

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Mörlunda Farms Project

Auctioneering Experience

O.H. 177

A. W. HAMILTON

Interviewed

by

Hugh G. Earnhart

on

March 1, 1980

A.W. HAMILTON

A.W. Hamilton (Colonel Ham Hamilton) was born December 17, 1911 in Booneville, Arkansas, the son of Jimmie Lee (Smith) and Ike L. Hamilton. He attended high school in Wister, Oklahoma. He then attended Oklahoma State University graduating in 1934. While he was in college, he was on the livestock judging team. Ham Hamilton went into the U.S. Navy in November of 1943 and was discharged in February of 1946. Also in 1946, he went to Colonel Reppert's Auctioneering School, a two-week school to learn auctioneering.

Mr. Hamilton was self-employed as a Purebred Beef Cattle Auctioneer from 1950 until 1976. He married his wife, Naomi, on August 18, 1935 and they have one son. Ham belongs to the Mason and Elk and his hobby is doing some part-time auctioneering.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Mörlunda Farms Project

INTERVIEWEE: A.W. HAMILTON

INTERVIEWER: Hugh G. Earnhart

SUBJECT: Purebred Beef Cattle Auctioneering Experience

DATE: March 1, 1980

E: This is an interview for the Oral History Program at Youngstown State University with Colonel Ham Hamilton at Mörlunda Farms, March 1, 1980 at 1:45 in the afternoon.

Colonel, tell us a little bit about your days of youth growing up in the area of Lewisburg, West Virginia and your parents if you will.

H: Well, it didn't start in West Virginia at all, it started in Arkansas.

E: Okay, sorry about that.

H: I was born in Booneville, Arkansas, back in 1911.

E: There you go.

H: Oh, I lived there until I was around twelve years old. We moved to Little Rock, Arkansas for about a year and a half because my father was a railroad man, brakeman on the railroad. We later moved into Oklahoma when I was in the eighth grade; eastern Oklahoma, a little town by the name of Wister, which was where my father terminated his run of the railroad. Took a lot of seniority to hold that job because Arkansas required four brakemen on her train and Oklahoma only required three. So, he lived there on the state line and he would just work fifty miles and got paid for one hundred. That was a real good job.

And it was there that he bought a little farm. That was my first experience with agriculture. I went through

high school in Wister, Oklahoma; attended one semester at Eastern Oklahoma College at Wilburton against my will, but I had to. And then I finally got to go to Stillwater, where I wanted to go, which, at that time was Oklahoma A&M College. Now it's Oklahoma State University. I went there for two years, decided I didn't like college and quit; made one crop and that taught me that I did like college and I went back. My last two years I even made the honor roll a couple times. The first two years I didn't quite have a C average. Anyway, I graduated from Oklahoma State University--it is now--in 1934 after being on the livestock judging team.

Wasn't many jobs then, but they wanted to get everybody a job. They had gotten everybody a job. My job was at Oklahoma City at the stockyards. But, they went on a strike just before graduation and they wanted me to go inside and live in there. Even though I had made most of my way through college, my dad had contributed some and I wasn't going to hit him in the face the first lick. Railroad men are union men, as you know, and I wouldn't go in.

So, that left me there for a month or so at which time we got a letter from West Virginia University wanting to know if anybody had made both the livestock judging team and the meats judging team. They needed a man out there to give a scholarship to, assistantship I should say, whereby he would coach a livestock judging team and he would also take care of cutting the meat for the girl's and boy's dormitory and actually conducting some lab work for the girls in home economics. So, I was the only one that made both judging teams and that gave me that job.

I was supposed to work on a Master's degree while I was out here, but I was more interested in the 66 dollars and 66 cents a month. That's what they were going to give me and that's more than I was making out there working on that hog farm for the school. So, I did come to West Virginia University and I stayed there one year. I wasn't interested in a Master's degree and I did not stay until I got it, as a county agent's job opened up in Doddridge County, West Virginia.

I didn't know an awful lot about West Virginia agriculture, so I'd say I learned more those five years than the farmer did maybe, but at least I learned how to get along with them and I wouldn't take anything for that five years. I really enjoyed it; after which I went to work for the Pittsburgh Producers buying livestock. I bought cattle and sheep over in West Virginia. Later getting into the agricultural program with the Monongahela Power Company

primarily because Roy Godley, who was really doing well with them at that time had also come from Oklahoma, had come out here on the same job I was on, and also had been county agent in the neighboring county to me, in Ritchie County. So, he talked me into coming with them in the Agricultural Developments Program.

I stayed there until it got to the point I grew tired of telling people what my status was with Uncle Sam and all their kids that had to go to service. I did have a deferment and a real good one, but I gave up that deferment in 1943 and joined the Navy. I hadn't ever been on anything except a row boat going across a river and I thought I'd like the Navy and I got into the Navy.

And it was then, floating around out there on the Pacific that I made up my mind if I ever got back I was going to try to be an auctioneer. Perhaps I skipped a little bit of it--Earl Gartin, who was a great auctioneer from Indiana, sold the West Virginia Hereford sale regularly and he also sold a sale here for Mr. Nelson. They set up the sale up there on Thursday, this one down here was on Saturday because they couldn't pay very much up there. They paid him seventy-five dollars to come from Indiana to cry that sale. Mr. Nelson never wrote an auctioneer's check for less than a thousand even right through the Depression. And he would make the thousand dollars coming down here and staying in the home over there. He was a real close friend of the Nelsons. So, he's the one that wanted me to go to auctioneer's school, become an auctioneer. But I only got two weeks vacation a year and every one of those vacations I went to Oklahoma. But I made up my mind out there, after associating with fellows in my own bracket, that I believed I had as much on the ball as they did. I believed I could do better back here and I made up my mind I was going to try.

So, when I came back I went down to the Commissioner of Agriculture, McLaughlin. I don't know whether you remember him or not. He and Mr. Nelson were also great friends; and he had always told me, "Why don't you come down and work for me. Anytime you want to come down and work for me, come on down." So, I just drove down and walked in his office one morning and I reminded him of that and he said, "Yes, I said it. I said it a lot of times. I'll say it again." I said, "Well, I'm here." He said, "Well, when do you want to go to work?" And I said, "I would like to go to work as of eight o'clock this morning because I can't lose the day." (laughter) But he stood his guns and made me--I guess he gave me a big title--'Purebred Livestock Specialist', I believe that's what my title was.

Anyway, I was working for the Department of Agriculture and Mörlunda Farms had a field day. I did not know the Nelsons very well at that time except just before the field day, Colonel Earl Gartin had a sale at Huntington, West Virginia. Now, it wasn't a state sale at West Virginia; it was just a few breeders over there who got together and honestly, the cattle weren't very good. But Earl wanted me to come to that sale. I did go over there to that sale and about the end of it we had six left, and they were pretty doggy kind, they weren't very good. And Earl said, "We got a new auctioneer here. I want to put him up and let him sell these last six. And I got up there and I'll guarantee you I was nervous and shakey. And I did not . . . well, I knew Mr. Oscar Nelson when I saw him, that was all. He sat out there and after I got started on that first one he bid. He bid on all six of them. I think he bought three or four of them. (laugh-ter)

And we got back to the hotel that night and there was a note in my box telling me that Mr. Nelson wanted to see me in his room. Well, as I say, I did not know him at that time. Mr. Nelson was very, very difficult to understand. He came to this country from Sweden and I had no experience in talking with immigrants at that time and it was an effort for me to grasp what he was saying. It was easy after you were around him a lot, but I wasn't around him much then and I was really nervous up in his room because I couldn't understand.

He asked me a few questions and I wondered why. And about the next week Commissioner McLaughlin said, "We're going out to my farm." He wanted me to go out to his farm with him, which we did quite often. We started out there and stopped under this tree and he asked me how I'd like to be
: farm manager and I said that I thought I'd never like it at all. I had no idea what he was leading to. He said, "I've got a real good friend. He's a Republican and a hard one and I'm a Democrat, but he supports me and we're good friends and he said his farm manager has taken a job with the American Hereford Association and he knows he has to look around and find another one and he just wants somebody to fill in. He's got a lot of people coming over here from Europe this summer. They'll be over at the Greenbrier Hotel. He needs somebody that can show them around the farm, that can sell a few cattle. Actually, you'll be farm manager and I'd like to loan you to him for six months." Well, I wasn't very keen on the job, but then finally we came down to the field day and he made me master of ceremonies. It was held in the yard across the road at what we call the Big House. The discussion about me becoming manager of Morlunda Farms began downstairs in the bar after

the field day ended. A lot of business went on down there.

E: What year was that, Ham?

H: That was in 1947. That's right, 1947.

So, before we left here that night, he had hired me to come here and stay for six months. He said, "I'll get you into the auction business." I said, "Mr. Nelson, I don't think I could ever sell Purebred Cattle." When I went to auction school I was just going to sell feeder calves and little sales in West Virginia and I never had any idea of selling Purebred Cattle because it's hard to break into that thing and after you do it, you don't know how you did it.

