so she got the land up on the hill then she went up and built her house....

---

<sup>14</sup> Henry (and Tilly) Brockman, early homesteader near 6 ½ M

*B: Coby Eberhardt (7 M) was over there where Domke's are?*

L: Yeah, Coby just lived in that guy's house for awhile then he went outside to drive Greyhound Bus....

*B: Whose house was this?*

L: He bought Bohnet's. Bohnet went out to San Francisco and got stationed in San Francisco workin' for Pan American....

*B: When did the Ward's<sup>15</sup> show up here, do you know?*

L: Wards were out there, it seems, about 1957-58, it seems to me it was after the fire went through there, in '58. He got someone out there with a D9 and they knocked all those dead trees over and Jim Day and Johnny Cole went in and cut a bunch.... And then there was an Irish guy bought that place after Charley left, a MacLean or Mac-something. He was a mechanic, he worked for Yukon Equipment.....

*B: Incidentally, John Hewitt was saying Carl Lindstrand had a FarmAll tractor. Do you remember this?*

L: Yeah, he had a big one and it had a saw on the back and it was power take-off. He'd deliver the wood in 4' lengths..... then he could buzz it up into 12" or 16" or whatever. He cut some for me one time but getting him motivated was quite a deal.... I finally pinned him down that he was gonna come over. I had a bunch I wanted cut up and I traded him firewood for sawing because I had these old, old chainsaws and they weren't very swift. We did about ten cord that one day. John Holmes had the first tractor with power steering because he figured that when he was drivin' the tractor in the field it was nice to be able to turn it easily but his truck, that Edith had to drive, didn't have power steering.

The farmers would all put in a bid on how much they wanted to sell their potatoes for and then the Co-op would put in a bid on the average, then if someone wanted to sell at the price they were setting, the Co-op would accept them. And some of 'em would make a real low bid.....

If it hadn't been for Walt and Dorothy (*Eberhardt*), a couple of times I think our homestead would have been somebody else's. But I didn't want to walk three miles to tell anybody, one night when I was ready to give it away. The road was washed out in two places, the car was (*on the wrong side*) and everything I did went wrong. Had a flat tire on my truck, then it fell off the jack and went way down in the mud and I jacked it up and almost got it out of the mud and it fell over one more time and I got the swede saw stuck in a tree and broke the handle of the axe getting it out and I was tryin' to cut logs and was goin' fill in that ditch with 'em..... The thing is, Walt and Dorothy came over that night when the road was washed out and they drove up through the woods, somehow, and I could hear this Jeep comin', makin' a lot of noise and all of a sudden they came to the house. And then Walt said, "Man, you sure make it hard to come visit you guys."

---

<sup>15</sup> Charlie and Gertrude Ward located near 7 M.



They were adventurous, Walt and George Lyle (5½ M). They went up to the Chena Hot Springs on the winter trail one time. They drove along and there were lots of those alders and everything across the road, so they were goin' along and all of a sudden it sounded like a tire blew out. They stopped and looked and all the tires were good and then after they got up to the Springs they still couldn't figure out what tire was blown out. It was the one mounted on the side of the Jeep. One of the sticks from the road had poked a hole through the thing.

*B: Well, Mattie was talking about all the old bachelors from around the neighborhood that sponged off Carl and the question we all had was, how did they support themselves?*

L: Well, Kruger had this greenhouse..... I don't think it supported him but occasionally Carl had him do some stuff for him.

*B: What kind of fuel did he use for the greenhouse?*

L: Oh, he had wood. He had a big old boiler... and he also burned coal. They got a stoker in there after awhile..... It seemed like that greenhouse was about 24'x24'.

You know Carl used to raise quite a few vegetables..... Kruger raised radishes for Carl. Carl had the ground and Kruger would do the radishes and they sold 'em to the military. I remember in 1953 and 1954, they did a lot of 'em. They sold them in 25 pound bags to the restaurants. And they did zucchini. The guys who got zucchini on the market first got about fifty cents a pound for it and they sold it for seventy-nine in the store. Then when it went down to thirty-nine, they got twenty-five cents a pound for it. Gasoline was twenty-eight cents a gallon.....

*B: Who was it hauled the wood down to the river?*

L: That was Adolph Sherrer and he bought that D2. I tried to buy that when they settled his estate. I did all the leg work on it and some turkey at the bank bought it out from under me. They figured it (*Sherrer's D2*) would be \$1800. That was a diesel and at that time, it didn't have a blade on it, but a blade was about \$1000 at that time. It had a winch on it and I thought it'd be easy to drag wood out of the woods with it..... I followed the trail of that cat and it got bought within a week, then it was sold to somebody else and it ended up down at Pierre Johnson's, on Johnson Rd. It went from \$1800 to \$3600 in a period of two or three weeks.

