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Transcript of DARE Interview (1966): Walhalla, North Dakota; Primary Informant ND003 (Tape 0999-S1)

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INTRODUCTION: The following was recorded from Dictionary of American Regional English, tape zero nine nine nine, side one.

FIELDWORKER: [distortion] A recording of John [beep] made at Walhalla, North Dakota, on August twelfth, nineteen sixty-six by [beep].

5 INFORMANT: (xx) Shall we start out like this, uh, (how will) we start that?

FIELDWORKER: Well, you were, you were working for yourself.

INFORMANT: Yeah.

FIELDWORKER: In nineteen twenty-eight

INFORMANT: Twenty-eight.

10 FIELDWORKER: Where was your farm?

INFORMANT: It's, uh, out there where I'm gonna build a chimney today, the turkey farm out there. I was renting the farm from my cousin. See my cousin died in that winter, see.

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm.

15 INFORMANT: (Sorta) left her a widow, so my relations all picked on me as, as the best guy to go ahead with her farming interest, as well as mine, I would get a start, see—do you have that [tape recorder] on?

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm.

INFORMANT: Oh.

FIELDWORKER: So, (oh), what did you put in over there?

20 INFORMANT: Well, the first I had to do was get ready for spring. Bought it in March, and, uh, had to get all our things lined up for spring season. So I had to get the (hay hauled home), and eight horses, and we had to get them ready. Had to get all our machinery ready, it was, machi-

25 machinery, as I say, was in, uh, in tip top shape, and one thing, another, so that all had to be looked over. We only had about fifteen days left, ready to go, you know, for the field work. Had our grain to clean, grain to treat.

FIELDWORKER: What did you do to it?

30 INFORMANT: Well, with water and certain percentage of formaldehyde. First, we run it through the fan, you know, to get all the chaff and the wild oats and weeds out of it. And then we, we would sow about twenty bushels, twenty, twenty-five bushels a day, so we always treated enough every night, see.

FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm.

INFORMANT: To, uh, sow the next day, always a day ahead. And, uh, we'd get the fields worked up, one guy would do the cultivating or harrowing, or anything that had to be done before the seed bed was ready for the drilling.

35 FIELDWORKER: What do you mean the seed bed?

INFORMANT: The seed bed was the, well if, uh, if it was piece of (summer-fall) it would be too hard for, to go out there and put the drill on it, so we put the cultivator in, and cultivate it and loosen it up, then we'd harrow it and then we'd sow it. Which made the seed bed.

FIELDWORKER: And you sow it with a drill?

40 INFORMANT: With a drill, yeah.

FIELDWORKER: Ah, what did that look like?

INFORMANT: Well, it was a machine with t-two wheels, had two poles, and two horses in the middle of the two poles, and one horse on each side of the pole, had two levers, had a box where you put the grain in, two levers where you lifted it in and out of the ground and it had a
45 bunch of disks and a bunch of chains. Had a grain spout where the grain went down into the disk, you know, down into the ground. That's about the best I can describe that to you. And the harrow was made out of, uh, well, pieces of wood with steel teeth in, and, uh, we had four horses hooked on that we'd take about twenty-five feet wide down the field. Only half around and going down, and then, uh coming back, it would be fifty feet wide in the field (swath), see.
50 And, uh, cultivator was made of, of uh, two wheels and two levers, heavy spring frame, and it had the showels that would go down in the ground, pulling with four horses you didn't dare to go down more than four, five, six inches, because the horses wouldn't be able to pull it. And, uh, then it would, it would have to get ready for either the barley, after the wheat was sowed, we could get ready for the barley, or the oats, it was, which was the same process as it was
55 seeding this wheat, or drilling the wheat. And, uh, then we'd get ready for (summer-fall), that would be some time in middle of July, and we'd get out there and if we wanted to plow it we'd plow it, or if we wanted to disk it, we'd disk it, or if we wanted to cultivate it, or, uh, yeah, cultivate it, we'd cultivate it. And that was all done with horses, too.

FIELDWORKER: How much land did you put in the (summer-fall)?

60 INFORMANT: Well, it all depends if we hadn't—like the farm I had there was, uh, six hundred acres, we'd put four hundred in crop and the other four hundred in, or the other two hundred in (summer-fall), which made the six hundred acres. {Then we—

FIELDWORKER: Wh-}which ground would you most likely put in, what would it have had in it the year before? Grain?

