

# Interview with Donald McKinley

# AI-A-L-2008-044

Interview # 1: August 22, 2008

Interviewer: Robert McIntyre

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McIntyre: Today is August 22nd. My name is Bob McIntyre and I'm here with Don McKinley in Quincy, Illinois. Maybe we can start with some background on you as far as where you were born.

McKinley: Bob, I was born in Page County in southwest Iowa, 1928, on a farm. My father had three hundred thirteen acres and that was a big farm in southwest Iowa at the time. Most farmers, at that time, had eighty or one hundred and twenty acres. He had double that; he had three hundred acres, three hundred thirteen acres, or something like that.

McIntyre: So was his primary occupation farming then? Or did he have other occupations?

McKinley: No. Total.

McIntyre: Total farming.

McKinley: Total farming. He had all he could say grace over, just running the place. Now he was a grain farmer, but he also fed that grain to livestock. So he raised his

grain and fed it to livestock and then, of course, sold the livestock. He sold very little grain, because he fed most of it. And hay; he fed that. That was a common thing to do back then.

McIntyre: Then on the farm would have been also his wife, your mother, I guess.

McKinley: Oh yes. They had six kids. I'm the youngest of six, four boys and two girls. I still have two sisters living, older sisters.

McIntyre: Are there other relatives involved in that farm operation, or just immediate family?

McKinley: Just immediate family. I can remember a time or two that grandma, my mother's mother came to live with us through the thirties; I can't recall when she passed away. But she lived with us, which made another mouth to feed, other clothes to wash, and so on.

McIntyre: You said the main thing they grew there was grain then?

McKinley: Corn and oats and wheat. No beans early on, no soybeans. Dad was under the impression that soybeans loosened the soil. I don't even know now what type of soil it was, but it was a fairly rolling area and ditches were a factor. He didn't want that soil loose and yet every spring he plowed the heck out of it, and disked the heck out of it. (chuckles) Anyhow...

McIntyre: What type of equipment would he have had available when you were growing up?

McKinley: Well, as a kid, I remember four teams of horses, eight head of horses. I also remember an old, old tractor. It would be an F20, I thin—something like that—Farmall.

McIntyre: Now the horses would have been his and also raised on the farm?

McKinley: Yes.

McIntyre: And they'd be eating the grain he grew too, then?

McKinley: Oh, yes, and the hay. Yes. But they were used in the farming operation. The tractor was also used. I don't recall it having lights, you know. Unless it was terribly moonlight nobody... I do remember plowing done by the light of the moon with that old tractor, barreling away. Yes, I do remember that. It had steel wheels. A little later on came a Farmall H. During the war all farm machinery was extremely difficult to come by; because of the war effort all the factories were going war effort. But he had his name in early for a new tractor, so in '46 I remember he got the first new tractor in the county, and that was a Farmall H. It

came in with steel wheels. The factories weren't up yet on rubber<sup>1</sup> and the salesman told him when the rubber wheels became available they'd trade him. They'd take his steel wheels away and put rubber on his tractor.

McIntyre: How far was the farm from the nearest town or village?

McKinley: Our county seat was twelve miles away, but a little village, a little town was a mile and a half away; that's where we went to school and did all of that.

McIntyre: So school was there, so growing up you'd go to that little village every day then.

McKinley: Yes. Yes, on a school bus. I don't remember—shortly before I went to school, I don't know how, but the school bus was a team of horses then and a vehicle with benches along the side that would hold—I don't know—eight or ten kids. That was the school bus that made the trail morning and night and picked up kids, delivered them all.

McIntyre: You know what his production was back at that time?

McKinley: I can recall corn.

McIntyre: What you got per acre?

McKinley: I can recall the corn production. When I got old enough to pick corn, Dad was tickled. He used open pollinated, meaning no hybrid. Hybrids came in, I think, in '35 or '36 and he was very skeptical of it. First of all, it cost him money. He'd rather pick the good ears out of last year's crop and dry them down and replant them the following year. He felt he got a good crop with fifty to fifty-five bushel an acre. Sometimes that was not attainable; it was less than that. I **marvel** at today, two hundred bushel an acre is not uncommon at all. The story about the evolution of hybrid corn from its inception to today is a marvelous story; it's just a marvelous story. That's a whole story in itself.

McIntyre: Now was any of the grain sold or did he use most of it?

McKinley: Most of it. He would go to St. Joe, which was a huge cattle town, meaning western cattle would come in there. They had packing plants—Swift and Cudahy and several packing plants in St. Joe—which meant the local area guys would send their fat stuff in there to be butchered and so on. But a lot of feeder cattle—I'm talking about four- to five-hundred pound feeder cattle—would be shipped in to St. Joe and then taken out to the guys with the grain to be fattened up and taken back and sold. So Dad would buy a hundred to a hundred twenty head of feeder cattle every fall, or was it spring. I don't know, every year he'd bring them in and turn them on his pasture land for a while. And then pull them in to what we called a dry lot and feed them hay and the grain—just pour grain

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<sup>1</sup> Rubber was extremely scarce during World War II as it was mostly natural. Synthetic rubber eventually replaced most natural rubber.

to them and fatten them up, then take them back to St. Joe to sell. He was acquainted enough down there with salesmen—both coming in and going back with fat stuff—the salesmen would call him on the telephone. I remember this time after time, year after year, the salesman would say, "Arlo, we've got a hundred and twenty head of just your kind of cattle. They just came in, they look pretty good; we've got to have such and such amount for them." He'd ask a few more questions about them and say, "Well, ship them up." So he would buy these cattle sight unseen. He trusted the dealers, the guys in St. Joe, and St. Joe trusted him.

McIntyre: So his income production I guess would have been the cattle, it sounds like.

McKinley: And hogs. He followed cattle with hogs. Hogs were underneath the cattle. Are you following what I'm saying?

McIntyre: Explain that.

McKinley: Well, the cattle would eat the grain, utilize what their systems could utilize out of it, and then their fecal material would drop on the ground and the hogs would get more good out of that fecal material. Are you hearing what I'm saying?

McIntyre: Yes.

McKinley: Plus, the hogs had their own mash and their own feed. They were fed properly, too, but they also gleaned from around the cattle in the dry lot.

McIntyre: So the hogs and cattle: he used some of himself probably but most of it he sold and that was the income for the family, while the grain was more used by him on the farm.

McKinley: Yes.

McIntyre: Okay.

McKinley: That's seldom done today. You just can't afford to do that today.

McIntyre: In addition to grain, did he grow other crops just for use by the family?

McKinley: Yes.

McIntyre: Which is also not done as much today.

McKinley: I guess you would say he was always attempting to diversify. He would look for other products. I remember so distinctly... By the way, before we forget animals; chickens were a big item.

McIntyre: For cash or use by the family?

McKinley: Both.

McIntyre: Both. Okay.

McKinley: Eggs were sold, definitely sold. We crossed a Leghorn and a White Rock cross and sold those eggs to the hatchery. The hatchery would take them and raise baby chicks out of them and sell those baby chicks out, you know. We got a premium for our eggs because of that cross. What else can I... We had, oh, I don't know, probably four hundred laying hens at one time, and they produced a lot of eggs; we would sell those eggs, then cull... Oh, my, that's a whole other story in itself, raising of chickens back then. Anyhow, where were we going? Oh, crop diversification.