A little bit beyond Johnson Rd. there, we found peat up on the hillside, up on top of the hill. We were huntin' peat because we were biddin' on a job at Eielson and we were tryin' to figure out where we'd get peat from.... As it ended up, whoever got the job that time just took the existing material down in that area, so we never did pursue that too much.

*B: This was after you were in the landscaping business?*

L: Well, I did a little bit, you know. The greenhouse thing, I was sellin' to Holmes. By the first or tenth of June, we had everything delivered to 'em, we didn't have anything at home and the only thing we did was our garden stuff. One year, we went overboard, we had almost 7000

cauliflower plants. I sold most of 'em to Safeway. When I tried to sell stuff to Safeway, the guy said, "You'll have to talk to the manager." So I talked to the manager and he said, "Well, give me ten good reasons why we should buy from you." And I said, "Oh, I can do better than that." I had 42 checks written out to Safeway, most of 'em in the \$100 category. I bought groceries about once a month and I had a lot of checks.....so then it wasn't so hard to break in.

.....About the time I went to work for Consolidated, I didn't have time to do this greenhouse thing so one year I made a deal with Russ Wood, or Mrs. Russ Wood, and I said, "You guys got your foot in the door. I'll give you a billing book and you put it on a separate billing book, write it up like it's yours, and then just take 20% off when they pay you." She said, "That's too much." And I said, "No, it isn't. That's what you gotta get." So, I made the agreement and after awhile she said that was good. It helped them get into the store with a few more items.

I'll never forget the guy that was the produce buyer at Safeway about that time. He said "We've finally got a guy can bring in zucchini as nice as yours." I said, "Oh, I must have showed somebody how to do it."... So, one night he's out at Russ Wood's and I'm delivering zucchini squash. Well, you see, I had so many zucchini squash, I could pick out the choice ones. I threw the other ones off the side of the garden. It looks so nice when they're all uniform and people are a little bit pleased if you can give them a quality product every time. In order for me to get into the store, I sometimes would have to take their old crummy ones that were wilted, put 'em on the scale, throw 'em in the garbage and give 'em my good ones. Then I'd have mine in there and they would sell. You had to work at it.

*A: This has nothing to do with zucchini, but I have two questions. How did they haul wood and hay to town. What time of the year?*

L: Most of that stuff, early on, they had old army 6x6's. Lindstrand had one of them old 6x6's and Kruger had one, too. If Kruger got a little bit of money, he worked on those engines, put rings into his old 6x6's.

When they hauled potatoes to the military, George Dornath had a truck belonged to Dan Hartman. George Dornath would line that truck with furniture pads and they'd stack the potatoes in and they'd cover over with furniture pads and then over the very top of the truck they'd put a tarp. And then they'd deliver out to Wainwright or Eielson. They'd back the truck in and off-load it, one bag at a time. Nothing was pallatized because no one had a forklift at that time. The military accepted potatoes five ton at a time. Most of the time with five ton on the truck, it was overloaded, but they delivered mostly in the winter, and hardly ever the scale was open and I don't know that they ever stopped anybody.....

Carl (*Herning*) had his own root cellar and I washed potatoes in 50 gallon barrels.....

*A: He used the same cellar later for a school bus garage.*

L: Well, he used it for the school bus already but then he dug out back into the hill a lot more. He extended it, got all his nieces and nephews over to do the work for him.

His house, at one time, didn't have a very big basement and they undermined that whole house, dug and carried the dirt out, a wheelbarrow at a time. And Harold made a root cellar

over at his place by pouring a slab of concrete on the ground, a monstrous slab of concrete with lots of steel in it, and then they went in and dug it out underneath. And Harold was on the wheelbarrow, too. Well, you know, we did some things pretty stupid, in our younger days, but sometimes, if you didn't have money you had to do what you could.

*B: Oh, Ackermans. John Hewitt said he (Ackerman) had a little sawmill or something out there.*

L: The sawmill was out at his place but it belonged to Fassler. The reason it was out at his place was because there were logs that were still available close by. Fassler'd go down and saw 'em, you'd see him go by with his crawler tractor and he had a go-devil (*sled*). I don't know what Ackerman did but I think he worked for the school system..... Then Al Wendt was out there. He raised chickens out the road a little bit further..... He was the guy who parachuted onto the ice floe when they had that ice island up above Barrow.

*A: T-3?*

L: One of those. He was the guy that parachuted down and run the cat down there and made the runway so they could land an airplane. And they dropped that—I don't know—D4, or whatever, with a parachute, onto the ice and he's the guy parachuted in and made it work. He was a heavy equipment operator and he did those banks on the Parks Highway.