65 INFORMANT: Well, it would be wheat, you know, or s-, a piece of soil that we knew last year was full of weeds and wild oats, or different things like that, and we wanted to give it a rest and clean it up.

FIELDWORKER: Did you have any particular problems that summer?

INFORMANT: Well, no, I can't say we did. We, uh, went along, we had certain amount of rain,
70 certain amount of sunshine, and one thing another of that particular time that season. And, uh, everything turned out all right.

FIELDWORKER: When did you first, when did you first start working on a farm?

INFORMANT: When I st-, first started working on a farm when I wasn't very big. I was about
eigh- [laugh], eight years old, which was pretty small for a young man to go out and start
75 plowing. ('Bout) four horses in a plow, course my dad was always ahead of me, so if there was
any trouble, why, I was all right. And he'd always stop at the end and help me lift the plow out
and put the plow back on the ground. So I had done that for, oh, maybe two, three weeks and I
thought, "Well if my dad can lift that plow out the ground, surely I can lift it out too," so I would
get off the seat and I'd stand on that little kick lever they there and as the horses went along
80 they'd help you lift. Something I had to learn, I thought you'd just, it would come out all by itself
when you stepped on it, but I found out it didn't. And he would push and kick, (that kinda
thing), until I did get it out. So to my s-, or Dad's surprise, he was surprised that I could get that
plow out of the ground as easy as I did for only being eight years old. And, uh, so then I was
about two weeks at that and then he says, "Well, I'm going to town to load grain today," he
85 says, "you think you can get the plow out of the ground and in the ground out there alone?"
"Oh, sure," I says, "done it for two days now, so I should be able to do it again today." Well, he
goes to town with a load of grain, watches me out in the field while he was loading, you know,
and, uh, things like that, and he was watching me all the way as he passed me on the road to go
to town, and he's seen I was doing all right, so he went to town and I went plowing.

90 FIELDWORKER: Plowed all day by yourself.

INFORMANT: All by myself. Just think, those four horses were pretty snappy too, if they
wanted to take off, I don't know where I'd have been. [Laugh] In the bush, I suppose.

FIELDWORKER: Did you harness them yourself too?

95 INFORMANT: Yeah, no, I didn't harness them. My dad harnessed them for me and got them ready and he'd help hook them up on the outside of the barn until I got over to the plow and I, I'd have an awful time getting that one horse over the pole. Seemed like, uh, the horse knew he was supposed to go over the pole, but (all was) too far ahead. I tried to back them up, and as I was backing them up, they'd all scatter out, you know, so you couldn't get them back. So I'd swing them around again, [laugh] and I'd swing them around again until I got them where I
100 wanted them. And so that's the life of farming when you're just big enough to walk. And, uh, then, after that, uh, years later, my grandfather used to come out in the field and he'd look at me and he'd look at the plow and he'd say, "Well, your one plow, one share isn't doing the job that it should be." It was either too deep, or not deep enough, and he'd come along and help me set that and then finally I got to learn how to set my own plows. [Cough] And, uh, uuh, let's
105 see now. We were at the plowing. That was in the fall of the year when we were plowing. I had to haul grain to pay for the bills. So, uh, next thing we knew, we were all done with the field work, and we had to get out in the bush and cut twenty-five loads of poles, get them home, so that would keep warm again all winter. Then we'd—

FIELDWORKER: What kind of wood did you burn?

110 INFORMANT: Well, it was mixed wood, like poplar, oak, elm, ash, birch, cherry trees that were big enough to make firewood out of, and different things like that. And, uh, we we'd get it haul holed, all hauled home in a pile, and then we'd, uh, get a sawing machine, or if we couldn't get one, we'd saw it all up by hand. And dad would do the splitting and my other sister was big enough to maneuver around then. She'd pile it all in cordwood lengths, you know? So then
115 when the winter snow came along, it wouldn't all get buried under the snow. Sometimes we threw it in piles, like, uh, straw piles that were piled up in the field. It would make one nice big round pile about twenty feet high and about sixteen feet in diameter, you know? Then we'd get ready for winter. We'd have all the stock and everything to get out of the pasture, get them in the barn, chickens to get out of the brooder houses and put them in the laying houses. And uh,
120 get the, uh, pigs and the hogs, out of the clover fields and bring them over to their houses where they're supposed to stay all winter, and, uh, different things like that. And then we'd have our morning chores and evening chores all winter long until spring came again, the following year.