He got an idea in his mind he wanted to raise sorghum. He didn't know anything about sorghum and neither did we. Nobody knew anything about it, nobody in the area. So he planted—I don't know—probably three acres of sorghum. There was a sorghum mill about six, seven miles away from us. They would accept sorghum in and process it and then give it back to you in syrup or in the sorghum. But they wanted that. The sorghum grew like it was supposed to. But come time to harvest it, you had to go out there and strip the leaves off of it—looks somewhat like corn leaves—but you stripped the leaves off and left just the stalk standing there. Then you came back later after a short while, and cut that stalk off and took that stalk to the mill, to the processing plant. They didn't want those leaves. There was no sorghum in the leaves; the sorghum was in the main stalk. So they chop that up and squeeze it and get the juice out of it. But you think about three acres of sorghum—row after row after row of sorghum—and you go in there and strip the leaves, that's **very, very**, time consuming. (chuckles) And then we'd come home from school, go strip leaves, get up in the morning, strip leaves before you go. I got to where I hated sorghum before it every left the place. (both chuckle)

McIntyre: So all the labor was the family?

McKinley: Yes. Oh, absolutely. You didn't hire somebody. But the off-shoot of this whole thing...

McIntyre: Now your mother, was she mainly in the house? Was she also working in with the livestock or fields or...

McKinley: No. Sometimes chickens, but mainly in the house. Canning food for the winter, getting ready, in the garden and in the house, and washing and so on; that was her job.

McIntyre: All six kids worked in the...

McKinley: You bet. You bet. Somebody asked me here in the museum—I was telling about the thirties and how tough it was. It was a tough period of time for a family, for anybody. Banks had closed; we were in a deep depression. On the farm in '34 and '36 out there we had **extremely** dry and extremely hot, and crops were not easy to come by, and gardens were not what they should have been or could

have been. Where am I going with this? Anyway, I don't remember. I lost my train of thought. What did you ask?

McIntyre: The hard times. '34 to '36 was the worst years it sounds, it was heat and a drought.

McKinley: Yes. I can remember my dad coming in—I don't remember if it was '34 or '36—coming to the family dinner table, noon hour—not the supper, to the dinner table—noon hour, sat down at the end. Mom was at one end and he was at the other and the six kids were on each side. Dad sat at the end of the table and looked down at his plate and put his head in his hands and couldn't look up or didn't look up. I'm the youngest of the six, I didn't notice much, but finally I heard Mom say, What's the matter, Dad? And he hesitated, and then he said, "Have you looked out the south window recently?" She said, "No." He said, "Go look." And so we all got up from the dinner table and went to the two or three south windows in the house and off in the distance was a thirty-acre corn field. That corn field at noon on that day was as white as a sheet of paper. The temperature would have been a hundred and twelve to a hundred and fifteen degrees. Out in southwest Iowa we always had a wind; always, every day, a wind came up, and a twenty to thirty mile an hour wind was not unusual at all. That corn, with that hundred and fifteen degrees and that thirty mile an hour wind, simply cooked—I mean **cooked**. It just turned white. That was not a happy day, because how are you going to feed your cattle and sell. That was income down the drain. Very, very... It was a serious day. Eventually, down along the creek bottoms and behind where that wind didn't get at it as hard, there was some green corn, which he cut and made a temporary silo and chopped it and put it in that temporary silo. The silo was made out of snow fence. You know what I'm talking about?

McIntyre: Um-hum.

McKinley: Put around the snow fence. I don't remember what he put inside it; had to put something. I don't think plastic was available. I don't remember what went in that, but built up three or four snow fences high. And that was the cattle feed. It was tough time; it was a tough, tough time.

McIntyre: Was the family pretty much self-sufficient from the farm production itself?

McKinley: Oh, absolutely. I remember...

McIntyre: Was very much purchased outside?

McKinley: Very little. Of course, with six kids you got to clothe them.

McIntyre: Right. But as far as food, was most of the food was grown on the farm?

McKinley: Absolutely.

McIntyre: Or raised—the hogs and the chickens and the...

McKinley: Once a week—maybe—they'd go to the county seat twelve miles away. I remember coming back home they'd have a hundred pound sack of sugar and that sugar was to last an indefinite period of time. But that went into the sugar bin. And they would bring in sacks of flour, bulk flour by the fifty pound sack of flour and that went in to the flour bin. Mom would always buy a few spices. But that's what she cooked with. That sugar and flour and that was it.

McIntyre: And everything else was from the farm.

McKinley: Everything else was from the farm.

McIntyre: What was the house itself like?

McKinley: Big old, typical two-story farm house. Two stories, not heated upstairs.

McIntyre: What type of heat was downstairs then?

McKinley: Furnace. We were ahead of the game because whoever built the house in 1909, I believe it was, saw fit to put a wooden tank, probably a hundred to a hundred to fifty gallon in the attic. The windmill outside by the house, fairly close, had a force pump. That windmill would pump water up into the attic in that tank. The tank had an overflow—you had to keep watching; if it overflowed the overflow would come out and you went and shut off the windmill. You didn't continue to pump. That was piped down to a bathroom upstairs and a kitchen downstairs. So Mom had running water as long as I remember since I think they moved into that house. My grandfather built that house, I believe.

McIntyre: Was that unusual compared to other farms at that time?

McKinley: Oh, yeah. To have running water was **uptown**, you know.

McIntyre: What about the furnace? Was that unusual also or most would have had something?

McKinley: Most had a type of furnace.

McIntyre: You said upstairs then where the bedrooms were was no heat, right?

McKinley: Yeah. You didn't heat that.

McIntyre: So what was that like in the winter?

McKinley: It was deathly cold. (both laugh) You didn't linger long. You were either in bed or downstairs. You didn't (laughs) stand around much upstairs. The house was poorly insulated by today's standards. Poorly insulated and wind would come through those windows, you know, around the windows. It was cold and it was,

by the same token, hot—hotter than “billy hell” upstairs; when that temperature outside was a hundred and fifteen we didn’t sleep upstairs. We slept downstairs, opened the door, tried to get a draft, or we’d go out and sleep under a tree out in the lawn.

McIntyre: Was the elementary school you went to, were those hours shorter than they are now because of farming? Was that regular...

McKinley: The days were shorter because the school would let out for the farm kids to help farm, particularly in the fall. When I say days, there were fewer days of school than there are now. What is it now? A hundred and, I don’t know.

McIntyre: Now they start in middle to late August which is not true then I would imagine.

McKinley: Yeah. We never started until—I don’t know—the middle of September and so on.

McIntyre: You went to the elementary school that was, what, a mile a way for the whole eight years then?

McKinley: Yes. Elementary and high school were in the same building.

McIntyre: How big was...

McKinley: My graduating class—out of high school, there were twenty-four of us in the graduating class. That was basically all the way along, all twelve grades. We had no kindergarten.

McIntyre: What was the name of that school then?

McKinley: Amity. Amity High School, or Amity school system. Of course, it had its own school board, superintendent.

McIntyre: And of your siblings, did everyone end up graduating from high school?

McKinley: Oh, yes.

McIntyre: That was somewhat unusual too, for that time period, wasn’t it?

McKinley: Yes. My parents insisted that education was pretty important. In fact, we all went to college. Let’s see. I’m coming down the line. We all graduated from college; that was upon their insistence. I never knew that I couldn’t go to college, or shouldn’t go; just assumed that you’re going to go to college.

McIntyre: Elementary and high school years, how many hours a day you think you worked on the farm plus the school.



McKinley: Oh, Lord. One of Dad's favorite expressions: Now get home, get home, because you're going to do this or you're going to do that. Yeah, you came right home and got busy doing something until dark. (chuckles)

McIntyre: So there was at least several hours of farm work every day then.

McKinley: Oh, absolutely. Chores.

McIntyre: Probably all day Saturday.