That's what all of them ask me, "How do you get into it?" Well, it's difficult to tell them how. But he certainly was a stepping stone to me. He did send the cattle to Chicago. I met all the Hereford breeders up there. We took our show cattle up there. Then, I started attending sales down here and he'd go to these fellows that had these real good Hereford cattle and said, "If you'll pick out a few of your good cattle and put them at the end of the sale and let my boy sell them you won't be sorry." More than one fellow did that. The only thing bad about it was, the other auctioneer would be up there beating his brains out, then they'd put that last ten head in there and I'd go in there and raise the price on him about five hundred dollars a head. It didn't make him look very good, (laughter) because Mr. Nelson would bid on them.

He had a great act. He always bid at sales. He'd bid to the auctioneer, bid to the rig man, anything to create excitement. Somebody else would get on and he'd quit and wait for the next one. He never left till the sale was over. As good a man as ever come and got on the seats because he helped sales. That was the idea of it.

He always had a lot of trouble with his real good friends coming here to buy. While I was manager and was having his sales, he'd get them up there and lecture to them. "Don't sit in there and buy the first one in the ring." They'd buy the first one and pay a big price for it. He'd say, "See how long you can bid without getting one," but he couldn't sell it to them very well. They wanted to buy a particular one and they'd pick one out. He didn't do that. It wasn't the best way in the world to build a herd, but by golly, he was in it, along with his business

up there. He recognized this as being his avocation, not his vocation, and that's the way he did it, and he had a lot of fun out of it. And people were first and cattle were second with him, by far.

E: Before we go any further in the auction business, what railroad did your dad work for?

H: Rock Island--going under right now. It has been in the newspapers a lot.

E: When you were in the Navy in the Pacific, were you aboard ship?

H: Yes.

E: Which one, do you recall?

H: Well, I was a skipper of an LCT [Landing Craft Tanks]. It's not very large. I was the only officer and twelve men to start with, and then I had an executive officer that came on. We were supposed to be landing tanks, the LCT. We made, I guess, four invasions and I hauled everything but tanks. We never had a tank on it.

E: Always men or something else?

H: Always men or trucks or equipment or something, never did have a tank on it, so they misnamed it.

E: What auctioneering school did you go to?

H: Reppert's.

E: Where is that located?

H: That's located in Indiana, Decatur, Indiana and Colonel Reppert was one of the great auctioneers. The Colonel had died the year before I went out there. So, he must have died in 1945. Yes, I got out of the service in 1945 and I went out there in 1946.

E: What types of things did they try to teach you at this particular school?

H: Well, it's only a two week school. They had some instructors out there who were real, real good and some that were just . . . they were pretty good auctioneers, maybe, but they didn't know anything about instruction. We had one man who I worked with after I got out of school. I worked with him even after I was established in the auction busi-

ness. He was not a good auctioneer, but he was a wonderful teacher. That's what he should have been. He taught articulation. He'd really teach those old boys to pronounce those words to where they could be understood. These fellows who sell tobacco and the ones who sell in the auction market, they get all that lingo in and they're not clear. In our business, we're selling to doctors and lawyers and to people who don't go to sales very often and they've got to know what that bid is or they're not going to be bidding. And he was a wonderful teacher. He'd give us a lot of tongue twisters to start with. I always got a kick out of the one; one of the early deals he used getting all of us to say, "The big black cat ran over the roof of the house with a piece of raw liver in his mouth; ran over the roof of the house, thirty will you give me the five; ran over the roof of the house, forty will you give me the five, will you give me the five, will you give me the five."

E: Yes. (Laughter)

H: That's the way he taught you the rhythm and counting and got you in, but he was a good instructor, a real good one.

E: Was there any effort to separate the people out at this particular auction school for the type of work they might go into?

H: No. I mean, they asked all of us. They tried to find out. No, they were interested in--I shouldn't perhaps say this--but the two hundred bucks you give. They said, "If you don't show a lot of promise, you're not going to stay here. We'll kick you out at the end of the week." Well, they never kicked anybody out and I guess they were right because there's some way that each man could get into some type of auctioneering probably.

E: Probably didn't want to give back that two hundred bucks.

H: Most of the boys that went up there were going to be auctioneers in the regular market. We had a lot of lawyers up there. They went up there just to get the feel of things. The only auctioneering they thought they'd ever do would be out in front of the courthouse selling delinquent property. We had some boys up there that were going to have to make a lot of speeches. I mean, they went up there for confidence just so they could get up before that group. It's hard to get up before a small group, really. And the first day you get there, that's the first thing they do; they brought you up there and gave you a hoe. They said, "Sell this hoe." Oh, crimeny, I mean, I never

had even called bids. I didn't do anything. And then they cut a record of that and the last thing you did, they took you back in there and you sold again and they gave you that record of before and after to show you what all they had done.

E: Do you still have your record?

H: I've got it somewhere. I don't know where it is. It's pretty old by now. (Laughter)

E: What was the size of that class for that two week course?

H: I'd estimate there were about sixty.

E: Really?

H: Something like that. They came from everywhere. There wasn't too many of the schools then. After the GI bill, after the first group got out, everybody set up a school because the GI would pay your two hundred and we have schools, oh we have lot's of schools now. Well, we should have one here really. Down on the river here, we had a golden opportunity to put one down there at a camp. Now this place, we had one big dormitory, but you didn't want to stay at a dormitory. You stayed in homes or motels or anywhere around town.

The old Colonel had made a pretty good school out of it and his daughter and son owned it at that time. The son was a doctor, well-to-do doctor. He didn't have anything to do with the school except come out and talk to us the first time. And his daughter worked at a bank and she ran the school, but she had all these auctioneers that Reppert had used and they came back and they were the instructors.

But it's from early morning until late at night. They really give you a lot of training in two weeks time. At the end of the two weeks, the last of the deal, they would go out and buy a whole group of items and we'd go down in town and, of course, make enough noise and get people in there and then we would sell. You'd get in line. When you finally worked yourself up there you'd get to sell something and then you'd have to go back to the foot of the line and wait awhile.

E: Now this is just people out in the . . . ?

H: Yes, just getting people off of the street, selling anything.

E: What if you didn't sell, then didn't you get a diploma?

H: Well, I guess if they didn't get a bidder, some of them would buy their own. (Laughter) But, it worked real good and then they would take us out to the livestock farm. Now, they did a lot of teaching to these boys. Those who wanted to be in the beef cattle business, why, they had to learn the different classifications of show cattle and all that deal. Of course, having gone through school, I knew all that to begin with.

E: Yes.

H: But, they give them pretty good training really, for a two weeks period of time. All it does is give you confidence enough that people back home know you went to auction school so that when you get back you're willing to get up and try.

E: Before we get back to your manager's job here at Mörlunda, what were your parents like? As far as parents, did they give you any type of direction that might lead you to become a Purebred top auctioneer in the country?

H: I would say not, I mean, my dad was a man of very moderate means as you know, being a railroad man. And back in those days, a railroad man's job wasn't too good because I can well remember, there was so many men on the extra board and so many men laid off. That was right in the heart of the Depression, but they encouraged all those fellows, as soon as he made \$125 in a month, to lay off and give the men on the extra board a chance to make a few bucks. He would do that around maybe the sixteenth or the seventeenth; he'd quit for the rest of the month to give these boys on the extra board some work.

E: So, they could finish the month?

H: We didn't have much money. I went to school. He gave me a thousand dollars for four years of school. The rest of it I had to work for. One year I batched and also worked.

E: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

H: I have two brothers.

E: What do they do?

H: My older brother was a school teacher. He was state senator in Oklahoma for about nine or ten years before

he died. We have a weakness for circulatory disease. It's inherited and I guess if you inherit the weakness for it, particularly if it's Buerger's disease--if that's what it is--any kind of tobacco brings it on.

E: Really?

H: My dad and both brothers are dead. They buried one leg with the three of them. My dad lost both of his. My kid brother lost both of his. My older brother just lost one and then he had the aorta replaced. And I came up with the same thing.

My son was in dental school at Morgantown in the first class of West Virginia and he came back and after he'd studied that summer he said, "You have an appointment over at the Greenbrier Clinic." And I said, "I don't have any appointment. I don't know what you're talking about." "You got one anyway," and told me what it was. He knew they'd get me over there and tell me about this tobacco. So, I quit tobacco in 1961, I guess, completely. They never would quit. My brother, I talked to him about it all the time. He would quit, but every time he'd go back to the senate and get in those senate rooms, come back, there he was smoking a pack or two packs a day. It's really strongly inherited.

He has a son nine months older than my son. He's also been state senator, replacing his father. He's running for United States senator now from Oklahoma. I don't think he has a good chance, but he does, so that's all that's all that matters. But anyway, he's only 44 years old the he's already had the tube put in from his heart down to his legs. The aorta has been replaced with this tube, it's dacron. It's a wonderful deal and they can get them in there and make them work.