FIELDWORKER: What would you do mostly in, uh, for your chores? Did you have milkers and—

125 INFORMANT: Yeah, we had, we had sixteen horses, and, uh, we'd have to feed them in the morning and get them ready for watering and do the barn chores, cleaning and stuff like that. We had about twenty-five cows, which required, uh, the milking and the skimming of the milk, then we'd have the young stock in the past-, or in the feeding stalls. Had to bring the milk down to them and pour it in the troughs or they were pail fed, or whatever way we had some of
130 them, you know, at the time. Some were stall fed, some were pail fed. And, uh, then, we had chickens we had, take the eggs, and water, and clean them, that is, clean them out once a week. And, uh...

FIELDWORKER: Well, didn't you ever have a chance to play, or [laugh] anything like that?

135 INFORMANT: Well, the chance of playing was, eeh, and Dad would say, "Now you gotta get this
done and you gotta get that done," and after we got that done, there was always something
else we had to do. So our playing ability was very small. Once in a while we'd, we'd play Annie-
high-o at a barn, next thing you know, he-, we, uh, we got caught doing that, (he'd) say, "We
ain't got time for that kind of work, let's get to work here, you need to carry the wood in the
house," or, or, uh, "We're gonna go to town," or we had to do something. We didn't find time,
140 uh, not even on Sunday. Sunday we'd go to church, uh, our church, we had church in, uh, in
those days at eight o'clock and ten o'clock. And we were five miles from church. And, uh, if the
horses, eh, were out in the field all week, you know, uh dad would say, "Oh, no, we're not
gonna chase those horses to town today." We had to walk! [laugh] There was no Hondas, no
this and that, then. Very seldom that some of the people had a, had a car yet in those days.

145 FIELDWORKER: Mm-hmm.

INFORMANT: Most of them had single buggies and surreys, they'd, uh, come to town in. Some
of them had horses that didn't work out in the field, they called them ponies or, uh, or horses
that were just for transportation. [Snort] And I remember lots of times when we were gonna go
to dance, about ten miles away, no, Dad said, "No, no, no. You're not taking those horses way
150 out there, they're gonna work in the morning or they're gonna have to do something
tomorrow. They're work horses, not pleasure horses. So we'd walk to the dance, ten miles
away. And, uh, different things that we wanted to go to. If there was a block social at the
school, well we knew all the time that if we were gonna go there tonight, we were gonna walk.
There was no such a thing as, as, uh, riding in a Ford Model T or anything at, at that time,
155 because we didn't have one. Not that the prices was so high at that time, now today they are
three thousand dollars, well at that time you could get one for three hundred and sixty-four
dollars. Used to make me mad sometimes when I wanted to go some place and everybody
would say, "Well, you're going there tonight?" And I'd say, "Yes, we're going there tonight, but I
don't know how we're gonna get there, you either walk or crawl, I suppose." So, uh, they
160 wanted to go too, but, uh, they didn't, they weren't the kind of people that I-liked to walk too
far. (If) it was close distance, why, they wouldn't even ask us, they'd be there. When it was
quite a ways they wanted to know if we were gonna ride and if we were riding, they wanted to
ride with us. But my dad never had time for anything like that when it came to dances or things
like that. He'd say, "No, I think you better go to bed tonight, so you can get up in the morning."
165 Well, we got up some mornings at four o'clock in the morning. I remember when we were
getting ready for thrashing in the fall, we had a long move to make that day. Dad says, "Well,
that machine should be ready tomorrow morning, and pushing straw out at five o'clock. So if
that machine's gonna push straw out at five o'clock, you remember, you can't get up four
thirty." You had the chores to do, horses to harness, we were all (bundle) teams then, drawn by
170 horses and, uh, they had to be harnessed and fed at last an hour and a half before we could go

to work. I remember getting up two o'clock in the morning, and never got back to bed before, uh, twelve-thirty again that night. [cough]

FIELDWORKER: So how long did you farm at your cousin's place?