McKinley: Oh, yes. But nothing on Sunday. **Nothing. Nobody** did **anything** on Sunday. That according to my folks' religion, faith, was, the Sabbath was a day of rest. Period. There was fooling around with that. You rested. You didn't do anything. You went to church and you came home and you rested. Sometimes that's hard for a kid to do. (both chuckle) So we'd sneak out—Mom and Dad would take a nap in the afternoon and I'd sneak out of the house—do my thing.

McIntyre: Of the siblings, how many was brothers and sisters?

McKinley: Three brothers and two sisters.

McIntyre: Was the work divided differently between brothers and sisters?

McKinley: Oh, yeah. You'd do...

McIntyre: The brothers were more in the fields and the sisters doing something else?

McKinley: Sisters would, by and large, stay around the house and in the garden. Yeah. I don't think either sister ever went to the field. They didn't drive horses; they didn't drive the tractors. Often they would bring, say, a noon lunch out; particularly for driving tractors, they'd bring a lunch out and you'd eat a quick lunch under a shade tree and get back on the tractor and go. Horses same way, except horses you had to rest, you know; you couldn't work a horse to death so you had to rest him every once in a while.

McIntyre: Now in the busier seasons, spring and fall, with the planting and harvesting did the farmers help each other out, neighbor farms, or stay pretty much on your own?

McKinley: Cooperation. The basic cooperation in a farming community was thrashing. Nobody with an eighty acre farm owned a thrashing machine. In our area two or three or four farmers would go together and purchase a thrashing machine. I don't have any idea what they cost at that time; don't remember, don't know as I ever knew. Dad had half interest; he had two other guys. He had half interest and because of that he stored the machine through the fall and winter and spring. And because of that he was the main, what will I say, operator of the machine. He was in charge of that machine. They'd take a circuit, maybe ten—no, more than that—probably twenty farms they'd circuit and thrash for the

people on those farms. Often we would take our teams and wagons and go pick up at other guys' farms, bring in, and thrash. It was quite an operation. The women would go to each farm where the thrashing machine was and they'd help serve dinner to the fifteen, twenty, twenty-five guys there doing the thrashing and all of the kids, of course.

McIntyre: So work was also the social thing too, then.

McKinley: Sure. Sure. Corn picking, no. We didn't help each other pick corn. We were lucky to get our own corn in. That's a story I might relate to you. I think I was in seventh grade. Dad told me one day, You're not going to go to school this morning, you're going to help me, go to the field and help me pick corn. So each fall for four to six weeks I'd drop out of school and pick corn—that's from seventh grade to senior in high school. Pick corn by hand, one ear at a time. The other brothers would, too. Of course, when they went off to school that made more corn picking for those that were left on the farm. I was the last and the year I went off to school Dad bought a corn picker the first time because he couldn't handle it himself. And he bought a combine because he didn't have enough help to thrash anymore. Hay baler, hay baler, cause he...

McIntyre: Was that common, that a few of the kids would be out of school for a period of time to...

McKinley: Oh, yeah.

McIntyre: So during certain times of the year the school attendance would be way down then.

McKinley: Well, attendance would be, but Mom, bless her heart... Of course, that was worked out with the Superintendent and the teacher. But she'd go down once a week and get assignments for the coming week, say, bring those assignments back set down in front of me after I'd picked corn all day and got the chores done, well after dark, **well** after dark, and said, Now It's time for you to study. Well, I'd be so tired I couldn't even hold my head up let alone...

McIntyre: Study. (laughs)

McKinley: Do the studying. Then she'd take those assignments back and get some more. So, in a sense, I didn't miss any school. I missed a lot of socialization and all that kind of stuff. But I kept the homework up.

McIntyre: You said your family all graduated from high school. Were other farm families similar, or was that somewhat unique?

McKinley: That was somewhat unique.

McIntyre: So a lot would drop out to work on the farms or whatever.

McKinley: Or other jobs. Yeah. Yeah. And a lot of them, in the forties, went off to war.

McIntyre: Right.

McKinley: I turned, what was it, eighteen, a month before the armistice was signed. So I missed being drafted by one month. To this day I've never taken a military physical. I don't think there's probably too many guys my age that have missed World War II and Vietnam and Korea; I missed them all just by days. Got married, we started a family; that let me out. Then I got too old, you know. So I've had no military service and I think for my age that's pretty unusual.

McIntyre: Where did you go to college?

McKinley: I went to a little town in Illinois, Monmouth College, United Presbyterian college.

McIntyre: Is that the religion of your family?

McKinley: Yes. Yes.

McIntyre: Okay.

McKinley: I had a next older brother, well, the second older brother, second beyond me, got deferred. Dad got him deferred. He had to have some help on the farm and so he got that deferment. Then my next older brother was drafted and went to the V-12 program in the Navy.<sup>2</sup> He went to the Navy and got into a V-12 program; the year the armistice was made, he got his commission and his degree in the same week, and got released.

McIntyre: What was your course of study at college then?

McKinley: I started in with biology. I wanted to be a veterinarian. I thought that would be just the thing to do. But when I really got serious about it in senior year in high school, I went to Ames, Iowa, the veterinarian school in Iowa. I just showed up at the door and went in to the admissions offices and said I wanted to be a vet, I wanted to join the veterinary school. He said, Are you a veteran? I said, No. He said, Well, you'll have to wait in line; there are something like three hundred and fifty applications from veterans ahead of you, and we will serve them first before you. Well that meant, who knows how long that was. So I went off to this United Presbyterian college and majored in biology, minored in P.E. [physical education] and Education and so on. Senior year I decided that I wanted to go teach school. That year then I started working on a master's for education administration. Dad was ninety years old I expect and I would have been, what forty-five, forty or forty-five, but he never stopped asking me when I was coming back to run the farm.

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<sup>2</sup> To accelerate the availability of officers during World War II the U. S. Navy developed a program which combined baccalaureate training with intensive year-round Navy training. Many college campuses participated.

McIntyre: So once you went off to college you never went back to run the farm then.

McKinley: That's correct.

McIntyre: So the undergraduate degree was in biology then?

McKinley: Yes.

McIntyre: What year was that, do you recall?

McKinley: I graduated in '50.

McIntyre: Right on to get a master's, or started working, or?

McKinley: No, I worked and got a master's on the side.

McIntyre: So you were working at a school district then?

McKinley: Yes.

McIntyre: Where was that?

McKinley: Well, it started in a small town in Iowa and I went to Drake [University] for one summer. Then I went to northern Illinois near the Rochelle area and finished a master's at DeKalb.<sup>3</sup> Then I came home.

McIntyre: Home to Iowa?

McKinley: I came to Quincy. My wife's a native of Quincy. By that time I had a master's in education administration. I was acquainted with the Quincy school system and I thought that would be a nice place to work, so I came, interviewed for a principalship here in Quincy and got accepted. I was twenty-six years old. I'll never forget that; I was the youngest principal ever hired in Quincy, and stayed with them for thirty-three years then after that.

McIntyre: You said you didn't go back to the family farm, but you got re-involved in farming in the Quincy area then, right?

McKinley: That's right.

McIntyre: Through the wife's...

McKinley: Wife's parents had an apple orchard, a huge apple orchard. Although I didn't have time to do much with it, I'd help on weekends and so on, particularly selling the apples and the cider. Then we bought ninety or a hundred acres. Now when would that have been? That would have been 1955, '56, '57 along in there, right here. We paid six hundred dollars an acre for it at that time. I wasn't

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<sup>3</sup> Northern Illinois University

earning enough to do that. I didn't know how we were ever going to pay that off. But we did; we paid it off fairly quickly.

McIntyre: And what were you growing then on ...

McKinley: This was a row-crop farm at the time, wind-blown loess soil, very, very erodible soil right here on the bluff of the Mississippi. I didn't want to see that soil going down to the river every time it rained, so we turned it in to forage, a hay farm, pretty much a hay farm. I'd do some rotation and get corn and beans occasionally. So we baled hay and sold it and fed it.