Of course, they tried to put a vein into my leg and they failed miserably. They got the blood down there, but they couldn't get it back. And then they started cutting it off down there and it wouldn't heal, and then had to cut it again and it would get infected. Finally, they cut it off up here where they should cut it off, and then it did heal.

E: What do you recall about Mörlunda? You got the job down here in the basement of the big house where you said most business was transacted. What do you remember most about that first day of taking over the job at Mörlunda as manager?

H: Well, actually, I felt inferior to the job, but I still

was thinking it's only for six months and I knew the type of people that would come and I'd be showing around, I would enjoy that part, which I did, I enjoyed all of it, really. And a few months after I was here, I made up my mind that I was going to stay here a long, long time.

The first thing we did after I got here, sold a farm. Mr. Nelson owned three or four farms back in this direction, in Lewisberg, at that time. He sold one. We had to cut down on the number of cows, so we set up a sale back there with me to be the auctioneer. He would not have it down here in the show barn. He wouldn't let us advertise in the Hereford Journal. He just put it in the local papers. Wanted to sell them, he said, "Not much money. They're too good of cows to throw away so let the farmers come in and buy them." Good old Purebred cows, most of them had some age on them. We set that sale up over there. We just had to build a fence around it and got some bleachers to put out and had this sale. As I say, we did not advertise in the Journal, but we had a real good customer in Roanoke, Virginia, who heard about the sale. He read it in one of these deals and he came over. So, the last minute, Mr. Nelson come to me and said, "Go back to the show barn and get a real nice heffer. We got a man here. We got to sell him one." So, we brought over one of our show animals over to that sale. That topped the sale. I guess we got \$1,500 or \$1,600, which was a real good price in that day.

E: Oh, absolutely.

H: He made me really feel at home. He wouldn't even let me buy a car. I couldn't get a car when I got back out of service, but I would take the farm car right here and he would say, "Go ahead and drive it anywhere you can book these sales." I built up a pretty good business while I was here. I stayed here until right near the end of 1949 and at that time I just had too many sales. Many times I'd have a sale booked, Canfield, Ohio. You know where that is.

E: Yes.

H: I had a sale there one Saturday. I had to drive back home that night because Mr. Nelson would come down here every weekend. On Sunday morning he saw every head he owned except in weather like this; every Saturday and every Sunday. You'd take him on a tour Saturday; you'd take him on another Sunday. He knew an awful lot of those cows with nicknames. He'd recognize them as he'd

go around. He'd make all of his recommendations,

We'd go out, I'd have a lot of questions for him, things that need to be done. He taught me an awful lot by the way he thought and the way he operated. As I say, his English, he had a tough time expressing himself until he got somebody that knew him real well. So, I'd ask him these things. What should we do with this? I'd never get an answer. At first it irritates you. He'll just sit there and listen. Monday morning, getting ready to get in his car to go back to Charleston to go to work, "Colonel, come here." One, two, three, four, without anything written down, he gave me every answer, everything that I'd brought up to him that weekend. He always believed in sleeping on something before he made these decisions.

E: Think it over.

H: Yes.

E: What did the buildings and the hired personnel and so forth consist of at the time you took over as manager?

H: Actually, there's only one exception. This has been enlarged. My office was just that part over there. This has all been added on. All the other houses are the same except we had one more barn. He might have shown you a picture of the early deal. That building burned down. It was the nurse cow barn, which we used in those days. It had been a dairy barn when Mr. Nelson bought the farm, so it worked real well as a nurse cow barn. We had all our stalls in there for the cows and then we'd turn all the calves in to nurse. And that barn did burn. It burned a lot of calves. And outside of that, it's almost the same.

E: Who handled the show string when you were manager?

H: Bill Lawrence. Bill was a foreigner. He came into this country and he was real good. Most of those boys are . . .

E: Scotchmen?

H: Scotchmen. That's what Adam McWilliam was, the former manager ahead of me. Adam came here from Hillcrest Farms up in Chester, West Virginia, where they had a lot of champion cattle. Adam was a good cow man. Bill Lawrence was a herdsman.

E: Did you have much trouble working with Lawrence at all?

Those Scotch boys always were so secretive and loners,

H: That's right. It was difficult. I mean, me coming in young, him having been here. It wasn't real easy going, but he soon accepted me. Mr. Nelson would stand behind you. I mean, he would back you up. Of course, they understood him pretty well.

Speaking of him being a little difficult to understand, he had a secretary by the name of Pobol. Amy is dead now. Most capable girl that I believe I have ever known. And I'll just give you an idea how he would . . . I'd go up to his office to see him occasionally and by the way, when you go to his office--it was in Charleston--they had a beautiful building. There'd be guys down on the elevator try to get up to see Mr. Nelson and couldn't. I'd punch the button and say, "I'm from the farm and I'd like to see the boss." I'd get on the next elevator and breeze right up there. He loved to talk cattle any time of day.

But while I was in there he dictated a letter to Miss Pobol once. He called her in. He was mad at this fellow, real mad. He said, "I want you to write him. Tell him the hell with his idea. I don't like it worth a damn and we're going to do this, and that's what we're going to do. That's what we're going to do." "Yes Mr. Nelson. Yes Mr. Nelson." She went out and brought back a letter. It was the nicest letter you ever saw and read right out. And the old man read it, "That's what I said." She put into it what he was trying to tell the old boy. She understood him completely.

And I'll have to admit, I think I did too before I ceased to deal with him.

E: You stayed from what--1947 to . . . ?

H: I stayed, yes, early 1947. It amounted to about two and a half years, I'd say. Six months were stretched to that much. I would have stayed on, but I was getting along too good in the auction business and I could see that I was going to make it.

E: Then, how was it, trying to break into the Purebred livestock business that an auctioneer from Missouri seemed to pretty much have a strangle-hold on at that time?

H: Well, actually, as far as the East is concerned, I had one real break by coming from Oklahoma. A lot of these Eastern boys used to resent that and they had a right to because these Oklahomans just swarmed out here. I had a sale in

Georgia once where every man helping with the sale, including the secretary, was an Okie. We had all migrated out here. There were more jobs back in this country and we were respected back here. At that time they just thought the West runs the cattle business. But that isn't true now. We've got, for example, in the American Hereford Association, we have a boy from southwest Virginia with the number one job, H.H. Dickenson. And the number two job is a boy from Princeton West Virginia, Bud Snyder. And the American Polled Hereford Association, the Senior Vice President is Johnny Winston, who's from North Carolina. So, it has changed. I mean, and also at that time they had to go West to buy real good cattle. The Western boys would just kind of hoodwink them and doing a real good job of it. We have good cattle back in this country.

E: Yes. How did you work into this auctioneering of Purebred?

H: Well, as I say, that gave me my first break. I guess, I must have got along all right in the auction box. You do your own advertising in this deal. If you get along all right with the people they take care of you. I doubled my business in the second year I was out. The first year I was out, I didn't know whether I had enough tied down to make it or not. I didn't make an awful lot of money. I come out with ten thousand dollars, which was pretty good at that time, but I fell into a real good deal and there again, Mr. Nelson gave me that deal.

I was not working for him then, but he was having his annual sale and he called me down here and he handed me some expense money, as he always would, and said, "Take my car and go out and drum up some business for my sale. Visit some of these people." So, I went down to South Carolina to a Chevrolet dealer who sold cars in Hartford, Connecticut. He had him a farm down there and we had sold him some cattle and I was trying to get him to come to Mörlunda. I said, "We want you up there. We got just what you need," and so forth. He said, "Now, Ham I would come up there, but what I really need is a large group of cattle. I want to buy a big group of cattle."

So, about that time I needed to go to Oklahoma to see my mother. Mr. Nelson knew it and he said, "What do you do on those trips? Don't you do any business so you can charge it off?" I said, "No, I never had thought of that." He said, "Okay, I need you to go to Oklahoma to look at a group of cattle for me." He sent me to a place just a hundred miles from where my mother was. And I went over there, looked the cattle over, got on the phone and called back and tried to sell them to Oscar Jr. and his dad, but

we could not make the deal.

So, when I came back home, this old boy wrote me a letter and he said, "I've got to sell now, I'll give you 5% of anything you'll sell for me," So, I called down the old boy in South Carolina and I said, "If you'll get in your plane, I'll tell you where you can buy those cattle right now." He said, "Tell me where," and he got in his airplane, flew out there and bought \$55,000 worth of them.

That old boy couldn't even read nor write. His wife did his writing for him, but he sent me a check for 5% of \$55,000, which I always claimed was the turning point in my life because that was in October and I hadn't had much business up until then. That was the biggest break, I guess, I got; and Mr. Nelson was responsible for it in both ways, having sent me to the man who did the buying and having sent me to Oklahoma.

