

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Mecca, Ohio

Farming Experiences

O.H. 198

CHARLES E. KNIGHT

Interviewed

by

Beth Hanuschak

on

May 16, 1979

## CHARLES E. KNIGHT

Charles E. Knight, son of E. J. and Minnie Ferry Knight was originally from North Bloomfield, Ohio. The family moved to Mecca in 1895 where his father began a cheesemaking and farming business.

Mr. Knight attended East Mecca School until the 10th grade and graduated from the Cortland School District. An interesting note about his graduation - he was the only member of his graduating class! The reason for this was that all the students had to quit because of home responsibilities. Mr. Knight did not pursue his education, instead he went into the farm business with his father.

In 1926 he moved to Greene Township to begin his own career as a farmer. Today, at age 77, he is actively involved as a farmer. His farm, known as "Grandpa Knight's", is a welcome place for people who are interested in farming and maple syrup.

Mr. Knight is a widower and lives alone in the family homestead. His wife, Helen Elizabeth Dirmeyer, whom he married on October 19, 1923, passed away in 1974. They had six children, Robert, Anna, Norman, Carol, Thomas and Jack.

Mr. Knight is a member of the Jehovahs' Witnesses and serves as a lecturer for the church. In his spare time he enjoys to travel, fish and walk through the woods.

Beth Hanuschak  
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History of Mecca, Ohio

INTERVIEWER: CHARLES E. KNIGHT

INTERVIEWEE: Beth Hanuschak

SUBJECT: Education, Maple Syrup Business  
Cheese Making, Sugar Houses, Lo-  
cated on Phillips Rice Road,  
Herman Love's Apple Cider Business,  
General Information Concerning  
Area

DATE: May 16, 1979

H: This is an interview with Charles Knight for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the History of Mecca, Ohio, by Beth Hanuschak on May 16, 1979 at 6:50 p.m.

Mr. Knight, I have some information that I would like to ask you about that I was able to dig up. Were you born in North Bloomfield, Ohio?

K: No, I was born in West Mecca, Ohio.

H: Who is E.J. Knight?

K: That was my father.

H: That was your father? He was born in 1872?

K: Yes.

H: Roughly around in there?

K: He moved to West Mecca and went into the cheese making business and they also made ice cream and things like that. There was a little house in the northwest corner, where I was born. That house is still in West Mecca, but it has been moved back and a little to the north. The cheese making business

was mostly summer work. At that time, the farmers, the dairymen, they were not so advanced in producing milk. They had their cows freshened in the spring of the year and they would have milk through the summer and by fall the cows would dry up and the cheese factory would close.

H: Is that right?

K: And the cows were so poorly fed through the winter, they got so weak that they couldn't get up and down themselves.

H: Was it because they didn't know how to take care of their cows?

K: That's right and they didn't have the proper feed, see. And I've heard my father tell how the neighbors used to go from one neighbor to the other and help tail the cows up. That is, they would get hold of the tail and help the cow get up. The cattle would get that weak.

Of course, as years went on and they learned how to better feed the cattle, why they began to produce milk in the winter and that's when the creamery came in. The cheese factories closed and up went the creameries.

H: Your mother's maiden name was Ferry?

K: Minnie Ferry.

H: Minnie Ferry. And your father's name was Earl, And your father and mother were married in 1893?

K: 1893.

H: That's incredible. Then they moved to West Mecca right after they were married?

K: They were married in North Bloomfield. There's history there. That old Brownwood farm did you ever . . . ?

H: I've been through Bloomfield, sure.

K: There used to be a big farm, 1,100 acres; and a fellow by the name of Brown owned it. He was also Justice of the Peace and he had a little office right on the southwest corner of the intersection. My father and mother were married in that office.

H: Is that right?

K: That office has been moved to the historical site. Now I can't tell you just where, but it has been moved out.

H: I see. What made your parents move again? Why did they move to West Mecca?

K: Well . . .

H: I'm digging up some good stuff--I can tell.

K: The first year that they were married, they lived upstairs across the road from the Brownwood farm, the old Mackadoo House. They worked. Father worked wherever he could find work and my father has told me that through the summer he worked for a dollar a day and when winter came or fall came, he had fifty dollars. And he said, "When spring came, I still had the fifty dollars." He cut wood through the winter to help buy their food and pay their rent.

H: That's amazing. When did they move to West Mecca, roughly what year?