McIntyre: Did you ever get back into livestock raising like your father did?

McKinley: No.

McIntyre: How long did he keep the farm then? You said he kept asking you to come back. How long did he keep it.

McKinley: He kept the farm until he died. He was ninety-four when he died.

McIntyre: But someone else was obviously working it then.

McKinley: He was working with a brother. One brother was on one side of the farm and another brother on the other. And they would kind of run the family farm, or the home farm.

McIntyre: None of your siblings ever went back to the farm to help run it then?

McKinley: Well, the two brothers were.

McIntyre: Okay. Your two brothers did.

McKinley: Yes. But my other brother and I never went back. No.

McIntyre: You mentioned the one difference in the farms and how much acreage was in corn back when you were growing up versus today. What other changes have you seen from the years growing up to now in farming?

McKinley: As I told you, I picked corn by hand every fall. And by the time I was a junior and senior I could pick, if the corn were heavy enough on the ground—by heavy I mean fifty to fifty-five bushel an acre—I could pick a hundred to a hundred-plus bushel a day on some days. I couldn't do it every day; too much for a kid to do. But that involved a team of horses and a wagon and a bank board. You would work from daylight, and I mean **daylight**; more than once I've gone to the field and waited until I could see the first ear. You would pick thirty-five bushel until about ten o'clock or ten-thirty and then go in and scoop that off. and Mom would have a light lunch. So you'd eat lunch and go back out and pick another thirty, thirty-five, what three o'clock, three-thirty, I don't know the

time. Go in and scoop it off and she'd have another light lunch. Then you'd go out and pick until dark—couldn't see anymore—and you'd come in and scoop that off. Of course, you did chores before that and you did chores after that. So it made it kind of a long, strenuous day. But doing that, you could get a hundred or... Not everybody could pick a hundred bushel a day. But, anyway.

This corn picker sitting here, this one-row 1931 John Deere corn-picker, was advertised by the Deere and Company as... Well, let me back up. In a hundred bushel corn I figure I'm picking a ten-hour day, so that's ten bushel an hour. This machine that we're looking at here in front of me is advertised as picking forty-two bushel an hour. Dad never had a corn-picker until I left home. I guess he decided...

McIntyre: He had you. (chuckles)

McKinley: He had four boys; why buy a corn-picker? Anyhow, a couple of years ago I got a hold of our John Deere dealer here in the area and I asked him what his newest combine was, his newest corn-picker, and he told me the model 8960. I said, "Tell me about it." And he said, "Well, It's going to cost you two hundred and seventy-five thousand, another thirty thousand for the corn-picking head." I said, "Well that's all interesting but how much corn will that pick in an hour," trying to compare my ability to pick and this 1931 machine. He told me that that thing in two-hundred bushel corn—remember that thing [the 1931 machine] and mine were picking in fifty, fifty-five bushel or less.

McIntyre: Right.

McKinley: But the big combine in the two hundred bushel corn today would take twelve rows at a time and it would go four to five miles an hour down through the fields. It will pick and shell and deliver four thousand two hundred bushel an hour. And I said to him, I can't believe that. Are you trying to tell me that that big machine will pick—I divided the forty-two hundred by sixty—are you trying to tell me that machine will pick seventy bushel a minute, and shell it and deliver it? He said, Yeah. So you ask me, have I seen any changes? (chuckles) Yes, from my hundred bushels a day...

McIntyre: They can almost do that in a minute now. (chuckles)

McKinley: They can do that in a minute and mine wasn't shelled! And this '31 picker, that's a whole other time consuming process, to shell that ear of corn. This modern day thing, it's unbelievable. To have lived through this evolution of what it was back in the twenties and thirties up to where it is today, and maybe a little insight on where it's going to be in another ten, fifteen years, it just boggles your mind. Because of this museum I've done some research. In 1800, ninety percent of the workforce in the United States worked on the farm—ninety percent of the workforce. Today less than one percent of the workforce work on the farm. Yet we are supplying more grains, more corn and more beans

than **ever** before. We're feeding the world—or **can** feed the world—with infinitely less number of people because of that machine that will pick seventy bushel a minute compared to my hundred bushel a day. So to see this evolution just blows my mind.

By the way, most farm people do not have any idea what this evolution has been or has done in all this. It's astounding. I get people in here, into the museum here, Well, what's that? They have no idea. Well, that was a plow, that's a disk, that's a baler, that's a hay loader. They have no idea what they were used for. Then you start telling about what there is today and they still have no idea. When I talk about that 9860 John Deere combine, they just shake their head when they say what its capabilities are today. They have no idea, the non-farm people. And maybe that's the farmers' trouble, or the farm organization trouble, of not informing the general population. I shouldn't say this, probably, but I'm firmly convinced we've got a governor of this state who still thinks milk comes out of the back of the grocery store. That's the mentality of a lot of people today. (both laugh) Excuse me for injecting that, but I believe that, firmly.

McIntyre: I asked about the difference in farming. What about another difference, in the schools that you attended versus your thirty years of being a principal. How did schools change over that time?

McKinley: You want an honest answer to that?

McIntyre: (Chuckles)

McKinley: They haven't improved very much. They have not improved very much and **won't** until we get some changes made in our bureaucracy of schools. Volunteer school board members and every school board member is a volunteer across the state.

McIntyre: Right.

McKinley: I see a budget today, passed yesterday, for Quincy: seventy million dollars for the coming school year. Seventy million. How many businesses would take seven people off the street and say, Here, spend this seven million wisely? There isn't a business **alive** that would do that. They would be out of business very soon. And yet we expect our school board members to do that. That's asking too much, I think. Plus, add into that, all the politics involved.

McIntyre: Did you retire as a principal?

McKinley: I retired as a principal.

McIntyre: Of elementary?

McKinley: Elementary school. I attempted for thirteen years to pull away from stagnant “do again what you did last year” type of schooling. I felt like we, as teachers and administrators, were not doing justice to the kids that were in our care. We were using methods used fifty to a hundred years ago. That’s good enough for today’s kids; and the kids told us that in many subtle, subtle ways. So we attempted to do something about it and created a very non-traditional school. By the way, a very successful school, because our graduates out of our school—we had them seven years, went on through junior high and high school—and we found that seventy-five percent of the National Honor Society kids had their start in our non-traditional school. So we were doing something right. But the community wasn’t ready for it. So they brought in a superintendent who sold the building, which was a unique building in itself, a semi-open concept. The school board sold the building and split the staff who had worked together for thirteen years, had many common ideas, different ideas. But they split that staff so that we wouldn’t be together across the city in other schools. So essentially, they murdered us; they shut us down completely. To this day, they’re not doing the things we were doing, many, many of the things we were doing. We individualized. This was before the day of the computer. But we individualized each kid’s... Now you’re going to get me going here. (both chuckle) We individualized each kid’s program, **each kid**. One time we had seven hundred and fifty kids in kindergarten through six. No two kids are the same. No two kids learn the same way. No two kids learn at the same rate. Yet today we’re **still** putting kids in classrooms and teaching to the average kid. Below average kids get lost and above average kids get lost. Now, we’re not being fair to all of them.

McIntyre: What about change from when you attended elementary and high school to the years you worked as far as student behavior and discipline. What changes did you see in that?

McKinley: I quit before the big—see, I’ve been out of it for twenty-some years—before the big discipline thing came along. I disciplined basically the way I was disciplined, which was fairly straight-arrow. You did this because of this and there was no deviation from it. Today a kid will tell you, You certainly can’t lay a hand on me or I’ll call the cops. And they’ll tell you, Screw you, I’m not doing that.