E: Who was the fellow down in North Carolina? Is he still in business?

H: No. I swear I'll have to think awhile now to get these things. He was a Chevrolet dealer in Hartford, Connecticut. Oscar would recall it. He's got a memory like his mother.

E: How did you get along with Mrs. Nelson, speaking about his mother?

H: Real good. At that time, Mrs. Nelson owned a farm. It was sold. It's a mile and a half from here. We kept her cattle. Well, they were all the same ownership, but the names of the cattle carried the Mörlunda [name] but her cattle all had an "H" following Mörlunda. If you'll remember, the greatest bull we ever had--he's buried right down there--was Mörlunda H. Domino XII.

E: Right.

H: And we had Mörlunda H. Silver. The old man said, "I can't understand it, Mama gets all the good ones. When you get through with the bulls over there, then I have to deal with her." But she was really great.

A bull would jump the fence occasionally and we'd have a crossbred. I had a real fat steer out there one year along about Christmastime over at her place. He weighed about 800 and she gave him to me for a Christmas present. We got all kinds of breaks like that.

We had creeps on the farm. We don't creep-feed our calves now. Truman believes bringing them up rough, so the other guys can, but we had creeps in all the pastures. I had a steer over in Skaggs pasture and every week Mr. Nelson would come down and he'd always mention that steer. "Colonel, that steer is getting big isn't he?" I said, "Yes, he's pretty big, boss, but he's helping me now because he helps me find cows that are in heat. He will always be with them if they are. So, I kind of like to have him in here." So, I kept him a little longer and a little longer. I had him weighing almost 800 and I'd get that creep where he can still get in there and I was rolling grain to him. So, he came down one day, "Where's the steer?" And I said, "I sold him." "What did you get for him." I told him. "Wasn't very much was it, Colonel?" I said, "No, but it was an awful good buyer, boss and he really needed him and I let him have him. We were going along a little while and he said, "Who did you sell that steer to?" I said, "I sold him to myself. I cut him up. He's down there in deep freeze." (laughter) He really liked that. He got a kick out of it. He thought that was great.

- E: What was it like to work those first sales? Obviously, most of your travelling was done by car and not by airplane?
- H: Yes, the first ones they were. Latter state of the game, I was flying an awful lot. I'd leave my car at the airports. I'd do it combination-wise. I liked to have my car because going from north to south, you didn't know when you were going to run into weather like this, rain, muddy farms. If you were in your car, you had your boots, you had your raincoat, you had your overcoat, you had everything. If you're on that airplane, as you well know, you cut right down . . .
- E: To the bare essentials.
- H: That's right. So, I like to drive. I drove 50,000 miles a year regularly for, oh, the last twenty years and then I flew an awful lot.
- E: In those early years, any sale stand out in your memory more than any other?
- H: Well, maybe instances of sales, I don't know of any . . .
- E: In, say, the first five years of when you left Mörlunda and started out on auctioneering full-time, in the first five years, what was the highest average of any of those

sales? Can you remember any of those?

H: Well, not of those real early ones I don't remember any high average. I do remember this sale that stood out more than any other because that's when I came back here and cried this one. I mean, that probably meant more to me right where I started. Colonel Earl Gartin was still living at the first one after that. Of course, there's another real big break that I had because, having worked with Earl and being real close to him and then Earl died just as I had swung off and really started, which threw open an awful lot of business and I did get my share of it back in this country.

Then I started picking up sales out West. I sold Colorado practically every year, California several times. I'd always go to Colorado. I got a lot of Oklahoma business. I got some Texas business, Missouri. Primarily though, it was Southeast. Georgia was the best state that I had for some reason. I don't know why I got along so well with those Georgia people.

But, oh, high averages; we had a four day sale in Oklahoma, which, I guess, resulted in my largest check. But of course, that was four days work and there were four others selling.

E: What sale was that?

H: That was the Turner Ranch. The Governor of Oklahoma, had-been Governor. It was a dispersal sale, sell them all. And you'd take your turn regularly and sell for about, oh, two hours. Sell two hours in the morning, two hours in the afternoon and if it went on in the night you drew another assignment, maybe about an hour. But, it was a real good sale. And I say, the four days resulted, I guess, in the highest price I ever had. The most money per hour I ever made was down in Georgia, probably one of my last sales.

It was 1974 when I figured out after the sale . . . Auctioneers, see, everybody says they get 10% and all that kind of stuff. Well, they do when they're selling the household goods and doing the advertising. But in the Purebred cattle business, you get 1% at most. That is it, and a lot of times you're dividing the 1% with another one. But even at 1% down there, I averaged \$10 a minute. I figured that out when that sale was over, for the time I was in the auction box; and I thought that was a right good fee. That was the best fee I ever made.

- E: At this period we're talking about a paid percentage or were they more apt to insist on just a flat sum of money?
- H: Cattle weren't bringing very much at that time. I had one fee that you very seldom deviated from and that was 1% with a \$250 guarantee. And the \$250 is what you usually got. The sales would bring in less than \$25,000. If you went over \$25,000, why, you got some more. Of course, you couldn't go all the way down to Mississippi on those deals. You had to make deals. If you got a call, just like the Colorado deals and all that, you had to have more guarantee than that.
- E: Right.
- H: Then you'd still hang onto that 1%. They'd want that in there, which is all right. It's real good now if you were selling. (laughter)
- E: You said you could remember some experiences in some of those early sales that stand out in your memory.
- H: I don't know. Most of the things went on between us and the ring men.
- E: That's always interesting.
- H: Yes, (laughter) some of the difficulties you get in. Enthusiasm is what they teach all these ring men. You've been to a lot of sales and you know how much yelling around there is. Some of the ring men get a little careless sometimes and yell when they shouldn't and you get ready to sell and there's nobody living there.
- E: Yes. (laughter) Got up and left.
- H: There's lots of good stories go around on things like that. And you have, for some reason, men working in that business, there's an awful lot of characters, real characters in it.

We had a boy from Oklahoma. He fought at Oklahoma State University. He was a boxer and then he went into boxing after that, got punch drunk and he stayed drunk on whiskey about half the time and he's still punch drunk and his ear is all messed up. But he's a great old boy and he worked these sales and he went to all of the sales. And he knew pedigrees, I believe, as well as anybody in the business at that time. And he was always good for many, many laughs at every sale.

We were out in Oklahoma one time and bids weren't coming in at all. We were sitting there, dead, grinding our wheels and he raised his hand to make a speech. And the man leading the bull around the ring happened to be coming right by him then, so he just stopped to see what he was going to say. He was about half drunked out and he wanted to see how he was going to get along anyway. As he was standing there and the bull facing him, and he had his hand up getting permission to talk and about that time the bull bawled. I'll tell you, just let out a great big old bawl right in his face. He said, "That's just what I was going to say." (laughter) That brought the crowd down in laughter.

E: Well, you're one of big successes in livestock Purebred auctioneering. Everyone still likes to talk about getting Ham to come back and do something here and there. What's your trick to the whole thing. Everyone has their own little method for success. How do you see Ham Hamilton as being so successful?

H: A lot of things that I did, things that I thought ought to be done and I did them. I got a lot of criticism from some people. First place, I like to keep the crowd happy. I think that I can sell to a man better with him smiling than I can when he's mad. And a lot of people have taken exception to the amount of comedy--they called it--that we put in. I mean, we'd make jokes with the ring men. We tried to keep the people jolly. Still go ahead with the business of the day. I don't mean getting off and telling long stories like some of the boys do. I'm just talking about injecting things that are real comical anytime you can to keep the crowd real happy.

Then we have an awful lot of people who think that cattle ought to be started real high; they'll bring more. Now, I definitely never went to that school. And I had the reputation of starting cattle too low. When I say starting--you're not supposed to start cattle, but everybody does. If you get up there and you don't have people that's going to set them, then you're going to set them in somewhere. But I always contended that if I set them in low, too low in fact, I would get three or four men bidding before we got up near what the animal was worth. And if a man bids one time, he's more likely to bid again,

A lot of people go to a sale; they won't bid that first time. They're nervous and they'll just keep sitting there. They just don't want to bid that first time. Once they bid . . . I always taught my ring men, "The man who has bid to you last is the most susceptible man in your whole section. Try to look at all of them, but don't you ever

take your eyes off of him. He's the man that has already bid once and he'll bid again."

So, my contention was, if I got three and four men on that animal early, you had more to go on with. Of course, I talked to you about it a while ago. Now, a lot of guys say, "Oh, the auctioneer's caught out on a limb." Well, anybody who sells day in and day out and you look out there and you see three hands up on one bid, well, you're not going to stop and point to one and say, "You were first." You're going to knock them all out and one of them will come in and you keep going. I mean it's just natural. You can't help it because you've got to keep that sale rolling. The guy that stops and gets in an argument when he's got three men wanting to buy it, he's just plain stupid because he's going to lose time and he's never going to get the animal sold. You can go and probably two of those men will go on with you and that's all you need. Go on with these two as far as you can and the other man is still always a possibility of coming back in. So, I like to start them low. I like a lot of activity.

