

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Jay Johnson

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Oral History of Illinois Agriculture Oral History project

Interview # AIS-V-L-2008-032

Jay Johnson, President and operator of Johnson Grain, a major grain terminal near Waverly, Illinois, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's & IL State Museum's *Oral History of Illinois Agriculture* project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: July 1st, 2008 Location: Johnson Grain in rural Waverly, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Technical Support (cameraman, etc): Tony Bateman, and Mark Suszko of IIS

Transcription by: Tape Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Rozanne Flatt, ALPL Volunteer

Video Indexed by: Jim Oliver, Illinois State Museum

Total Pages: 36 Total Time: 57 min + 42 min + 30 min = 2 hrs 9 min / 2.15 hrs

Session 1: Eckert's early life on family farm & growth of grain elevator & rail lines

Session 2: Walk and talk interview of the Johnson Grain facilities

Session 3: Stock footage

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on 11/21/2008.

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

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Abstract

Jay Johnson, *Oral History of IL Agriculture*, AIS-V-L-2008-032

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Jay R. Johnson was born on November 6th, 1967 in Springfield, Illinois, and grew up in rural Waverly, where his father, Robert, farmed on tenant property. In 1975, his father founded the Robert Johnson Grain Company and began to truck corn directly from farmers' fields to various barge terminals on the Mississippi River. That proved to be a lucrative venture, and Robert gradually increased his trucking business and decreased his involvement in farming. Meanwhile, Jay majored in finance at Illinois State University, and upon his graduation in 1990, was hired by the First Chicago Bank. He spent the next few years living in downtown Chicago and working as a financial analyst.

In 1991 Robert purchased a grain elevator in Palmyra. Jay moved back to Waverly in the early 1990s when his father asked Jay to help manage the growing business. They purchased a grain elevator in Waverly in 1996. Jay later took the lead in the business. A few years later, Jay was approached by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad about operating a rail loading facility, and in 2003 the BNSF helped him finance the construction of a grain terminal, building a rail spur onto the family's property outside Waverly. Within months, the facility shipped its first 110 unit train of corn destined for the Texas and Mexico markets. By 2006 they loaded their 100th train, and the business has grown rapidly ever since. Jay was selected as the Illinois Small Business Person of the Year in 2006, and was runner up at the national level. The interview includes a detailed discussion of the entire shuttle operation, from receiving grain, to testing for quality control, to loading of the train cars.

Topics Covered: Growing up on the farm; Robert Johnson Grain Company; Johnson Grain LLC, Waverly, Illinois; Illinois State University; First Chicago Bank, Chicago, IL; commodity (grain) prices; corn prices and ethanol production; Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad; railroad grain shuttle – grain terminal; grain shuttle operation;

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.

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