175 INFORMANT: Two years. Nineteen twenty-eight and twenty-nine, and then I was gonna, I had a five-year lease, but then she wanted to get married again, and, uh, sh-she wanted to take over the farming interest of her own, then, because it was her own to start with. So, uh, well, I says, "I rented it for five years, but I don't want to tie you down in any way," I says, uh, "it's your farm." So I says, "Tell you what I'll do, I'll sell you all the machinery and horses and cattle, and everything that I have for so much down, and it's yours." So at that time, the whole thing put
180 together was two plows, one drill, a harrow, two wagons, about twelve head of stock, or cattle, there was some young stock, calves and yearlings and stuff like that. Maybe about fifty chickens, about two hogs and there was eight horses. Twelve hundred and fifty dollars. In nineteen twenty-nine that's what I got for it. Couldn't get any more (than that). Go to the bank, there was no banks here, they had a bank, though Grand Forks a hundred miles out of town
185 here at that time. Because the Depressions were coming on then. So there we were, right down to the bottom. We stayed in the bottom too, till after ni-, nineteen thirty-two when Franklin Delano Roosevelt would become president of the United States. That's when we started coming back to the top.

190 FIELDWORKER: Well, was it in, uh, that, that year that you got out, was that when the hard times started coming on?

INFORMANT: They just, just starting, they were just starting to come in, you could feel them, you know. You'd take a load of grain to town, it was a dollar and twenty-five cents a bushel and about a, before thrashing, and when we started thrashing, we got eighty-five cents for it, if
195 we'd a hauled it to town right away and then when we're, uh, we didn't wanna haul it till, around Christmas, New Year's, we got sixty-five cents for that same grain. So it's like my uncle used to say, "If I'd a sold it yesterday," he says, "I'd a made good money." So I said to my uncle, "You lost a lot of money, didn't you?" "No," he says, "I never lost it," he says, "I never got it."
[laugh]

FIELDWORKER: [laugh] Well, when did you start working for that John Deere farm?

200 INFORMANT: John Deere farm, I started working for them in nineteen thirty-two. In the fall of the year. And, uh, as I say, it was mostly an experimental farm, uh, the John Deere guy in our town there was Alfonse [beep], who was the agent for John Deere and he had a farm out east of town there, about a mile. And, uh, he'd buy and sell. He was a great buyer and he was a great seller, too, because I remember many occasions of it. So, uh, his boy was the boss or the
205 foreman at the time, in nineteen thirty-two, thirty-three. So, uh, the boy would say, "Well, uh, we're gonna do this and we're gonna do that today," and well, the big wheel would come in right after we were going, he'd say, "Well, who told you to do this?" he says. "Well," I says, "your son told us to do this." "Well," he says, "I thought you were farmers," he says, so I says,

210 "Well, maybe we're not." I says, "Because you come down here and give us orders to do this,"
and I says, "we get orders from here to do this," so I says, "we don't know what to do." So I
says, "We're kinda going in between," I says. So, anyhow, we worked all winter and all fall, all
fall and all winter, I should say it that way. Then in the following spring, was thirty-three, and
everything was a mess you might say. Snow and water and mud. Out those fields down there is
215 black soil, kind of a sticky clay, and boy when you got out in those fields, your feet was about
the size of a potato sack. Carrying a lot of mud around, you know, and you couldn't shake it off,
no matter what you tried and the longer you tried to shake it off, the more you got on it, it
seemed like. So you'd drag along all day in that stuff. Then we got ready for field work. So you'd
get the wheat all sowed, then we'd get the oats all sowed, and then we'd get the barley all
220 sowed, and then we'd get ready for the summer fallowing again and one thing another like that
and went on, and on, and first thing you know, it was haying time and we'd go out there and
we'd make the hay, and, uh, one thing another like that and stack it, or fill the barns. Had a barn
in there that held about f-, thirty ton of hay, then we had a big silo in the back that held, uh,
would take in about sixty acres of corn, down in a silo pit there. And we had, uh, eighty-five, uh,
white Herefords running around the pasture down there. We had a river that went through, so
225 we didn't bother too much about watering them. But it was always the eighty-five head of stock
in the barn that we had that we were stall feeding. There was no running water. We had a well
about two hundred feet away from the barn. And I used to run with two five-gallon, a five-
gallon pail in each hand and get the water, until I had enough water in there to water the, the
stock in the barn there. And then, that was the daily chores, every morning and every night,
230 was getting that water in there. And, uh, we never milked any of the white Herefords. They
were the beef type. And then, uh, we had, uh, eighty-five sheep. We never had too much
trouble with them, because they always went out on, uh, clover range or alfalfa range and then
they'd always go down to the river for a drink. And we had about fifty, sixty head of hogs. They
were no trouble to us either, because they'd even go down to the river for a drink and we'd
235 have their feeders and they were running on the range like that. By the time the cold weather
set in, then we'd have to get them inside. And then we had eighteen, or twenty head of horses,
and I remember well, it was in thirty-three, which was the year of the Depression, when all the
farmers were really fighting that, because the, the, uh, implement men would come out and
say, "Well, I've gotta take that plow away on you, or I gotta take that tractor away on you, or I
240 gotta do this, you haven't been paying any more monthly payments on it for a year, or a year
and a half." Oh there was that rush fight on, because the farmer figured he was the boss, and
he was the guy that bought the thing and had, maybe three quarters, maybe one or two
payments left on it, and that's the machinery that they always liked to repossess, was the one
that was pretty near paid for. So, anyhow, we were going along pretty good, in nineteen thirty-
245 four. Remember going out in the field, I was a foreman then because his son wouldn't, wouldn't
take over anymore, so the Alfonse [beep] says, "Well, John," he says, "you're the only guy that
can take over here," he says, "you been here now two years." Or two and a half years at the
time. And he says, "I think you're the one that should be the foreman here and take over."
Well, I wasn't too anxious about taking it over, because at that time, we were only getting