My brother-in-law (*Orland Carey, a Baptist minister*) had taken some really bad alcoholic and straightened his life around, so this guy's mother deeded Orland a piece of property out there by the airport, little chunk of ground, acre or acre and a half. I had worked for a construction company and there was a kind of old caretaker guy, lived at the church. He and I went out and staked out this place, found out where the property was, then my brother-in-law said, "We'll get somebody in there to dig a basement." So I called up Mitchell Truck and Tractor. This young Geraghty come out there with this big old D8 on the back of a tilt-top trailer. He was 18 years old, and I thought, "Oh, my gosh! What did I do?" You know, he dug that basement and had it within an inch of being level. Charged me two hours of cat time at \$25 an hour, and half an hour for travel time. Had a basement dug for \$67.50.

Then my friend that was in the army, he came and helped me. We put in a foundation and laid up the box and we were haulin' blocks from the block plant. I had a car and we had a little old trailer, so we couldn't haul too many at a time.

Dudley R. Skelton was the police chief for awhile and one night he came over with his gun drawn and says, "I caught you in the act, stealin' blocks." We were a little bit excited, a gun pointin' at us, you know, so we called Bill Olinger, or whatever his name was, the manager for the block company, and he came over and looked it over and said, "Oh, yeah, you better watch it, those guys already got fourteen hundred hauled. How come you didn't catch 'em before now?"

We'd mix up our mud by hand, you know, and we laid out that basement. That was an L-shaped basement and once we got the blocks up, Orland had gotten some lumber from somewhere. It was used lumber, but it was good stuff. Went out there, I don't know who all helped, but we got the floor joists down and then they brought three-sided logs. We got one load and Carl (*Herning*) told us how we should do it..... We strung two wires together, that

212 wire, and we went over and attached on to some guy's trailer over where that Golden North Motel is now. There was a few trailers in there and a couple of concrete igloos. We piped our electricity over there from that point.

*B: Were you and Greta married then?*

L: No, not in '53.... I was up here by myself. Then we got those logs up in nothin' flat, so Orland called up the guy and said, "We need to get some more logs." The guy says, "Well, it's huntin' time now, I won't be able to, I don't have anybody to help me. It takes two more guys." Orland says, "What time do you want 'em. I'll have the two guys down there." And the guy says, "Well, we'll start at seven." So we went down there to 39 mile on the Richardson and, sure enough, the guy was ready to go, so we sawed enough logs to finish that house.

That afternoon and evening, we peeled them suckers until 2 in the morning. We were pitch and all, on our legs. See, there was only one side to peel but this Mr. Reynolds took his tri-square and marked all of them so we could peel to a certain line, so each log, when they were cupped on the edge, would touch each other. They were eight inch logs, six inches high and four where the narrowest part was, and every one was peeled to that dimension.... He had a chisel that was about this long, the metal part of it, and about that broad and weighed about twenty pounds and if you had one of those bad knots on there, you'd go WHAP and off it'd come. Then when we layed 'em out on the floor, we had this big drill, we'd drill a hole big enough so that when we drove the spike down in it, in case the log would shrink or somethin', it could slide on there. It just kept it from tippin' over..... Carl showed us how to get the corners straight. We stuck a log up in the corner, a short one, then built to it.... When we got it under roof, that's when we went out and started helpin' dig potatoes.

*B: Is that house still there? What happened to it?*

L: They sold the property and they moved the house down that University Avenue... just a little bit further down University Avenue than the entrance to Fred Meyers' there..... Donnybrook bought the property from her (*Mabel Carey*)..... She had a house built then in North Pole.... Her husband died in 1961, that year the bitter cold was here. Right after he died, her well quit running. And her with eight kids. We went and drove a well in the basement of that house. It was 45 or so below zero when we started. I don't know how cold it got. It got colder before the night was over. And we had to cut these pipes in short pieces so we could drive 'em down. Oh, my God, I tell you what, I was so happy to see water comin' out of the faucet when we got done.

*B: You were just driving it by hand?*

L: Yeah, we had a big old weight and we picked it up and WHAM, WHAM. Well, to get it up, we had a pulley. Most of the time you could do a half a length of pipe or so, but this one we had to do in the basement— you know, we had the floor joists overhead..... That was an experience, tryin' to drive a well—I mean it wasn't frozen or anything, but inside of a building it's a little bit of a deal.

.....Hempel was a produce guy, too. Hempel (*homestead*) is right there... on Farmers' Loop (*around 1 M*). I went out there one time and you know, they had onions, green onions they

were growin' there in that field and they must have had two or three hundred bunches, that particular day when we were out there, neat little onions, hotter than blazes, but they were pretty. And they were growin' 'em out there in the field.

