

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Orion Samuelson

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
& IL State Museum's
Oral History of Illinois Agriculture project

Interview # AIS-V-L-2009-002

Orion Samuelson, a lifelong agriculture broadcaster at WGN radio and advocate for agriculture issues, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Illinois State Museum's *Oral History of Illinois Agriculture* project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: February 2, 2009 Location: Samuelson's office at the WGN studio, Chicago

Date: February 3, 2009 Location: Samuelson's office at the WGN studio, Chicago

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

Technical Support (cameraman, etc): Greg Lipe and Norman Ibarra, IL Info Service

Transcription by: Tape Transcription Center

Edited by: Linda Brand, IL State Museum Volunteer and Michael P. Maniscalco, IL State Museum project manager

Total Pages: 133 pgs

Total Time: 1:33(1) + 1:29(2) + 1:59(3) + 1:01(4) + 1:04(5) = 1.55(1) + 1.48(2) + 1:98(3) + 1.02(4) + 1.07(5) = 7:06 / 7.1 hrs

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on 08/04/2009.

Session 1: Orion's early years to his beginning at WGN Radio in Chicago

Session 2: Orion's career at WGN Radio

Session 3: Experience as a world-wide traveler, & issues in contemporary Ag.

Session 4: Samuelson reflects on contemporary issues in American agriculture

Session 5: Reflections on inheritance taxes & changing face of Am. Farms

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

© 2009 Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Abstract

Orion Samuelson, *Oral History of IL Agriculture*, AIS-V-L-2009-002

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Orion Samuelson was born on March 31st, 1934 in Ontario, Wisconsin, and grew up on the family's dairy farm. At the age of fourteen he contracted Legg-Perthes disease, a bone disorder that caused him to be confined to his bed for two years. During that time, with a farm career out of the question, Orion considered radio broadcasting as an alternative, helped along the way by Mr. Robert Gehrig, his vocational agriculture teacher. Orion discusses his childhood years on the farm, including his one-room school house, the Great Depression and World War II years, and the day in 1948 when the farm first received electricity.

Following graduation from high school in 1952, Orion attended the University of Wisconsin on a scholarship for three weeks, then dropped out to attend the American Institute of the Air in Mendota Heights, Minnesota. For the next two years he worked at WHBY Radio in Appleton, Wisconsin, then at WBAY Radio and TV in Green Bay, Wisconsin, where he began his career in agricultural broadcasting. In 1960 he moved to Chicago and started work at WGN Radio, the famous clear-channel station heard throughout the Midwest. Orion has been at WGN ever since, joined in 1977 by Max Armstrong. As the station's Agribusiness Director, Orion serves the Midwest's vast agricultural audience, and increasingly, to a wider urban and suburban audience as well.

Orion discussed how agriculture has evolved since his youth on the family's dairy farm in Wisconsin, and shared his views on a wide variety of contemporary issues as well. These include the fuel versus food debate, the role of markets and commodity prices in farming, the impact of genetics on both plants and livestock, environmental issues, the role of land grant colleges and extension services, price-production ratios in modern agriculture, and the changing face of rural communities. Over his 55 plus years in agriculture, Orion has met every president from JFK to George W. Bush, as well as every Secretary of Agriculture since 1960. He has traveled to forty-three countries, and given scores of speeches and motivational talks over the years.

Subject Headings/Key Words: WGN farm broadcaster; farm chores; Legg-Perthes disease; farm life during the Depression; rural electrification; 4-H; FFA public speaking; American Institute of the Air, Mendota Heights, MN; WHBY Radio, Appleton, WI; WBAY Radio, Green Bay, WI; WGN Radio, Chicago, Illinois; polka bands on the radio; Max Armstrong of WGN Radio; Presidents John F. Kennedy; Richard Nixon; Lyndon Johnson; George H.W. Bush; Secretaries of Agriculture Earl Butz; John Block; Daniel Glickman; Mad Cow Disease; 1972 U.S. grain deal with Soviet Union; farm credit crisis of the 1980s; Farm Aid concerts; *This Week in Agri-Business*; *Samuelson Sez*; 1996 Freedom to Farm Act; PETA

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955