K: One year later. They were married in 1893, so that would be in 1894 then. Well, they lived in Bloomfield one year and then they moved to West Mecca the next year. I think he was in that cheese factory for five years. Then he bought a farm in East Mecca. That's where Joe Zerovich now lives. We lived there, I can't tell you, I know I went to school one year there and then he moved the next farm north. He sold that one and moved to the next farm north.

H: How did he get involved in this cheese making business? How did that start? He just decided to start it and was able to do it?

K: Well, it was quite a growing thing then. There were cheese factories in all townships. There used to be one below East Mecca too. A fellow by the name of Clark run that when I went to school. And there were three here in Greene Township. See, the farmers, they couldn't transport milk very far because that was in the days of horses and bad roads and mud roads. So they had cheese.

H: What do you remember about your parents? Describe them to me. What were they like?

K: Well, my father was a very exacting man. He was a very hard worker. And he got involved in several activities, too, in the community. I don't know, well known in the community. When I married, he still owned the farm in East Mecca. I got married in 1923. I don't want to say anything against my father.

H: No, go right ahead, you say what you feel and you believe.

K: Well, I was to take over the farm. He got a job as County Truant Officer and I was to take over the farm. Well, I was working night and day and father was used to having plenty of help on the farm and I couldn't get a hired man that was very dependable. And he'd come up there and find fault with it. He never went to me though; he went to my wife, see. And she got to be a very unhappy person.

H: Sure.

K: So, I bought my own farm up here in Greene. I moved to Greene in 1926.

H: Where we're at right now?

K: No.

H: No?

K: No, not where I'm at now. Oh dear. Do you know where the Kingdom Hall is down there?

H: Yes.

K: Well, you go straight up that road and I bought that first farm on the right. In 1926 there was nothing there. I put up nearly every building and I raised my family there during the Depression and never missed a payment on my farm. I had an awful good helper, I'll tell you. Had the best woman in the world! And the farm was always good to me, always good to me.

And I love to make maple syrup. I can't wait, hardly, from one season to another. And of course, raising a family, you've got to plan how you're going to do it and pay for a farm. Well, I got a dairy and I kept some chickens and I raised potatoes--five to six acres every year. And in the fall of the year, I put an ad in the Tribune and I would sell my potatoes over weekends. They'd line up. I'd have to

have four or five men weighing out potatoes and taking care of the customers. That made my fall payment on my farm. And I always had some wheat, I'd put that in the grainery. And then my syrup making money and my wheat would make my spring payment. We had our milk checks and our egg money to keep the family.

H: I guess. My goodness you were a go-getter.

What was your mother like? Did they get along well? Was she a pleasant lady?

K: Oh yes, she was a very pleasant lady.

H: What can you remember about her? Was she small? What did she look like?

K: She was chubby, like I. (Laughter)

H: You have a nice body.

K: And she was a wonderful singer. And she and I used to sing at funerals. Do you remember years ago, they used to have funerals in the homes?

H: Yes, I can remember my parents telling me that.

K: They didn't have funeral homes. And we used to sing funerals together. I would sing. Well, she was a soprano voice and I would come in with the second tenor or silhouette and harmonize; we harmonized. We used to sing "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere" and many others. She was a lovely woman.

H: Can you remember doing that in Mecca? People laid in your house in Mecca?

K: Yes.

H: Is that right? Isn't that spooky though? How did you react as a child and having to go to bed in that same house where you knew that there's someone laying there? Did that bother you at all?

K: No it didn't.

H: No?

K: No, it was a common thing at that time.

H: That's interesting. I don't know if I could handle that or not.

K: Well, where else?

H: You didn't [have funeral homes] that's right, that's right.

K: It was a way of life then.

H: Your parents had five children: Howard, you, Richard, Earl and Mable?

K: Yes.

H: I understand Mable died. She was thirteen. She died of diptheria.

K: That's her picture in there.

H: I see. Were you the oldest? Youngest?

K: I was the third. Mable was the oldest. Howard was the second and I was the third. Then there was Richard and then there was Earl.

H: All of you were born in Mecca?

K: All were born in Mecca.

H: What was it like? That's a pretty big family. Did all of you contribute to the farm and all of you had to work and keep things going?

K: Well, yes we all worked on the farm. Of course, Howard being the oldest, when he got married, he went and took up housekeeping and farming where Earl lives. And then when I left the home place, he came up and took over there when I bought my own.