I've seen men who would come in and in order to get you to start that animal where you wanted it he'd say, "My neighbor," and give his name, "offered \$1,500 for that. Start that animal at \$1,500." Just as sure as you do that and cattle are selling around that figure, you will waste three minutes trying to get another bid. They don't like it starting them up there that high. It's difficult to tell these boys.

I said, "If you hire a man and have to tell him how to do the job, you hired the wrong one." And I always carried my little black book, carrying future booked sales. I said, "As long as the little black book is full, I'm going to sell them the way I think they ought to be sold." There's plenty of boys in the business. There's an awful lot of them.

Actually, you talked about whether or not I was near the top. I always compare. I think auctioneering, particularly Purebred auctioneering is like golfing. There's an awful lot of guys on that golfing circuit. There's an awful lot of them that, after they don't qualify, they say, "Go to the interstate and turn right." And they to out and try to get in the next. And they're not making enough money to live on. I mean, if somebody is backing them it's tough to go. And there's about twelve that's really flat up at the top. I mean they are really going. Now, you take that magazine there and you can see how many guys are advertised in the magazines. There's auctioneers all

over America, but there's still only about a dozen of them that's getting it done, surely making a real good living out of it and making some money.

E: What do you think is probably the best sale that you've had in your career? What was the top animal, dollar-wise, that you sold? Can you recall?

H: I guess the \$104,000 one. I don't know. Perhaps this shouldn't go on tape, but I'm always reminded of the old boy in Oklahoma who said he sold a \$1,000 hound dog. He said, "You got \$1,000 for that old hound?" He said, "Yes, but I had to take in two \$500 tom cats on the deal." (laughter)

Some of these high priced animals sell. Maybe some of them don't. Maybe some of them, something went with them. You have no way of knowing that. As far as I was concerned as an auctioneer, I didn't care as long as that percentage went in there. That's all I was interested in.

E: Right.

H: But it's only natural, only natural to trade sometimes. And I'm not saying that the million dollar bull didn't get some things that went along with it. Maybe they did and maybe they didn't.

E: What I was driving at, Ham, is as you look back on your career, is there any one event that, you got in your car and started home from or just sitting here at the desk today and you look back over a long and prosperous career and say, "That was a highlight. That really was an outstanding event."

H: I mean, I know what you're driving for, but I don't remember that about any one particular sale. I really don't. I mean, you get through with that one, you're thinking about the next one. The ones that were the hardest to swallow was when you'd have a real good sale, a red hot sale and you knew it, but the man didn't. See, a man can be a real good judge of cattle except for his own. He thinks his own are better than they are. We've had many a sale which was real good and the man was most disappointed when it was over.

I sold a good deal with an old boy from Memphis that was very full of humor and smart as a whip. He's dead now. The bottle was a real problem for him. It was hard to get him sober. When he booked a sale, you didn't know whether you were going to get him or not, but everybody

loved old Bill. And he was one of the real good auctioneers, and he was very observing. We'd be driving along, maybe we had a Polled Hereford sale that day and we were driving by and there as an Angus sale was breaking up and Bill said, "Wait just a minute here. Let's see whether or not they had a good sale." And I said, "Do you want to drive up there and talk to him?" He said, "No, no, no. Just let me look here for a minute and I can tell you." I said, "How can you tell Bill?" He said, "Well, if the auctioneer and all the ring men stay around there and go to the house for a drink, it was a good sale." He said, "If you see those guys right there jump in their car and come down this road it was a bad sale." (laughter) "It's real easy to see."

Bill had another deal on old ring men and young ring men and auctioneers, all of them together getting the catalogue. He said, "You can tell whether they're an old auctioneer or a new auctioneer or a ring man just by watching them get that catalogue when it comes off the press." I said, "How can you tell Bill?" He said, "Why, that new man will pick that up and he'll turn to that first sheet and see if they got his name in there." Who's the auctioneer? "They got my name in there and got it right and all that stuff." And he said the old one will come in and look at the back and say, "How many of these s-o-b's we got today?" He wanted to see that last lot number, see how big it was. (laughter)

E: See how easy it's going to be.

We've all heard stories of sales that had their problems, tents falling down and had bad weather setting in and things of that sort. Do you recall any . . . ?

H: Bleachers falling over and so forth. Well, we had a lot of those, really. We had a lot of tents that would go down, storms come. Manassas, Virginia when a small twister came in and took the tent. The tent pole came down over the desk and tore up the typewriter and adding machine.

I had always been taught if something like that comes, you're supposed to get in a ditch and lie down. I went out of the back of the auction box. My PA system, it tore it all to pieces anyway. I jumped a real large ditch and I can remember yet there were some people laying in there. Some of the girls that had been clerking up there, they got down there and laid down in that. I sailed all the way over that and headed for an old barn. Bud Snyder and I ended up in this old barn. Bud is the man that I was

talking about, Princeton, Virginia, the number two man at the association there. Well anyway, we went in that old barn and all that cobwebs and everything else. I said, "Bud, do you think this will stand?" He said, "It has for a long time." That was pretty much right and it did stand. But the sale tent was completely torn up. And then we went back and I sold the rest of the cattle. We only had a few cattle remaining and I just got up on the side of the ring and the ring men stood around. It was still raining when the boys came up and removed a piece of the tent that was covering the sale ring. The old cow and calf that was in there when the thing went down were still in there and we sold them.

- E: How would you settle a crowd back down again after a twister just went through and demolished the PA and the equipment gone? What would be the first thing that would come to your mind that you'd say to the crowd?
- H: Well now, the crowd was diminished. See, there wasn't very many there. I said, "Boys, I know those of you that are still here are interested in buying the rest of these cows so just get around on that rail and we'll get that job done."

We had a sale over in Virginia on old US-11. By the way, Jenks and Richardson were their names. They were in the coal business, and they build them a herd of cattle, the two of them. They were having this sale over there; had all the cattle in the barn; had the ladies preparing the meal. It was wintertime and they had these salamanders with which to heat. Now, those salamanders have caused a lot of excitement in a lot of sales because they need to be handled carefully. These boys tried to pick one up and were going to pass it over a fence and at the top, the handle came off. The oil all spilled out and run onto the straw in the ring and the thing caught a fire, and I mean . . . He had apple boxes all the way around for walls and that place, I've never seen anything go down any faster.

I very calmly went to the next room and told the ladies at the church. I said, "You ladies get ready. You're going to have to get out of here. This is on fire. You're going to have to move." I was talking so calmly trying to keep them calm they said, "When do you think it's going to burn?" I said, "Right now. There it comes." " " "

But we went by and cut the ropes of all of the cattle and just turned them loose. So, I should say the fire department came and you could see the fire from US-11.

When it was over, why, Richardson came up to me and said, "I've already talked to two or three of the boys and they're going to give me a free ad on another date. When can you give me a date to sell these cattle?" I said, "What are you talking about?" And he looked at me very oddly and I said, "You got all the people that came to your sale, plus all of the people that came to the fire. You'll never get this many people here again. Let's have a sale." He said, "How?" So I said, "Go get a jeep or something for me to stand in, in the back, and a PA system." And we rigged up four gates and made a ring there, went down and run the cattle back up there and he had a whale of a sale. And we sold them in about a third of the time we would have in that regular sale because everybody bid. He had a real good sale. He had a fire.

Bud Snyder wrote it up for the Hereford Journal and said it was the hottest sale he'd been to in a long time. He said, "The man wanted a hot sale, we had to burn the barn down, but we gave it to him." (laughter)

E: What does the PA system mean to an auctioneer?

H: The PA system is more important than most people think it is. I've seen poor PA systems cost money, money, money. People do not like when a system is not clear. They don't like when it's growling at them with all the noise and so forth. As I said in the beginning, they need to know what the bid is or they're not going to bid. And a lot of money has been tried to be saved on a cheap PA system and they've lost money. They lost a lot of it. I'd say it was very, very important.

E: Did you carry your own?

H: I did at first until I got to flying to sales. At that time, I went to a sale once down in Tennessee, I had sold the sale before, and he hadn't had one for a few years and in that few years I had started flying a lot and I got rid of my PA system because I did not know whether I was going to have it or not. And they could rent them anyway. We got to that sale. We had a wonderful crowd and Bill said, "Ham, put your PA system up, We're ready to go." I said, "Bill, I haven't carried a PA system in three years." And we had to send into town, had to go out and get one and put that sale on. But I just quit carrying it for that reason because they depend on you having it. Now, some of the auctioneers who sell out of the car, they all carry a PA system.