McIntyre: And when you attended school that didn’t exist at all. (chuckles)

McKinley: That didn’t exist at all. Until we get some semblance of order back into that, I think we’re in trouble. If I were twenty years younger, I would start a private school today. I would see to it that the state allowed me to spend tax money in my private school, first of all, or the parents to spend money in my private school and we would put into practices some educational psychology that we know. Our colleges and universities know it well, but we’re not touching it.



The farmer: you bring out a new piece of machinery or a new number of seed corn, or a new hybrid of wheat and that goes across this country in two to three years at most. The farmer needs that because it means more profit to him. So from the laboratory to practice in the farming community is a very, very short time. When we discover something new about how the brain works, fifty years later it's still not in practice in our public schools. Not there. I think that's a crime. We insisted upon doing something about that and tried. Let me give you an example.

My school psychologist came to me one day and said—this is elementary school now—he said, I don't understand why we are getting so many LD kids? In the state of Illinois that's Learning Disorder kids. He said, What do you think? Why are we getting so many, by state standards, pigeon-holed as LD kids. I said, I don't know. Is it something we're eating? Is it...I don't know. And we would talk about this after school; we'd maybe spend an hour. He finally came to me one day and said, Look at this piece of literature out of England. It was a piece of literature talking about hearing. So, as a result of that piece of literature he and I pulled some strings and got every incoming kindergarten a hearing test through the sound-proof booth—not just “can you hear a”—but we'd put each kid in a sound-proof booth and give him his hearing test. We found that first year, fifty-three percent of our kids, in kindergarten, coming to us, had significant hearing loss. Now if I can't hear what you're doing, what you're saying up in front, teacher, if I can't clearly distinguish that, then I'm going to turn you off. By the way, I've got a hearing loss. I go to a lecture and if I can't hear the lecturer, or I go to Sunday morning preacher and I can't distinguish, that's hard work trying to clue in and fill in the words or partial words that you can't hear. Well, that kid's going to turn you off. If he turns off, what's he going to do for six hours, seven hours a day? He's going to throw spit wads, he's going to raise a little hell otherwise, relieve his boredom. Common sense. So we designed a program, a piece of research, fairly sophisticated, I thought. We got one of the local industries to help us. The audiologist out of that local industry who would go around taking factory sounds, the amount of sounds of different parts. If it was too high they'd put earplugs in their workers and so on. I mean he knew what he was talking about. We brought him in and he helped us. In a classroom we'd put up four speakers in the room, turned in such a way that they would totally cover the room and put the lavalier mike on the teacher and turned that mike up to sixty decibels. Generally, most people are speaking at fifty decibels. We just turned it up ten decibels and you couldn't distinguish. You walked in to the room it would not bother you at all. Then we did another room, put the speakers up and nothing was going on and so on. Anyway, for three years, and then I got out, I quit. But that classroom that had those speakers and the teacher could teach every kid, her discipline went down to almost zero. Kids were involved. They were busy. They were involved. They didn't want to screw around. The achievement of those kids came up measurably.

We took our findings, by the way, to the local superintendent who wasn't very interested in it. We said that if fifty-three percent of our kids are coming to school with a significant hearing loss, we assume that fifty-three percent of the whole damn district is coming. This cost, at that time, a thousand bucks to set that classroom up that way. We suggested to the superintendent and the school board that every first, second and third grade in the city have this sound system. And suggested that the special ed kids would significantly be down. And they rejected us. No, it cost too much. I think another thing was, you know the state pays so much extra for a special ed kid; they saw that money disappearing because there would be fewer special ed kids. So there you go. We told them, we proved to them, that it would help kids. No, can't do that. Now, I'm way off from what you came in here for (both laugh)

McIntyre: No, that's part of your background, too. The building we're in now is your farm museum. When did this start? What year did you...

McKinley: Five years ago we built this building.

McIntyre: When you say "we," who's...?

McKinley: Well, my wife and I and daughter and son-in-law. My wife and I included our son-in-law and daughter.

McIntyre: A fair amount of people maybe grew up on farms or worked on farms now or are involved in farms, but they don't start farm museums. So why did you decide to do that?

McKinley: Alright. That's a story telling itself. After I retired three or four or five years and farmed my hay ground, I said to my wife one day, I want a tractor like the one that my brother had that I spent so much time on in southwest Iowa. Happened to be a John Deere B on a steal. She said, What do you want it for? I said, I want to play with it and farm with it; I can rake hay with it and what have you. Well, several years later (chuckles) we got around to getting it and this is pretty well what you see right here. I had that tractor at a tractor show. In fact it was up in Iowa, the Mount Pleasant Old Thrashers Reunion. At that show that year there were four hundred pre-1939 tractors, made before 1939. Row after row of these old, many, many models of tractors, different brands of tractors. A father and son walked by. I just happened to be standing by my tractor and they walked by; I heard the son look up at dad and say, Yeah, Dad, but what were they used for? I thought it a perfectly logical question from a nine or ten year old. What were all these four hundred tractors used for? Dad's only answer, that I heard, was, They farmed with them. Period. That bothered me. I came home and asked my then forty-eight, forty-nine year old daughter what a grain binder was. Can you tell me what a grain binder was? She paused and looked at me and said. Did it have something to do with the farm? I thought, **Ho-ly Cow**, one generation, it's gone. I spent many and many an hour slaving around that grain binder cutting oats and wheat, shocking it,

taking the shocks to the thrashing machine and here I've got a daughter that's really not sure what a grain binder is.

I think at that moment, I said, Hey, I'm going to surround this 1936 John Deere B tractor with every John Deere implement that I can get a hold of that it could have pulled or powered in the 1930's. That's what you see basically on the floor. Ninety percent of the stuff here is John Deere, or sold through John Deere branch houses. And we decided—my son-in-law and I mainly—decided, Hey we'd try to keep this museum confined to the decade of the thirties. If you walked in to an eighty acre farmstead in the 1930's or a hundred and twenty acre farmstead in the Midwest, what would you find? You find this stuff. The implements, the stuff hanging on the wall you would have found in the farm shops, in the barns, etc. You're almost literally walking into the decade of the 1930's. I felt if that kid still wants to know what that tractor was used for, he can come in to this museum and see what it was used for. That's, by and large, what it's here for. It's a preservation and education.

When young men, or women, climb in to their air-conditioned cab of their tractor, or more importantly their combine, they spend the day in dust-free, air-conditioning, many of them never touching a steering wheel, because that new combine is run by GPS, Global Positioning System. The new combines will go down across the field, turn around on its own and come straight back, turn around on its own and go straight back—been programmed to do that. And the guy sits there. And if that guy thinks that's the way it was in 1930, I want him to come in here and say, Look this is an evolutionary process. You wouldn't be where you are today if it weren't for this era, this period of time. It has evolved to where you are today. So preservation and then education is the whole philosophy or whole principle of the whole place.

McIntyre: Did you obtain most of the things fairly locally, most of the items in the museum? Or did you have to go distances...

McKinley: I've gone to Minnesota, southwest Iowa. Ninety percent of it locally, yes, within a hundred miles. Ninety percent of it, yes. **Ah!** There's an Island Saw in here that was made for John Deere by the Island Machine and Foundry Company of Norwich, New York. I have three of their products here, three models. One of those models that's sitting here came from upstate New York. My daughter and son-in-law were back east and they brought it home with them. So that's the farthest piece, that's the farthest I guess.

McIntyre: Is there some pieces that are particular liking to you that you were able to obtain and really excited about getting that particular item, or?

McKinley: Now, say that again.

McIntyre: Is there certain pieces that you more—I don't know if "like" is the right word, but that you're really excited about being able to locate some particular piece that maybe was more scarce or rare?