H: Was it a fun household other than the work? What did you do for enjoyment as brothers and sisters?

K: I was always playing hooky and going fishing. And my father bought his first automobile in 1915. It was a Model T Ford. And the first summer, he took us up to Lake Erie and we could brag about that because we went up and back and never had a flat tire. And that was very, very unusual. But there was no paved roads and every once in awhile we'd get into a sand bank and you'd get stuck and jump sideways with the car and everything else. In these roads there used to be places [where] there'd be sand. The sand would be that deep and you'd get stuck in it. You'd always carry a shovel. Dig the sand out

from in front of the wheel.

H: That's incredible.

You were born in 1902, correct?

K: Right.

H: Born in 1902 . . . as a child you grew up during World War I?

K: Right.

H: You were still pretty young yet, right?

K: Well, World War I started when? In 1918? 1917?

H: Yes, the United States entered in 1917.

K: Well you see, I would be 15, 16. Worked a team [of horses], milked cows. When I was eight years old I started milking because I had to. My father was one of the biggest dairymen in this section at that time. During World War I, we shipped 12, 15 cans of milk every morning and that was way beyond most farmers.

H: What was the typical day like for you then? When you'd get up in the morning, you'd have to milk cows. What time did you get up?

K: Five o'clock.

H: Tell me what the day was like for you. You got up at five o'clock, then what?

K: Went out and milked the cows. That took us an hour. And then I generally helped feed the cows. We had to throw the silage out. We didn't have silo unloaders like they got today. You had to climb up and throw it down and carry it in a bushel basket and feed the cows and my father always had a lot of chickens and we'd feed the chickens. We had to carry water to them; didn't have water there. And then we shipped the eggs to W.P. Southworth Company in Cleveland. We had a one-horse spring wagon. We used to take the eggs to the Cortland station. You don't remember that station?

H: No.

K: It's not there anymore. We went up to W.P. Southworth Company and then we would get an egg check. Father,

he was a good farmer. He was an outstanding farmer, the County Agent. In fact, he was one of the first farmers in Trumbull County that thrashed red clover. They didn't raise clover until they started putting lime on, see. This land around here was very, very low in lime. And the county agent would bring men out here.

H: Is that right? What time were you done with your work during the day then, that typical day you were just telling me. What time were you done with your work? Or didn't it ever get done?

K: A farmer's work is never done. That's why I never grew up. (Laughter) Well, we'd usually, by seven-thirty, eight o'clock we'd come in for breakfast and then we started the day's work. We had to clean the barn, clean the litter out.

H: Sure.

K: Then when that was done, you took the team and went to the field and plowed and harrowed and cultivated--no tractors.

H: That must have been so difficult.

K: I don't know; we enjoyed it.

H: Is that right?

K: You'd walk behind the walking plow in your bare feet and take up fishworms. And after we worked all day, we'd go down to Mosquito Creek and fish at night. (Laughter)

H: That's funny. Oh my goodness. What time were you done with your chores then? You extended it, five, six o'clock.

K: Six-thirty.

H: Six-thirty and you'd go fishing a little bit.

K: The farmers always had time to go to the neighbors and visit.

H: Really?

K: Either you went to some of the neighbors or they came here and they'd talk about the activities of the day and this and that and the other. If someone was sick in the neighborhood, they were all there to help.

If someone got a leg broke or an arm broke, the other farmers went in and planted his crops. They worked together.

H: That's great. You don't see, that today, I don't think. I'm not into farming, but I don't think you'd see that today. Does that sadden you to see that?

K: It sure does. Sure does. Everybody is on his own. That's what ruined the country. Of course, these young folks don't think the country's ruined, but it is. It is.

H: Sure.

K: That little farm, that little home life, the children grew up under the supervision of their parents. They had something to do. When they came home from school, they had a job. They worked. And my father always paid us a little something. And that way we learned to handle money.

H: Sure. What were some prices that your father, in selling the eggs and you got that egg check. How much money did you receive? I wouldn't even know how to guess on the [price].

K: Eggs during World War I were 75¢, 80¢ a dozen. And the feed that went into those chickens cost probably four or five dollars a hundred pounds. That's the supplement. We had our own feed mill on that farm.

K: We had a big gas engine we'd run it with. We would grind our own corn, our own oats and wheat and buy supplement, meat scraps or tankage and stuff like that. And you know today eggs . . . well, my son over here retails them for 70¢. That supplement that he puts with his grain costs \$17.50, see. See how hard it is to farm?