- E: I noticed some sales in the last year or two carry two PA systems and if one amplifier or something goes out, they just hook right in and go with another one.
- H: Most of the sales now, particularly in the area you're in, in Ohio, you have all those local auctioneers who work the ring. They hire out and work the ring. I'd say at every sale you have in Ohio, there's three PA systems on the ground at least. Every one of those boys has one in their trunk. So, you'll never have any trouble on a PA system in the state of Ohio.
- E: Numbers of miles, number of sales in a year, what was the peak?
- H: Oh, I guess my peak was 120-some. I always liked to get a hundred. If I got a hundred, that was enough. You don't work all year because after June, early part of June, your field days and everything else start, and your shows in the fall. The only time you have a sale in July and August for the most part, are dispersal sales where they want a date and they want to get out and away from everything else. So actually, you're working about nine months a year. A hundred sales makes a real good deal. Now, a lot of times you'll have a sale everyday. That's a little too many, a little tiresome. About three sales a week is what I call a perfect schedule. Sell one day and leave some driving for the next.
- E: Sell another one and drive a little more, be home on Sunday.
- H: Sunday? That's one thing your wife has to get accustomed to, you're never home on the weekends, always got a Saturday sale. You have a Saturday sale every week of the year except for Christmas and then that July and August deal if there was one. You've always got a sale on Saturday and you've got one on Monday. Monday is a good sale day. Saturday and Monday are your best two sale days. Saturday, being a carry over from the olden days when that was the only day to have a sale because people didn't work on Saturday. Monday, I will always contend, is the best day for a good Purebred outfit where people are coming from far away.
- You'll get in there on the weekend. You'll have your party on Sunday evening if you're going to have any. They'll spend all Sunday afternoon looking at the cattle, marking their catalogue and they're ready to go Monday morning. You can get the sale started at a decent hour, get it over

and the boys can be back in their office; go work on Tuesday. They only lose one day.

E: What changes have you seen since your early days in the business till you finally retired from auctioneering? What major changes did you see?

H: As far as the auction sale is concerned, there hasn't been any changes with the exception of, when I started the Depression was still hanging on pretty much and it cost money to get these ring men. They don't come free. You got to advertise to get them. And you didn't have any paid ring men, which is how I got acquainted with Earl Gartin. I did it free. I was county agent and I worked the ring. They didn't have enough money to hire three ring men to work out there.

Now, of course, at these sales, you go to a big sale and there's many, many ring men. At some of them, there's too many for them to work. You have to tell some of them, "You won't be on the starting team. You got to wait and work later," because they advertise everywhere and they have too many. That has been a big change as far as that's concerned. Of course, now they have a lot more money to operate on.

Now, as far as the kind of cattle that you're selling, they have really gone through a lot of changes. Back when I got in, we were trying to see how short and deep and thick we could breed them, like that one and that one right over there (looking at pictures) and this ones head right out here. Then we changed this. Now we want them tall.

E: Lean.

H: And lean, and we're going too far in that direction too. We're going to get them too tall. Then they're going to start back because that daylight underneath there doesn't weigh anything. They still have to sell them by the pound. The commercial boys don't want them too tall, but the Purebred boys do right now. That's one of the most important things there is. If Truman got a call this afternoon by 4H Club boys wanting to buy a heifer to show, that's the first thing they'd ask is, "How tall is she?"

E: In recent years there's been quite a change towards the social side of an auction. Get in there on Sunday afternoon, have a party and see how many Buds [Budweiser beer] you can consume before you expire on Sunday night and have to stick your head in the sink to wake up on Monday morning

and this type of thing, Do you think this social side of Purebred business has helped or hindered as far as auctioneering is concerned?

H: Well, that's difficult, as far as the auctioneer is concerned, there again, I got a lot of criticism, I went to very, very few of them. I would get within 50 miles of the site, and that's where I'd find me a good motel and that's where I would stay. And I'd be on the farm that morning before the boys who were out the night before at the party got there. So, I liked to do it that way because . . . I mean, standing up there beating your brains out in that microphone all day in a real large, loud place is rough on your head. I couldn't stay out, cheat and have all that fun. I'd do that on the night after if I didn't have a sale on that next day. I like to do it. I wouldn't run from it. But I did not like to do it on the night before. I hardly ever got there. Everybody would always say, "He won't be here. He'll be here in the morning. He'll lay out somewhere." But that is the reason.

Now, if you're selling these real expensive kind and fighting for an average, that goes with it. I mean, you got to do it. It's a must.

E: What's the first thing you did when you got to a sale that morning? As an auctioneer, what did you see as your responsibilities to get ready for that sale, your game plan, one, two, three, four, down the line?

H: The first thing you do, of course, is contact the man that you're selling for and see if he has any news or prospective buyers. In other words, he's been there the day before and you weren't. Who was looking at what animal? A lot of times I'd have bids in my pocket because all the catalogues say you can send bids to the auctioneer or send them to the ring men or send them to the owner. Sometimes the owner would have one. As soon as I got there he'd give them to me. He'd write them out. You'd want to go look over the offering. And then the rest of the time you stay under the tent and talk to the boys you're going to work with; but you also like to see who's looking at what.

If you catch some old big boy just can't keep his eyes off a certain bull and he goes back there and after awhile you see him go talk and he takes somebody else and they go back and look at that bull; you better believe you ought to know where he's sitting. And you want a real popular ring man on him and you want him to know what you know, that that old boy has been looking at that animal. We don't want

that man's bid to be overlooked,

A good ring man makes a lot of money for the man running the sales. I mean, he's on his toes. He knows who's likely to bid on what animal coming in there and he sure gives him every opportunity. He's practically right on top of him. I mean, he's "working" him.

E: You're the captain of that team.

H: Yes.

E: It's the auctioneer and maybe the association representative is there, the ring men will be there and so on, but you're the captain. Did you ever feel that it was important to get together with that team and say, "Now, look, here's what I know and what do you know and let's make sure we got all our wires straightened out before we get started."

H: That's right. We always did with the boys who were experienced ring men. The greatest rule of working the ring is: Go back to your man. And it's the hardest thing to teach a new man. I mean, if you're out there at a land sale and you're working the ring, you're out there and you get a man that's going to bid so much an acre, you turn around to the auctioneer and you call it out real clear. Well then, you stroll the other direction. You leave that old boy alone for a minute and let him think. Now, that's not true at a cattle sale. That man bids and you turn that bid in, and, if that auctioneer gets another bid right then, you want to get right on top of him right now. I mean, you can get him right back in to get him bidding fast. And it's hard to get a ring man to go back to his man.

E: Who were some of the outstanding ring men that you worked with? If you walked into a sale and you saw the sale catalogue and you said, "Oh boy, this is going to be good, I got this fellow here or I got that fellow there,"

H: Yes, we got three or four real good ones. In the olden days in the Hereford business, Dean Spencer of Kansas City is the best ring man I have ever known. He was number one. We have a man; he still works sales; I referred to him awhile ago, Johnny Winston, Johnny is a top ring man. He's just as top as they get. And big Fred Shaw would have to fit right in there. Fred works all breeds. And Fred puts on a big show. He's a real big man and he puts on a show and he makes it work because everybody hires him when they're going to have a sale. We've got some other

ring men who were never very colorful, but as far as the auctioneering is concerned, they are good. I have one in Virginia by the name of Ed Huff, Ed was never too colorful. He didn't look too good to the crowd like he was doing everything, but Ed was one of the very best.

You've got to know all these things. You've got to keep them on your mind when you're a ring man. You need to know who else has got a bidder over there. You need to know what your last bid was, always. And man, if that's not the bid then you need to be back on top of that man. You are working that one particular man because he's the last one that bid to you, but you still got to look over the rest of that section too, because you might have a new man coming in at any time. And when that new man comes in you need to let the other ring men know that it is a new man.

E: How would you let the rest of them know?

H: By the enthusiasm with which he turns that bid in, that he's got him a new man. He's got two then. But these other boys they'll know that he might come back even against himself. The last bid they turned in might be three or four back because he might be getting his two men and got his own show going. But the auctioneer needs to know it and they need to know it. It's competitive and you've just got to know when to get to that man, when to let him know that he's out and flat just talk him into a bid if you can.

E: If you walked into a situation where there was a new man there, a new field man for example, they've taken out a full page ad in APHA [American Polled Hereford Association] or World [Polled Hereford World] and you may have known him by reputation or name or something, but you'd never worked with him before, have you ever felt the need to go over and somehow give a set of communication signals to him or have a little chat with him and say, "Here's the way I work sales and I don't know you, but I'm the captain."

H: I'd go around to see how much he knew about it. The thing I'd want to emphasize on him, "Be enthusiastic about turning your bid in and never forget the last bid you gave me," whether that's the current bid or not, he needs to know the last time that he was in there. You need to impress that upon him. And the other thing, sometimes, if you've never worked with a man before, as I said a while ago, the ring men make a lot of noise. It's kind of like

a baseball team, chatter and everything else. You need to know what is just his chatter and when he's really got to bid. If you don't, you can get embarrassed. (laughter)

E: You end up buying it yourself, huh?