McKinley: Oh, yeah. This corn-picker that we have totally restored, **totally** took every nut and bolt out of it and brought it back. That's a number 10 corn-picker and quite rare. There's not...

McIntyre: That would have been what, late thirties that it would have been made?

McKinley: Yes, it was manufactured in 1931. This may be a misstatement, but I'm willing to bet that there's not ten of those in the country today, and they made many hundreds of them. It's useless today. You couldn't pull that into a two hundred bushel-an-acre corn field today and pick corn with it. You couldn't go slow enough. It couldn't swallow the hybrid corn of today, the tall stalks. It couldn't eat it. It'll do a good job in the fifty bushel an acre corn, but not today. So it was cast aside, sold as iron and all that stuff.

McIntyre: And the upper level, what was in the household versus the fields, I guess?

McKinley: Basically when we started down here we got to thinking, Hey, if we're looking at a 1930's farm you cannot ignore the farmhouse. So we started with Mom and her kitchen and her dining room and her sitting room and her sewing room and so on. Tried to bring the farmhouse to life down so far at least down the way. These are things that mom had to work with. This was things that she did. These canning jars. By the way, there's no two of them alike, but **every** farm had canning jars. In the 1930's if you didn't can your food you went hungry in the winter. You couldn't afford to go to town and buy it as you do today. And so huge gardens. I bet our garden was two acres for a family of eight. Everybody worked in that garden – Dad, Mom, everybody worked in it. Planting it, weeding it and harvesting it. Oh, Lord. We'd pull it in and Mom would can the stuff. Potatoes went in a cooler cave, we called it, it was a storm cave, tornado cave,<sup>4</sup> I guess. But potatoes down there and all of the jars of canned fruits and vegetables went down to and then they'd come back up when needed. Mom was very frugal. Good Lord, she clothed us and fed us, sometimes on not much. I don't ever remember going hungry, don't ever remember. I do remember a lot of beans and corn bread. She was a wise woman. She insisted on feeding, twice three times a month, salmon in different forms. I'm led to believe somewhere she knew the salt of that day was not iodized; she knew her family needed iodine and the best way to get that was through salt-water fish, so salmon was served. We were so far in the country we never had fresh fish. **Never**. I don't ever remember eating fresh fish. You couldn't get it there before it spoiled. Refrigeration wasn't like it is today, you know. But she'd serve that canned salmon which, by the way, today I still love.

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<sup>4</sup> The "cave", also called a storm cellar, was literally a room in the ground lined with shelves. The door was generally at ground level, with a stair into the cave. The slope of the stair's ceiling was covered with dirt and grass for insulation. The room would remain at a fairly even temperature all year.

But somehow she knew her family needed that for iodine, a pretty essential part of the human body and that was a good way to get it. Now where she picked that up or learned that I have no idea. I was telling that I was ten years old before I ever had a new pair of pants. I wore hand-me-down pants.

McIntyre: Because you were the youngest.

McKinley: I was the youngest and I wore pants with patches on patches. The older kid put a hole in a patch, she'd repatch the patch, you know, and keep right on going. But we didn't know, I never knew we were poor. I never knew that. They didn't talk about it. Of course, everybody was poor. Nobody had any money in the thirties. It was gone; it just wasn't there. And so if you were a member of a family, you had a job to do – to support yourself and the family.

I was talking about this one day in here and some guy said to me, Well, how old were you when you got a job? And nobody had ever... Finally, I said to him, Well I would guess that I was about three years old. Well, he looked at me in complete disbelief and finally he said, Well what did you do? I said, the first real family job I remember, it was my job to go out a hundred yards and bring in wood, put it in the wood box, so Mom could feed that stove. If I didn't get wood in the wood box, all hell broke loose because she couldn't cook for the family. By the way, she cooked three meals on that thing— morning, noon and night.

McIntyre: On the wood stove.

McKinley: On the wood stove. Unbelievable. I don't know to this day how she could do it. But my job was to fill that wood box. In addition, I was to go to the hog lot and pick up cobs; Dad would throw just an ear of corn out and the hogs would eat the corn off the cobs and leave the cobs. They made good fire starting and good quick heat. So I had a couple of buckets of cobs sitting there and a box full of wood. Better get it done; better get it done. (both chuckle) So I learned a little bit about responsibility and contributions, giving, you know. That was from there on.

McIntyre: Some other things in this museum. I guess the wall behind, farther down I guess is the horse bits.

McKinley: Horse bits.

McIntyre: Is that something you collected or who?

McKinley: No. My youngest daughter collected those horse bits. She started at the age of four. By the way, there are thirteen hundred horse bits hanging there. No two of them are alike. She started at the age of four collecting horse bits. She was a horse kid from the time she could walk. She had her first pony at four years old and she'd ride that thing all over. Somehow she got interested in bits. Today,

many years later, she is an absolute expert. She's got every bit book that was ever written and can tell you all about any bit you choose to bring out. She's got a fourteenth century bit here; that's long ago. Long ago. Anyhow...

McIntyre: So the time period she covers on the bits is very extensive.

McKinley: Very wide. Very, very wide. Four years old. I didn't remember this: she tells me that she'd go out and collect morel mushrooms, hunt mushrooms in the timber and collect them and sell those by the pound or whatever and take that money and go buy a bit. That was her income; that's what started her on... So here she is at four realizing the whole business of money and budget, and if you want something you got to work for it and all this.

McIntyre: The particular era she kind of concentrates on is the Civil War?

McKinley: No, military bits. Not just Civil War. Military bits—all ages. She's got some great stories about collecting some of these bits. She's in Macon, Missouri right now at a horse equipment sale. I'll guarantee you she'll come home with something special, unique, that will slip by a lot of collectors. She'll see it and know what it is and bring it home.

McIntyre: Is there a particular name for the museum? I guess I didn't ask you that.

McKinley: 1930's Agriculture Museum.

McIntyre: And then who's the ones that it's open to? How does that work?

McKinley: It's open to anybody that wants to come in here. Anybody.

McIntyre: School groups. Do you work with a lot of school groups?

McKinley: Interestingly enough, I worked with some school groups; some junior college classes have come in. I find that a kid needs to be fourth grade or above to really get very much out of it. So when lower grades, primary school teachers call and want to come, I discourage it. I won't say no, but I discourage it. But they do not come. I had a class from Missouri come over and spend several hours in here; really did a good job. The teacher had prepared them for what to look for and so on. But Quincy does not come. I've probably had five classrooms of kids in the last five years. I've told them twice. I told the gal in charge of field trips and had her here; she knows what's here. I've told her twice (phone ringing) and I'm not getting a reaction and I'm not going to beg them to come, you know.

McIntyre: That way, I guess.

McKinley: It's over there.

(Pause in tape)

McIntyre: Are we back on? Okay. Behind us is some buggies. What time period is that from?

McKinley: That would have been before... The lady's Phaeton here is here simply because of storage. I found that and had it restored thirty years ago. It's a Quincy-made buggy. I've tried to give it to a couple of museums in town and they don't want it; they don't have room for it. I'd like to see it in even heat and even humidity.

McIntyre: What time period was that from?

McKinley: That was made between 1895 and 1900, here in Quincy. Heintz Buggy Company here in Quincy. I'm not going to leave that sit in a fence row so it's in here. There was a mail buggy in here which I'm taking to Moline the first week in September. It was made by the Vealey Buggy Company; the guy that started that company was a son-in-law of Charles Deere who was the son of John Deere. He started this buggy company. They're having a reunion of anybody that's got any Vealey equipment whatsoever. Please come and bring your equipment. So I'm going to take that up; it's up in the shop getting cleaned up.

McIntyre: And then in the corner behind there is, what tractor is that one?