H: Yes, sure it is, sure. That old homestead that you talk about your parents having, take me through that house. Tell me what that house looked like.

K: Oh, goodness sake.

H: Can you remember? Tell me what that house looked like.

K: Well, it's a "T" shaped house. It has got uprights at the south end and then there's a long wing. And

clear to the very north end, . . . oh, we'll come in the kitchen door. It's a big kitchen and it goes clear through the house. There's a front door from the kitchen and a back door from the kitchen and we always had a cook stove in there too.

H: What's a cook stove?

K: What's a cook stove?

H: Yes.

K: A wood burner.

H: Okay.

K: Wood and coal. And north to the right of the kitchen was a pantry, a big pantry. One side of the pantry was all cupboards and the other side was shelves. And then in the northeast corner was the bedroom. That's where the hired man slept. I could draw it out for you.

H: Tell me, you're doing terrific.

K: You'd go from the kitchen into a big living room. And then to the south end of the living room and there was a stairway and it went upstairs. It was an enclosed stairways. And also another bedroom and the parlor. And there was two bedrooms upstairs, that's all. And a great big attic.

H: Did you have indoor plumbing, outdoor plumbing?

K: We had outdoor plumbing. We had that little thing that you put under the bed too. And more than once it went down the stairs. (Laughter)

H: Did you get indoor plumbing then, eventually?

K: Father was one of the first ones around to have electricity.

H: Yes?

K: He bought a Delco light plant. That consisted of a little generator and I think it was 32 storage batteries. Once a week he had to run that thing all day long and charge those up. Well, then he had a water pump running off of that electricity; and then we got one of the first bathrooms around put in there. We had running water to the barn, to the chicken house.

Of course, we had electric lights too.

H: Describe to me that barn and all the surrounding little buildings that you had.

K: Let's see. Your name is Beth?

H: Right.

K: Oh, dear me.

H: I'm making you work tonight.

K: Well, you ought to stop and see it.

H: I'd like to.

K: You know that place is all going to pieces.

H: Is that right?

K: Howard's widow lives there and they rent the land out and the buildings are all going to pieces. It's a great big long barn with a double silo at the south end. Big chicken house, big tool shed, doors are falling off. She's just my age.

H: I hate to hear that. I'm sorry to hear that. Go ahead, tell me what that looked like, all those buildings on the outside. Was it just one big barn then?

K: One big barn.

H: I see. Where was the chicken coop?

K: That barn is long. It must be 150, maybe more, maybe 180 feet long. It's a long barn. You probably noticed it sometime.

H: Yes.

K: It's on that side of the door. There was a driveway between the barn and the chicken house that went back. There was a lane that went the whole length of that farm. It went clear back to the Phillips-Rice Road. When father bought that farm, he laid the fields all out in sixteen acres, each one. There's six of them and there's a lane between them. And then there's seventy-five acres on the east side of Phillips-Rice Road. We used to have a little sugar bush back there.

H: How many acres all together did he have?

K: Two hundred.

H: Two hundred acres. That's unbelievable. Do you know how much he paid for it at that time?

K: Forty-five hundred dollars.

H: Really!

K: And it was all run down. He had to fix it up; re-built the barn, the silo.

H: One thing that interests me: How did he become so knowledgeable in farming? You said that he was just a great farmer. Where did he get all his knowledge?

K: My father attended New Lyme Institute and took up a business course and an agricultural course. Now, you don't know where New Lyme Institute is?

H: No, I don't. I'm sorry.

K: You go straight up north on Route 46. It's in New Lyme Township. You'll run into a little crossroad called Brownsville and the next intersection is New Lyme. And that was a college.

H: Is that right?

K: And now it's nothing but an antique place.

H: I see.

K: I've heard my father talk--he had to take a train up there. The Pennsylvania Railroad run up through. Of course, he lived in Bloomfield when he owned land. He'd go to Lockwood and take a train and go up to the Rome Station.

H: Oh my goodness.

K: Come home on the weekends on the train.

H: So, that's where he got all his knowledge about the farm then, right there.

K: Well, there's most of it due to experience.

H: Sure.

K: Where did I get my knowledge?

H: Well, we're going to get to that, I'm curious myself. (Laughter) My goodness.

What year did you start grade school?

K: Me?

H: Yes.