John Holmes must have had a quarter acre of tomatoes one year. He bought tomato seed from every imaginable place and he had maybe ten acres of cabbage one year. He raised cabbage for the military and Dornath hauled it.....and he pumped water out of Columbia Creek.... Henry Gettinger's father-in-law (*Max Douglas*) had that homestead there where that gas trial thing is, (*on Columbia Creek*) and they were growing radishes about where all that test site is..... They had a little radish harvester. It would dig the little things out to the top, then you'd stop the thing and get a bunch off and put a rubber band on as you were diggin' 'em, and it was good if you didn't have wormy ones.....but they'd put four or five extra ones in, then they'd just pinch off the bad one.....

Some things are big improvements and I think the biggest improvement was when the flood came. That got banks thinkin' a little bit, because their little prima donna properties downtown got their thermostats rinsed off. Some of this land out here became a little more valuable. (*Before the flood*), I got turned down on tryin' to drill a well but they loaned money to someone to buy a Cadillac at the same time.....

I didn't get fired (*from Matanuska*) because I didn't do my work. The excuse was that I was selling produce and wasn't selling it through the Co-op. I sold a few boxes of potatoes to people who wouldn't buy Alaska-grown potatoes. In 1953, you could put Alaska potatoes in a pan without water and drain water off of 'em after they were cooked. The Knik potato was the worst one.

I'd give 'em a box of my potatoes, I think it was thirty pounds, and I charged 'em three dollars or something. I said, "If you like 'em, you pay me for 'em. If you don't like 'em you don't pay me." And I got paid for every one of 'em. But I promoted Alaska potatoes. ....Ford had a big homestead at North Pole and his potatoes were so full of scab that you couldn't see the potato. It was in the ground out there. Walt Eberhardt had a little patch in one of his fields, where the water got caught, from a burn pile. On our hill over there, it all drains down the hill and we've never had a scabby potato. I've always used certified seed, except the first couple years when I didn't know about certified seed.....

When it warmed up, we (*Lee and Walt Eberhardt*) would get a whole load of potatoes out of the garage quick, put it on this old Dodge he had sittin' in his yard—old "Kismet," it's a 1937 Dodge--and we loaded that thing up as high as the rack and to town we went. Williams Construction was working on the Steese Highway, at the Farmers' Loop connection. Well, they wanted us to drive clear around McGrath and Walt says, "I'm goin' through there, anyway."

They were haulin' gravel in dump trucks and they were bailing the gravel<sup>16</sup>, and then it would smash down into the box (*of the dump truck*). When they'd go to pick 'em up like that, sometimes it wouldn't slide out. They had one truck sittin' up in the sky when we went by. Old Williams had a shovel in his hand and came over toward Walt like he was gonna smash the

---

<sup>16</sup> This gravel was probably wet, therefore packed (maybe froze) and resisted sliding.



window in on the truck and Walt shook his fist at him and drove on by. He put it in third gear and went tearin' through that loose gravel and down to the root cellar we went.

And then there was Joe Lawler, lived out there off Miller Hill. He was into this farming thing at one time.....

*A: Yup. He got a job with division of lands.*

L: He offered me some land on Bradway Rd. one time, and we went out there and there was water up to the road on both sides so we didn't know where the land was. I think it was \$27 an acre at that time, but I didn't have a boat so I didn't buy it.....

Old Fassler had to pull me out of that creek (*Hopper Creek*), one time. I took my John Deere and tried to go across from his place over to mine, straight across there, and everything was goin' good until a stick poked up and pulled the coil wire off. I didn't know why it died..... I looked at it and didn't know exactly what to do..... It was dark. I walked back over to Fassler and he says, "Boy, oh boy, I don't think I can go down there with my tractor. That's too shaky down there." I says, "Well, why don't you back in. If it looks too bad, I'll stop ya." Well, he backed up there and I hooked on and he started pulling and by that time I'd gotten it started again and then I got out of there, but I drove the long way after that..... But you know, Hopper Creek isn't running like it used to.....

*A: What do you think is causing that?*

L: We had such a terrible dry spell last year, and I don't know if the water is coming from the mining eight, ten miles up the road here—if they're changing the course of the water, underground there, 'cause you know that's straight north up there..... I haven't gone down in the swamp to see if the beavers have got some huge dam in there, too....

*B: Who was Hopper Creek named for? Any idea?*

L: I don't know. I haven't got any idea.....

Transcribed and edited by Bruth George

I agree to share this information with fellow interviewees and others interest in local history.

name

date