McKinley: That's a Huber tractor made by the Huber Company in Marion, Ohio. My son-in-law's name is Marvin Huber. From a kid, he always wanted a Huber tractor, and he's found this and restored it. This is one of three hundred made that year.

McIntyre: That year being?

McKinley: 1926. Three hundred of that model I should say. He says it doesn't belong in here. Well, it does and it doesn't. Again, we're not going to set it in a fence row so its here.

McIntyre: It's '26, but it would have been used in the thirties then.

McKinley: Yes, it would have been used in the thirties.

McIntyre: Because they would have had quite a long life, I would assume.

McKinley: Yes. Yes. What else? (pause) I made a couple of notes.

McIntyre: Sure.

McKinley: I remember an ice storm in the thirties, out home. It rained and froze ice **over** an inch thick on everything, and then immediately plummeted to zero and below. And stayed there for d-a-y-s. All traffic stopped. You couldn't... We walked to town on ice cleats—put cleats on our feet to walk.

But one thing that didn't help the family income. Dad had a hog waterer out from the hog house; wasn't in the hog house, it was out probably

fifty feet. He woke up one morning after the storm and found eight or ten hogs on their way to the hog water; they were heavy hogs—two hundred pounds plus—just ready to sell. They had split on that ice—their hind feet had split and had broken their pelvis, couldn't get up. Before we realized what happened, more came out. I would guess at one time he probably had thirty, two-hundred pound hogs with split pelvis, laying out there on the ice at zero. Now what do you do with that? It's hard on the profits. You can't butcher thirty head. Nobody can get to you to help you butcher. I remember, the only thing he knew to do was to burn them.

We had a hedgerow, a row of hedge trees fairly close to the hog house. We went out with crosscut saws and axes and begin sawing that hedge row off. There would be hedge trees that big, bringing that into a central location and starting a fire and then pulling those hogs to the fire and throwing them on it. What else is there to do? You couldn't bury them; ground was frozen too hard. So he burned his hogs; he burned his profits. Tough. Tough on everybody. I think he learned his lesson. He quickly strawed or manured paths back and forth to that hog water so the other hogs wouldn't split, you know. But I remember that so distinctly.

McIntyre: How many hours a day do you think he worked, generally.

McKinley: Oh, Lord.

McIntyre: (chuckles)

McKinley: Before dawn and after dark.

McIntyre: Every day but Sunday.

McKinley: Every day but Sunday. Nothing on Sunday. We've got a dinner bell hanging out here. We had a dinner bell at home right outside the kitchen door. The kids were never allowed to play with it. We would not play with that bell. Dad and Mom had a system of signals, had a system of signals. Dad never needed the dinner bell to come to dinner. If there was any sun at all he could look at his shadow and tell you within fifteen minutes what time it was. But if somebody came to see him, or some visitor came to the farm, she would ring that so many times. If you didn't show up she would try it again, if you didn't hear it, you know. But that was their cell phone. (both chuckle). That was their cell phone. I have seen the neighbors'; most people in the area had dinner bells and used them for communication within the family. But I've seen this happen: If you got on that dinner bell and didn't let off of it, you just kept ringing and ringing and ringing, those within ear shot—now remember they're eighty-acre farms so if somebody was a quarter of a mile down the road and another quarter—would collect regardless. They'd drop what they were doing and come to that bell. Somebody was in trouble—physically, broken leg, or barn was on fire, or there was some



emergency—and that bell would clang. Again, a method of communication. I saw it work very effectively, long before, (laughs) long before...

McIntyre: Before that cell phone... (both laughing)

McKinley: ...that cell phone came along.

McIntyre: Did you have a phone on the farm?

McKinley: We had a phone exactly like that one hanging there on the wall.

McIntyre: Now was that unusual too, or did most farms have them?

McKinley: Most farms had them. You had a party line and there would be eight, ten, or twelve people on this party line. Everybody would be on the same telephone line with telephones similar to that. That line was connected to a central place, a central, you called it the phone central, where a gal would sit. If you wanted to get on to another party—to call somebody on another party line, other end of the county or something—she would plug you into that line and then she would ring that party's number. Our ring was a long and a short. Anytime you heard a long and a short, answer it. Ten or twelve other people on the line had their own rings: two longs and a short, or a short and a long and a short, or, you know, everybody had their assigned number. But interestingly enough, if you stood by the phone, or happened to be by the phone when it rang your house and you picked that receiver up quickly, invariably you'd hear click, click, click down the line; somebody else was listening. What's happening, who's calling the McKinley's.

McIntyre: (laughs)

McKinley: And everybody knew everybody else's business. You didn't gossip too much. Well some of the women gossiped; that is just the way it was. But what a boon that phone was, that whole thing. That put farm women—and farm-ers—in communication, in contact with each other. They could call a neighbor. Other than that you had to get your horse and buggy or walk and go see your neighbor. Boy this thing, you could call across the country just like that and that brought them out of isolation into society very quickly. Interesting. Interesting phenomenon, and that really hooked on. Alexander Graham Bell did a number on this country by coming up with that thing. Beautiful. Beautiful. It enabled the women particularly, to connect, communicate; somebody to listen to or somebody to talk to, which otherwise they didn't have. They'd see them maybe once at church.

McIntyre: Once a week at church.

McKinley: Yeah. And for the farmers, too. Dad would order cattle by phone; he didn't have to go see them. He trusted them down at St. Joe; he ordered cattle by phone. He could talk to his sons and daughters in college.

McIntyre: So a lot of inventions were important to the farm but that was a very important one it sounds.

McKinley: That was a very important one. Yeah. I'll tell you something else. Electricity—very important. My God, our, it's not RFD, what was the name of the program?<sup>5</sup> Farm program, Roosevelt. Anyway, it enabled electricity to come to the farm.

McIntyre: Did you have electricity the whole time growing up or?

McKinley: Yeah, but again we were very unique. I remember when the high line, as we called it, came to us. But our house was wired before that. We had a thirty-two volt system. We had a generator and a motor in the basement. That motor would run, generator would generate. I can't explain the physics of it, but we had a whole row of batteries filled with acid. The generator would, just like today, I guess, would generate—help those batteries generate electricity.<sup>6</sup> So every room had a light bulb in it. You'd turn the switch on and the light was on. Mom had a thirty-two volt iron; she could plug in her iron and didn't need the sad irons<sup>7</sup> anymore on the stove. So we were way ahead. I don't know of another soul within ten miles that had that 32-volt system. We were way ahead of the highline coming through, the 110-volt business coming through. But when that hit, oh my. That was so... Then you could have electric motors running your equipment on the farm. Small, the pump jacks—you could pump water with electric motors. You could see, my lord, a distance, you could see, wouldn't have to carry the damned old lantern all the time, you know, at night, or morning.

McIntyre: You had the generator. Before there was 110 you probably still used the lantern outside the home itself, right?

McKinley: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah, you had to. Oh, yeah.

McIntyre: The lights were only in the house itself.

McKinley: That's right. That's right. I'd love to get a hold of one of those Delco generators, Delco system and put in here. But they're very, very few and far between and quite expensive now. They're antiques. Hah! Oh, my.

Horses. My experience with horses was limited because my older brothers would take over that. They'd drive and so on. But I remember I told you Dad had four teams of horses, eight head. Somewhere in the thirties,

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<sup>5</sup> The program to bring electricity to rural areas was the REA: Rural Electrification Administration; it brought power from the Tennessee Valley Authority's generating stations.

<sup>6</sup> A generator produces alternating current (ac) which is used to charge batteries as a way of storing the power which was not immediately used. Batteries put out direct current (dc). Many implements must use either ac or dc, but cannot accept both as they operate on different voltages.