K: I started when I was six years old.

H: So, about 1909, 1910, maybe around in there if you were born in 1902.

K: It would have been 1908.

H: Right 1908. Where did you start school at?

K: East Mecca. They had a centralized school right across the street from where Maplewood is. You've probably heard of it.

H: Right.

K: It was a third grade school. They only had two years of high school. And it got so that we didn't have a professor there. We used to call him a professor. They'd have one between them, East and West Mecca. East and West Mecca always feuded.

H: Oh, I've heard that. Go ahead.

K: So, he would be in West Mecca two weeks and then he'd come to East Mecca two weeks and while he was in West Mecca, the big boys raised cain in East Mecca.

H: Were you one of those people who did that?

K: Oh, I was always a good boy.

H: An angel with horns, it sounds like. Tell me some of those experiences. I can see you've had a lot of them in grade school. What can you remember about that?

K: Well, there is one thing I'll never forget. C.W. Parnaby was our principal and we used to call--I didn't; I always had respect for my teachers--but the bigger boys, they got to call him Chester White Pig, C.W. Parnaby. And they'd call him that to his face. One day they tied him to the fence. There was

board fence around the school house. They tied him out to the fence and school didn't take up for an hour after the regular time. (Laughter) He never got mad either. He took that good natured. Had he got angry, I don't know what would have happened.

And we used to have outdoor plumbing. We had the little building and then they had a board screen around it. Well, while he was over to West Mecca, every time the boys would go out there, they'd kick off a board around that screening. So, it finally got so that all that was left was a little wooden building. It wasn't safe to go out there. (Laughter) When he came back and saw what happened, all the boys had to get the hammer and nails to rebuild that.

H: Is that right?

K: Are we recording?

H: That's all right. That's great. I love it. (Laughter) See, I didn't hear that before. That's good.

K: There's lots of things you didn't hear before. (Laughter)

H: Keep talking, tell me more. I love it.

K: When I graduated, I graduated from that school in 1918. I was the only one in my class.

H: You were the only one in your class?

K: I was the only one in my class.

H: How did that come about? What happened?

K: There was no more. A lot of young boys dropped out, worked on the farm or something.

H: You graduated, you were the only one in the graduating class?

K: I was the only one who graduated.

H: That's incredible.

K: And I took plane geometry and solid geometry and I put every figure on the board myself. Well, I'm going to tell you something. You go down the Phillips-Rice road. You know where that is?

H: Yes.

K: And on the right, all the way to Cortland was nothing but sugar bushes, maple syrup trees and sugar house. All down through there. It was the most beautiful sight you ever saw. The farmers kept those woods clean. You could see through them. " you could see the sugar house where they boiled the sap. And in the spring of the year, as soon as they start to boil, we'd look out the upstairs window in the school and we'd see the steam from those sugar houses.

And do you suppose you could keep us young boys from playing hooky? We'd have to play hooky every time and we'd get a licking too, but we played hooky anyway. (Laughter) We'd go down through there and visit the sugar houses and some of those sugar makers where we sat, they were just as nice as could be and the others would chase you out.

H: Who were some of the people that had those sugar houses? Do you remember any names? Can you give me any names?

K: Well, I can remember them all.

H: Well, tell me.

K: (Laughter) Well, Slim Simpson's father was the first one. Do you know where Slim Simpson's is?

H: Yes I do.

K: The next one down was Wanamaker and the next one down was Chafee. The next one down was King and then there was the Lake Farm and then there was the Holkems. Below the Holkem's was Bert Baldwin and then come Cauffield.

H: Let me just interrupt you for a second. I had had a teacher in high school by the name of Cauffield. His first name was Lee.

K: He was no relation to them.

H: No relation.

K: Lee Cauffield lived over in Greene.

H: Is that right? See, that has been so many years ago and he has since passed away, but I had him in high

school for chemistry I believe it was.

K: I gave him his diploma.

H: Go ahead. Keep telling.

K: We're going on down. Where did I leave off?

H: After Cauffield.

K: Then Biggins and then J.B. Rice and then there was, down on the curve of the road was, oh, Jacoby's. And below that I can't tell you the next one; you're getting downtown. That was all woods.

H: Oh, I'm sure it was. What did that school look like that you attended, that centralized school? That was right where the creek was. Was that the school that you went to?

K: No, they had a school at East Mecca and we had a school at West Mecca.

H: Okay.