H: Yes, you need a farm at home.

E: In regards to the sales that you handled here for the Nelson Family here at Mörlunda, can you go through some of those and remember some highlights of those sales and not so much in dollars and cents, but the things that happened?

H: I wasn't gone too many years until Mr. Nelson passed away. And then, I guess we had one sale right after he passed away. That was the toughest sale I ever had to open. I'll guarantee you that. Of course, the family stayed up here until we did get it open, but it was still tough. Definitely it was the toughest one I ever had to open without any doubt. The new generation has never had a sale since they've been in the Polled Hereford business. They advertise it and they sell.

E: All those were in the horned business weren't they?

H: That's right. Well, I helped on the horned dispersal sales. I haven't sold too many sales for Mörlunda. The first one after I left here was when I came back. That was the first year after Colonel Earl Gartin died. So Hamilton James of Illinois and Jewett Folkerson of Missouri were both real good auctioneers. They were just climbing then right up toward that top deal. So, Mr. Nelson had all three of us that time. I guess that was the last sale while he was living. We had three auctioneers.

E: You came into this area as a youngster and obviously found a certain attraction here in the hills of West Virginia; stayed and didn't go back to that Dust Bowl of Oklahoma. And you retired and here you are back at Mörlunda again. I know that during the years that you were an auctioneer you made every effort to show that you were wide open and wanted to be visible and appealing and available to anyone who wanted your services as an auctioneer, but for those of us who followed you in any way, shape or form, we always knew that no matter how far you got away from Morlunda, your heart was always back here somehow, somehow. And if he'd only talk to you long enough, Ham would drift into it. Colonel Ham would drift right back to those hills of

Mörlunda even if he was out there in Columbus, Ohio, What's the big attraction at Mörlunda?

H: One thing that contributed to my being back here--I might have done it had I not moved back here--but I lived in Parkersburg when I got into the auction business. So, when I saw I was going to make it, Parkersburg was not a good place to live then. In those days we travelled by rail an awful lot. There was not air transportation in there at all. Of course, there wasn't down there either, but I was thinking about rail and even my car. Now, most of my business was south. So, I told my wife, "I'm not going to be home much on weekends. I'm going to be on the road, but I'll let you live anywhere you want to live." And she surprised me very much and said, "I'd like to go back to Lewisburg." So, I came here in 1952, built a little home down there.

And in those days we had wonderful C&O service. I'd go down to White Sulfur Springs and get on that sleeper at night. If I was going to Columbus, it would set me out at two o'clock in the morning. You wouldn't have to get off until seven, still get your night's sleep. You could go to Cleveland. You could go to Detroit, St. Louis, Chicago; you're not getting there that early. The other way, Washington D.C. was where I went most of the time because it set you out there again, at three o'clock in the morning, but you didn't have to get off till seven. The ring boys could meet me there and we'd have breakfast and then go to the sale. Do the same thing to Richmond or on up. I spent a lot of time on that train. Real good connections here in that day.

So, we moved back here and then of course, I went steady from then until I was going to quit. Nobody would believe me, but I was going to quit. Well, they did believe me after I didn't book any sales in 1977. But I said, 1976 is going to be my last year. I was 65 years old in December of 1976 and I was going to quit. As I say, they didn't think I was, but I had set it up.

These legs started giving me so much trouble. I had a sale, a night sale--it doesn't matter, not far from your home--for the Ohio Polled Hereford Association and that's when I gave it up, that night. There was a doctor there at the sale, he had some cattle. And I said, "If you had to go to the hospital, where would you go? I've been debating." He said, "I'd have to admit I'd go to Mayo Clinic." So, next day I had a sale for Goff up at Harrisville, West Virginia. I told my wife going down there that day, "Get

under this wheel and start learning how to drive this car because you're going to have to drive it to Rochester Minnesota because I can't go on anymore. I'm going to quit." I sold that sale, I don't know how I did. He said I did a real good job, but I sold it from memory, I'll tell you, because I was real miserable. So, we came home and I got on the phone and cancelled the rest of the sales. I had a good November and December booked I had to give all that up. I stayed out at Mayo for 49 days and the year was about gone when I got out. But I did quit.

I've sold two or three sales and I still sell the steers down here at the fair. I'm Vice President of the West Virginia State Fair, on the Board, so I'm the auctioneer and we sell steers and hogs and lambs and all that. I helped Jewett Folkerson with a sale in North Carolina, a man who had got into a mixup. It was a real, real good sale.

They're very lucrative now that they're selling so high and I'm going to Georgia on Easter weekend. As I said, Georgia was my best state. And the man down there was a boy right out of law school when I was selling for his daddy. And he got interested in the cattle business and he has laid law aside now and he's a sales manager and I worked with him, oh, for twenty years. And he said, "If you're going to sell for anybody else, you got to sell for me one time," and I'm going down there on Saturday before Easter to sell that sale. That will be my 1980 sale. And I think that will probably be the last unless somebody else talks me into one.

When I first quit I told the boys that a good auctioneer . . . I said, "If they happen to get in a car wreck or they could get hurt or something and you're really in trouble, call me and I'll take it for you." But it's tough.

The type of business I had, I had a lot of cattle got in the box with me. I mean, you go out to these little old county fairs and they'll rig up a deal to sell a sale and they'll have an old makeshift fence there. A little old auction box that you're barely off the ground and the cockeyed bull just come right through there, knock you all the way out of there, tear up the PA system. And buddy, I can't move now. They're not going to get me in one of those.

This sale I'm going to down there is for a man who has a brand new show barn and that auction box is way up here

and it's large enough for all of us to get in there and comfortable. No bull is going to get in there. (laughter)

E: "I can't move that fast no more, bull."

H: I'd be busy trying to keep them out of there, but you can't keep them out unless the auction box is high and protected. I can't run now and I don't want to get caught in it. I can't stand either. I mean, I have to sit down. It's a little bit of trouble, but when they know that I'm coming and they rig up a deal, they have me very comfortable.

E: I don't remember what your remark was when it happened, but I remember one time at a sale some old cow got rambunctious and jumped right up and put his feet up right in front of the PA system looking right in your nose at you and I don't recall what your remark was, but it certainly . . . (laughter)

But you didn't tell me what the big attraction is back to Mörlunda. Of course, that's your home here.

H: Well, of course, I told you enough about what all Mr. Nelson did to get me into the business, how he changed my life. I mean, I learned a lot off of him as I told you, and he did an awful lot for me. He got me in the auction business. I would never have tried for that Purebred Cattle business I don't think. Well, I know I wouldn't, had it not been for that little incident at Huntington. That's just how one little thing can change your life because, frankly, I did not think I could do it. There was a lot of guys trying to get in it then. There were lots of them. There is now. There's always a lot of them knocking on the door everywhere.

E: Right, right.

H: And I didn't think that I could do it and he gave me confidence enough and he said, "You can do it." Made a believer out of me and I did do it. And of course, even after I was there, now, I did some things for him. He sent me down to Georgia on a trip to take care of some cattle. He had bought some cattle over a phone down there to make a long story short--they had not blood tested them as they should and they came up here. We never did let them in our herd. Had to put out electric fence to keep them in one little spot there until they got them checked. And they did not check out so they had to send them back. So, I went down there to take care of that for him. I had

to go down there and sell them, which I was fortunate enough to do, and I got them sold. But he would always call on me for things like that.

Just like he called on me to go get some business for his sale. I never did drift away. If I was in this area, I'd come out here. Most weekends he'd bring somebody in the business with him down here. I don't know anything about how much he charged off of this in his business, but I'll guarantee you he should have charged an awful lot of it, because he did a lot of business over there on weekends for United Carbon Company. He'd have one, two, three men and as I say, there's a lot of talk, maybe, down at the bar the night before, but that morning up in that big office, if there's any deals made, that's when they were made. He did an awful lot of business over there on weekends. And he tied it into his business here. So, if I was in the area I'd come out here on Saturday. It was just a good place to be on Saturday night, on the weekend. He was a "liver" and he liked people around him.

Before he started all that when he first come down here, a garage downtown, where, in the olden days, they had the old stove out there and everybody went down there on Saturday night and sat around the stove and talked. He was a part of that crowd. He liked that and he had a lot of friends down there. He went to everything like that.

I was down there one time. I guess I was working here then because we had the livestock photographer here and he found out they were having a pie supper back here, way back there on Muddy Creek Mountain in a little old church. He loaded that thing up and back there we went. He walked in, and I'll tell you, he started buying pies. He'd buy one for this guy, buy one for that one. I went outside for something--he had the chauffeur drive us all up there in that big old limousine--I went outside and nobody recognized me out there. It was dark. And they said, "How's the supper going?" They said, "Oh hell, some fellow come in here in a long Cadillac and my God, you can't buy a pie in there now. That price has gone up." (laughter) But he loved that. Now, he liked to be out here and associate with these mountain people.