<sup>7</sup> One reference: In Old English, "sad" meant heavy, solid, dense....hence a "sad iron". Another reference suggests that, because the irons were heated on the stove, two or more alternately to keep a hot one in use, were so heavy you became "sad" from having to do the ironing.

sleeping sickness hit horses across this country, a disease that killed many and many a horse. And if you could doctor them through it—we didn't know how to do that, most vets didn't know how to do it—then they weren't much good after. If they survived the disease they were not able to pull, they were not able to do the job they had done before that. So I remember Dad losing several head of horses. If you have a team of horses, they are a team; you take one away and this guy has some trouble, 'cause he's missing his mate. They tell each other what to do and when to do it. So if you lose one you have to start all over matching the team, training the team over again. That wasn't good. I remember I didn't actually see this, but a hyperactive team, young team, pulled into a thrashing machine, on the belt side of it—big pulleys and big belts going from the power source, the tractor, up to the machine—and these horses got in there and got to fooling around. The tail of one of them got wrapped up in the pulley and jerked the tail off of that horse. And you think there wasn't some scrambling going on. It wasn't good.

Picking corn. You could go along and swear that team would know by the sound where you were, the rustle as you stripped an ear out and threw it. They would just keep that sound at a certain distance. They learned in a comparatively short period of time, Hey, don't let that sound catch up because he's going to tell you to move on. Or don't let it get too far back because he's going to come and tell you you've gone too far too fast. And they quickly learn, keep that sound that guy shucking right here. They'd just mosey along, just keep up with you, just a well-trained team you didn't need to say anything to. Interesting. People don't realize how **great** horses were and are. They're creatures of habit, of course. I don't know.

Once in a great, great while we'd go to town. They had a spring-fed lake there which we would swim in if we were not too tired at night. But it was a spring-fed lake and they would put up ice every winter. Let it freeze a foot thick, or whatever and the guys in the community would go down and they'd mark off the squares of ice and then saw it and store it up, bring it up an elevator and store it in a huge, big old I guess insulated building, using saw dust as insulators. They'd pile in a layer of ice and then sawdust and then another layer of ice and sawdust. If we kids were lucky, Mom and Dad would go down and get a chunk of that ice, buy a quarter's worth of ice, bring it home and make home-made ice cream out of it. That was a, that was a treat. Just an absolute treat. (both chuckle) We didn't have ice box, no refrigeration at all.

We had a dry well about thirty-feet deep; it was hand dug, but it was dry when I came along. Dad made a container with shelves in it that would go down on a rope and a pulley; you could lower it to the bottom of that well. Well, it's what? theoretically fifty degrees, fifty-two or fifty-five degrees down there? That's a lot better than a hundred degrees. So Mom would put her butter and perishables things in those shelves of that thing and lower it down. Then she or the kids could pull it back up at meal time and take out and that was our

refrigeration. That was the way she preserved her perishables. I got an interesting... Probably you're not interested in this...

McIntyre: So a cold treat wasn't something that happened too much really? Not cold that we're used to it today at least.

McKinley: No. No. My two older brothers, next older to me, at the supper table or at the dinner table would occasionally talk about how they'd read that if you were in a hole deep enough in broad daylight, if you'd go down deep enough and look up you could see stars. Once in a while they'd bring it up. One day they said, We don't know if that is really true. There's a well there. Why don't we put you down in that well and you can tell us if you can see stars. And, of course, I'm youngest and I'm gullible and I want to belong, you know, the need to be a part of the group, so I said, Sure. So they took off the containers, made a little foot sling, or something so I could go down in this well. Now the well is probably two foot across. Down I went. I got down there and they had eased that rope back up so I couldn't reach it, and in fact raised it clear to the top. And they kept talking, You see anything? No, I don't see any stars. Can't... You got to be. Nope I don't see a thing. All of a sudden, dead silence and I yell, Okay let me back up and never saw. (chuckles) I suspect it was three hours later, Mom missed me. Where's Don? They didn't know. She knew something was up. Finally, she ordered them to find me. They came and dropped the rope down, but I was down there for quite a while. It was too slick; the walls were bricked, but they were very damp and I couldn't, you know, I couldn't...

McIntyre: Climb up.

McKinley: ...I couldn't climb up.

McIntyre: How old were you?

McKinley: Probably five, six. They were **always** doing something like that to me.

McIntyre: (laughs)

McKinley: (chuckles) They were always doing it. But, you know, that's kids, that's kids. I wish they hadn't, but I remember it very well. (Both laugh) Ah, shoot. Hey I don't know.

Dust storms. Dust storms. We milked probably a dozen cows. Had a dozen cows fresh at all times and that was a morning and evening chore. Milk those out, bring the milk in, put it through a separator, separate the cream from the milk, use the cream and sell the cream and so forth. But those cows had a pasture, and I would say it was a quarter of a mile out from the barn. It became my job to take them out, open the gate and let them into that pasture and then close the gate. In other words, keep them out there all day. Creeks were running through; they got water and all the feed. Well, it was my job to go get them at night and bring them back in. I didn't have to bring them, they'd come in. And

it got to where they would go out. They knew. They're creatures of habit, too. About four thirty one night Dad said to me, Don, go get those cows. I see a storm coming up and we'd better get them in here. So I went out. Walked out, opened the gate, they weren't around. I had to go back in to the pasture and into the creek bottoms to find them and round them up and bring them up. It took longer than Dad intended, and that storm hit while I was still out there. And it was a **fearsome dust storm**. That dust was coming in out of Kansas and Nebraska, just a **wall** of dust. By this time I've got them started, but if dust gets in your eyes and I'm blinking and the tears start to run, you know, I'm blinking. And the more tears you got the more caked full of dust they'd become. I was virtually blind. I'd wipe. Wind was blowing lickety-cut, but the cows kept steadily going in the right direction. So I picked out the back cow, the old cow that I always milked, and I grabbed a hold of her tail. For the next twenty or twenty-five minutes they led, the whole herd led us to the barn and I got on in. Dad and Mom were about to die because they didn't know where I was or what it was doing. That old cow led me in, held on to her tail, couldn't see. I remember after that storm was over, every nook and cranny in that big old two story house had dust piles. There were piles of dust on the window sill. That's a typical Kansas dust storm, but it got to southwest Iowa. I don't whether you've read about how the dust would pile up like snow drifts. Wipe people out, just wipe them out. They don't do that anymore. Agriculture has learned to leave that, to get that dust to stay there. Not bare the soil like it did. But that was one, my lands, what a...

Polio scare?

McIntyre: This is back in the thirties again?

McKinley: Back in the thirties. I would say that we did not go to some public gatherings because of the polio scare. I don't think we went to the State Fair, for instance. Too much danger of contacting polio from somebody. So we limited our social gatherings. Mom and Dad didn't want any one of us with polio. That was a big thing back then. That disease grabbed you, boy, you...

Anyway, Mom relates the story: she was born and raised in southwest Nebraska. Nebraska, City, Nebraska. She relates the story of her parents fighting a prairie fire, that they saved the homestead. Hurriedly plowed around, I guess, and had wet sacks and, you know. That seems impossible today, you know, to think that such a thing could happen and yet it has happened with our CRP<sup>8</sup> land. You get some of that CRP land going and I'm telling you it'll... You can't stop it. Oklahoma and Texas has had some of that. Just sweep. Just sweep. I don't know, I'm done.

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<sup>8</sup> The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for agricultural landowners is a voluntary program of annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource conserving covers on eligible farmland.

McIntyre: Okay. (chuckles) Why don't we end it here then?

McKinley: We could along and go some more, but I don't think we better. The transcriber will faint if we go much longer.

(end of interview)