K: It was a wood frame building. If we had the time, I'd go get you a picture of it.

H: Go ahead, tell me more what it looked like.

K: There was two rooms downstairs and one big room upstairs. The room to the west was called the primary room. I think that was first, second and third grades. And you called the next room the intermediate room. That was fourth and fifth, sixth and seventh and upstairs was the high school, just ninth and tenth. And then, if you wanted to finish high school, you had to go to Cortland.

H: Did you do that?

K: I started. The next year after I graduated from there, I started and my brother Howard got appendicitis. In the fall of the year we had silos to fill and field corn to harvest and potatoes to dig and everything. So, I quit. And then the next year I went down to Cortland and I finished two years down there. I took two years of agriculture. We had subjects in school that were, I don't know, helpful to you in farming. I took sociology, biology, physics, economics, subjects like that. They don't

teach them anymore, do they?

H: Yes, we have those.

K: You do? You don't teach agriculture.

H: No, we don't.

K: I was interested in that.

H: Is that right? Who were some of the teachers you had? Were there any that were outstanding in your mind?

K: They all were in my estimation.

H: That's great. What were some of the names? Do you remember?

K: Well sure. I told you C.W. Parnaby.

H: Right.

K: I can see them, but I can't . . .

H: Well that's okay because I know [it's hard to remember].

K: There was one by the name of Green. I can't think who were the . . . Oh, I can think of the younger teachers. There was Myrtle Brown and Mable Brown. They were sisters. They lived up here in Greene. And there was the Hinds girls from Johnson--Mary and Bessy. And then there was Ethel Layman and she just passed away not too long ago.

H: Is that right?

K: Oh dear.

H: What time did school start for you in the morning?

K: Nine o'clock.

H: What time was it over?

K: Three-thirty.

H: Were there any sporting activities for you?

K: Baseball. We played Johnson. We played West Mecca. Every time we played West Mecca we had a fight, every time. We had to walk over to West Mecca and play ball and get all hot and sweaty and everything

and then walk home.

H: Oh my goodness.

K: Not walk home to school, but you had to walk to your home.

H: When did you practice? Was there an organized practice as there is today?

K: At noon.

H: At noon?

K: At recess, recess was only fifteen minutes, but we played games outside.

H: I see.

K: Pull away, and games like that.

H: The school didn't have a cafeteria? You brought your lunch didn't you?

K: You'd take your lunch. Of course, they had the general store at East Mecca. Faulkner's, Bill Faulkner's father and you could buy a package of chewing gum for a nickel and if you had a penny, he'd split the package and give you one stick. Did Bill tell you that?

H: No.

K: You could buy a whole stick of candy with a ring on it for a penny.

H: (Laughter) That's cute.

K: There's a well beat path down there.

H: What was the creek like? Were you happy to see when the reservoir replaced the creek?

K: No.

H: Why? I have asked that question so often. Why? Why weren't you happy?

K: Well, I used to spend a lot of time up and down that woods. I knew where there was some lovely big hickory trees. I'd gather those great big hickory nuts, would crack meats like the walnuts you buy. And I knew where all the good fish holes were,

and I knew where all the good muskrat sets were and mink sets. I got a lot of enjoyment out of that. And some beautiful timber in there.

H: So really, you're looking on the angle that when the reservoir was built, it just took away all the beauty of that area, correct? Do you feel the farmers got a fair deal on the money that they received?

K: They got all their land was worth. Of course, land kept going up and up and up. I sold thirty acres to them.

H: How much did you get for that?

K: A thousand dollars. Half of it was tilled too.

H: Is that right?

K: What I had bought, that was what I paid for it. And that's what it's worth.

H: Getting back to your school years and then you were in school during World War I. Do you remember that war? Did you have anybody that fought, any relatives? Or not?

K: Us farm boys didn't go. We worked on the farm.

H: I didn't know that.

K: There's always work.

H: Had you talked about the war all the time? Did you really know?

K: Oh, we had friend after friend. And the worst thing that hit was that Spanish flu. It took the best, most healthy, strongest young men in the community. And they'd only be sick two or three days, that's it.

H: That hit in the community? When did that hit? See, I never heard of that.

K: 1918 and 1919.

H: And it just wiped out all the healthy men?

K: There was more people that lost their lives with the flu than there was in the war.

H: Is that right? My goodness.