250 about twenty dollars a month, and we had to board ourselves. And every man that we had that
ate with us, from daylight till dark, breakfast, dinner and supper, we only got fifty cents a day
for giving him something to eat. Now you can't give a guy very much to eat for fifty cents a day.
So then, we'd get out in the field, well I'd send one guy out there drilling, and I'd have another
guy out there harrowing, and I'd have another guy out there cultivating, and the first thing I
255 know, oh, God, there's something wrong out there, so I'd go out there and, well, as I say in one
instance there were, we took a brand new tractor and a brand new plow up there, and told the
guy, "Now," I says, "don't turn too close to the, uh, ditch here," I says, "because it's all white
sand, and you'll slide in and upset it." Well, it was all right, he understood that all right, so I left
him. (Guy stays on only one side) and I see him walking across the field, so I went out to meet
260 him. "Well," he says, "you know what I done?" I says, "Yes, I know what you done, you upset
that tractor." "Right." Brand new one, only made three rounds out in the field and the rounds
were only a quarter of a mile long, or, or eighty rods. So, uh, we had to go to town and get
another tractor, pull it back on its wheels, oil was spilled, gas was spilled, water was spilled,
transmission was draining out on the wheels and all those things that goes with it. (Upsetting).
265 And a lot of times he'd say, "Well, John, you gotta go over a certain place now," he says, "you
got the men all working," he says, "I got a team of horses over there that I had to take away
from a guy and repossess them, and so you have to go get them." So I'd go out, get the gray
team, or black team or whatever it was, and, uh, walked-, he'd give me a ride over there, and
I'd have to walk back with the horses, or ride back, and I wasn't too much of a cowboy at the
270 time, I didn't like riding horses. So I'd walk. So, uh, on the way back we'd come in across a rail
road crossing. My gosh, here comes the old galloping goose there, and, uh, with passengers on,
it's what they call "galloping goose" here. And, uh, all at once, those two horses took me right
out across the rail road track and right out into the potato field. I never touched the ground for
about two hundred feet. And I'm telling you that the halters that I had on wasn't too safe, even,
275 uh, to lead them home without pulling on them or trying to stretch them too much, because
some of them had a little piece of wire on them, and some had a little piece of twine on, and
some had a little string tied on. You can imagine when you get in the years of the Depression
when they can't buy rivets anymore to rivet those two straps together. And here I went sailing
out two hundred feet in the potato field, with just twine strings around the horse's neck, you
280 might say, well a, supposed to be a halter, but it wasn't. And the ropes, they were shredded so
bad that you couldn't tell whether it was a corn tassel or what it was.

FIELDWORKER: Well, when did you quit working for this guy?

INFORMANT: Quit working for him in nineteen, uh, thirty-four.

FIELDWORKER: Did you just get tired of it?

285 INFORMANT: No, I didn't get tired of it. But, uh, he wanted me to buy it, because, uh, he was
down in, uh, bankruptcy almost. So he wanted me to buy it, and I didn't wanna buy it. I figured
it wasn't the right time to buy. So, uh, "Well," he says, "I gotta do something, can't go on this
way," he says.