And he took care of them a lot. I mean, I well remember what he told us, "Don't pay your men anymore than these other boys are paying them." He wanted you to always guard against that. In other words, he knew that if he came in here and everybody wanted to work at Mörlunda because they paid more than anybody else, that would

hurt these other farmers, At that time, you didn't have to pay very much, which was all right, but he always kept that in mind, Told us to stay in good with them. He didn't want to do anything wrong with them, make them pay more money just because he was,

E: Well, be a good neighbor.

H: That's right, and he always emphasized that and he liked to get out and associate with them. He was a big "liver." We went to go to the state fair. We went down there one night. As soon as we got out we started. First thing, they were selling chances on a car. He bought a chance for everybody in the crowd, eight or ten of them. He just give them a twenty dollar bill, "Give me that many." Gave everybody chances on the car. And when you got through going to the fair with him and going on that mid-way, you had seen everything there was to see. He participated.

E: Do you think that Mr. Nelson's demands at Carbide Company and office five days a week, this was kind of like a recreation. This was a way of cleansing the soul and so he could start over again on Monday?

H: I really think that. This was restful for him to come down here. I know that. As I said a while ago, he saw every head of cattle. In a normal weekend, he'd see them all twice. He'd go into every pasture. He'd look at everything. And that was restful to him. And it was even better that if he had this man with him, maybe he knew something about cattle, maybe he didn't, a Firestone man or somebody else. And we sold cattle to Firestone. Living here, this close to the Greenbrier Hotel, a lot of conventions over there.

E: Yes.

H: And he had lots of groups over there for an afternoon, oh, a couple of hours, looking the place over; governors, for example. We got pictures in there when, I don't know how many governors were up here. Governor Roy Turner of Oklahoma. That's where he--I wouldn't say that's where he he got acquainted with him, but I imagine he met him through the cattle business.

E: This has always been a big resort area down through here too, hasn't it?

H: That's right, yes.

- E: What better place to take a trip around the mountain or a couple switch back turns and you were sitting right in the heart of something.
- H: Of course, he had a lot of foresight, He knew that it was close to that hotel when he fell in love with the place. He picked the right spot to fall in love with. The only thing, he didn't pick a very good road from Charleston to Lewisburg to have to drive over every week, (laughter) That was the worst part of the matter out there. He didn't even mind that. Of course, he has old George the chauffeur. And that road just suited old George. By the way, he died this year, not long ago. But George was the slowest going man you've ever seen and that road suited him all right. He liked to drive that big Cadillac.
- E: Was he with the family?
- H: Well, Mr. Nelson had him for many years. That was his job. Oh, he'd do odd jobs around the house for Mrs. Nelson. He'd take her anywhere she wanted to go and he was the chauffeur. Then when he got out here, of course, there'd be odd jobs for him to do.
- E: There'd be clean air to breathe when he got down here.
- H: Yes, he liked it.
- E: Well, I don't have anymore questions. Can you think of anything that I didn't ask that we ought to get in here some way?
- H: Seems to me like you covered it pretty well.
- OSCAR NELSON JR.: What do you think about the cattle business in the future, Purebred livestock business in the future?
- H: What do I think about it?
- N: Where will it go from here?
- H: You know what I think about the type of cattle. The thing that concerns me more than anything else, and I wouldn't project anything on this, but it worries me that we're getting to the point now, artificial insemination and the way that we measure our cattle, and these bulls that we say is a wonderful bull because he was champion at a big show and everybody wants semen from it. You pick up your catalogue now and there will be six bulls in every

sale, they've all got calves by them. We've got calves by every one of those six bulls right here on this farm. Everybody has got calves by them. Now, some of those bulls, if they were not correctly reported, in other words, you don't know on that bull; you don't know whether they had to pull him out of his mother or whether she gave natural birth to him. And that's one of the most important things we've got. These cows, we don't have those people out there now. They've got to calve by themselves. We can't have all that going out there and pulling them and giving them all that assistance. You don't know anything about that though. He might not be the bull for us to breed to.

There's one real popular bull we have some calves by from semen we purchased. And I know that Truman will never breed to him again. But there's people breeding to him all over America, and I think after they do, they find some faults in there. We don't yet have the proper way of sorting them out is what I think and it scares me that you've got all this artificial insemination and everybody is breeding the same ones. And some of them are not right. Some of them shouldn't be bred to that much, but they have a reputation therefore they can.

- E: Do you think this synchronization that we're about to launch upon in a big way where we can give them two shots ten days apart and bring the whole cow herd into cycle at one time, breed all the cows at the same time, is going to compound this problem?
- H: Well, it will all have to be artificial insemination of the herd, that's for sure.
- E: Right.
- H: But I contend that we've lost more good bulls, as many good bulls as we ever found because the good bulls are bulls that get in the right hands. We've got a few people in America that can take an average calf, by the time they get through showing him and fitting him, he's going to win an awful lot of shows if he's got just a few good things about him.
- E: Good advertising.
- H: Right. But I think that a farmer is better off to buy a bull and take him out there and turn him with the calves. I don't think it means a lot to the farmer to bring all these cows in and breed them at one time. I think it's

important that he get them all within a five week period or something like that, where they can all go to town at the same time. But it's not worth enough to him to go ahead and bring those cows all in heat that same day and then hire that inseminator and breed them all. I just don't think he's that far ahead. And they all don't catch. Artificial insemination has ruined an awful lot of good cattle because you're not getting them bred.

I learned that in the auction business. You'd see these guys, "Oh, we get wonderful conception. Get them all bred." Everytime you have a dispersal for that man, the last thing you sell will be about fifty heifers that are coming three years old and they haven't got them in calve yet because they fooled with them artifically and didn't turn a bull out with them before they accumulated so much fat in there.

It's not as easy to inseminate a beef cow as it is a dairy cow anyway. An old dairy cow, crimeny, if you know what you're doing, I mean, it's all very simple. That old beef cow got some fat in her. It's difficult.

N: What type of cow would you like to buy?

H: I know what he's leading up to now. This is another thing that I strongly believe and I believe it because of my observations and nothing else. We're bragging now that we like to get a cow that you buy the bull and the old farmer will say, "How much did that bull's mother weigh?" He wants her to weigh 1,500 pounds. But, if you had 20 tons of 1,500 pound cows and I had 20 tons of 1,000 cows, I'd sell more pounds of beef than you by such a majority that it wouldn't even be close. And I wouldn't spend as much feeding mine per head as you did.

We get into this idea we need them big. I contend that if you got some 900 pound cows, if you're a commercial man, and you can breed them to a bull, naturally the bull is going to have more size and that bull will grow until he weighs 1,100 pounds. That's all you're interested in. That's when you're going to eat him. I mean, he'll be a steer. He'll be on your plate. Why worry about whether he's going to weigh 1,500, 1,600, or 1,700 pounds or not? And we brag about these 2,000 pounds, 2,200, 2,300. Why? We eat them at 1,000.

E: Yes, but we're all thinking about having a champion some-day. See, that's what we're all striving [for],

H: Yes, I know it, but are we right so far as the commercial man is concerned? You can't lead the commercial man. He'll get the Purebred boys in line eventually,

E: Either that or they won't be there.

H: There's the little jumpy cattle that we're in the market right now. They don't bring very much money. They call them shorts. There's nothing in the world wrong with shorts if you've got enough of them. We got a neighbor down here, a real smart cow man. He buys everything down here at the fair, bought all the shorts because he puts them all together and sells them to a man to feed them. The only thing wrong with those shorts is that they'll get to about 1,000 pounds or less real quick and real good, but they won't go anymore. And a lot of these western boys who are feeding have a certain amount of corn they want to feed. And they might want to feed them 1,200 pounds and they don't want them. You can't feed them 1,200. He's like a peach, when he gets ripe you better send him to town. But there's nothing wrong with it if you've got a group of them.

Get a real smart feeder, he doesn't mind buying twenty or thirty of those. He puts them over here and feeds them by themselves. When they get to 950 to 1,000 pounds, they're going to town. He makes money on them. And they're good. They'll do it economically. But if you've got them mixed up with those others, then you've got to make more than one shipment. You've got to ship these this week. In three weeks you've got to go get some more and a month after that you've got to go get some more. They don't want to fool with them.

E: It isn't automated.

H: No. But we've got so many of big feed lots now that they don't mind picking those shorts in there at the right price if they've got enough of them to put them over here and treat them as a unit. But the average man wants them big.

We got a bull here now. A lot of people say he's the tallest bull every been measured in North America. The man who measured him, measured him for 62½ inches. Truman wasn't able to get the half. He measured three times and he got 62. (laughter) But he's a tall rascal, I'll tell you.

E: Should have just knocked him over that and let him come

HAMILTON

40

up a little bit more.

Well, thank you, Ham.

H: Yes indeed.

END OF INTERVIEW