K: I remember one time I had to do my neighbor's chores across the road and our chores. Everybody was sick in bed. I was the only one that didn't get the flu. Everybody got the flu.

H: That's something.

K: Oh, that was terrible, that was terrible.

H: I guess. Do you remember in 1919 a cyclone went through and it destroyed the Palmer house? Where were you? What were you doing?

K: We were milking cows at the time. It was, near five, five thirty in the afternoon, six o'clock, somewhere along there. And we had to carry the milk. When you got a cow milked, you got to carry the milk. The milk house was up by the house and you had to carry it up to the house. And father, he saw it first. He said, "Look." He hollered at us and we all come out. We could see that wind going around and we saw two young cattle up in the air going around like that. The Denmans, over here, had rented Palmer's pasture and that wind had picked those animals up and they set them down over in Simpson's pasture and they weren't hurt a bit.

H: Oh my goodness. Were you affected by that? Was your farm or anything?

K: Oh no.

H: Nothing?

K: It took the old church over there and twisted it up too. There used to be a church right across from the Palmer house.

H: Yes, I remember reading about that. That's amazing. Had there ever been anything like that before?

K: You'd never seen nothing like that.

H: No? My goodness. What did Mecca look like at that time during your teens and in the teens [1913-1919] itself? Was it just all farm? You gave me such a beautiful description of what is now Phillips-Rice Road. What did the rest of the town in that area look like?

K: Well, I told you what the Phillips-Rice . . .

H: Right, oh, that's beautiful.

K: North there was, oh, let's see, I would say maybe six houses. There was no houses at all on the left side. The farms are up Route 46, backed onto that road.

H: I see.

K: But there was maybe five or six houses on the right. The rest of it is all farm land, but there's no brush. The farmers kept their land. There used to be a law, you had to keep your roadside mowed. If you didn't mow it, the trustees hired someone to mow it and it was added on to your taxes. We didn't have this at first. It's a disgrace! It's a disgrace!

H: Sure.

What did that Mecca Park look like? The center which is now what they call The Center?

K: It was beautiful. Of course, the trees were not very big when I remember, but they were probably about like this. They have never grown very fast, I don't know what. They've been banged up. It was pretty. There used to be a watering trough at the south end. Right at the south end the stone was hollowed out. They used to have those every once in awhile when you used to drive horses and buggies. If the horses got thirsty, you had to feed them. There was a pump at one end. And near this big stone hole, it was probably seven, eight, maybe ten feet long and so wide and hollowed out and the stones kept the water cool. That's about all there was there.

H: There's no motel then? There was, at one time, a motel--correct--in Mecca?

K: Hotel?

H: Hotel.

K: Sure.

H: That was right in the circle?

K: That's the building that's in the southwest corner. Right back of the Dairy Queen there, to the right there, that was a hotel. And there was a delivery barn south of it. They used to come in on the stage or on the bus and they'd stay at the hotel. And if they had some friends out five miles, they rented a horse and buggy or they would hire a hack.

H: What's a hack?

K: Well, the man that had the hotel had some horses and buggies. They called them hacks. And he'd drive them out.

H: I love it. It's great.

K: Well, that was the old way.

H: Oh, that's neat. And there's, you said, a store there that Faulkners owned?

K: That has been there ever since I can remember.

H: Was there anything else? A restaurant?

K: No.

H: No? That is very interesting. After you graduated what did you do? You said you had some additional training for farming, right?

K: No, I took two years of agriculture in high school.

H: Oh, I see, okay. I understand, then.

K: I started farming.

H: Immediately after high school you started farming?

K: I farmed; I went into partnership with my father until I got married.

H: When were you married?

K: In 1932. I was twenty-two. (Laughter)

H: What is your wife's maiden name?

K: Helen Dirmeyer.

H: How did you meet?

K: Oh buy, that's quite a story.

H: Well go right ahead.

K: Well, they lived where Tom Kachur lives.

H: Oh, great.

- K: They owned that farm. And we started to school together. And there used to be a rail fence along the east side of the school yard and, as kids, we used to play together. We'd get the big flat rail and put it over the top of the other and she'd sit on one end and I'd sit on the other and we'd teeter over the rail fence. All the children did that, but I always played with her and all the boys always teased me of being a sissy and they would tease her as being a tomboy. But nevertheless, we played together and we went to school together and we were always close. Then when she was in sixth grade, they sold the farm and they moved to Nutwood. Do you know where Nutwood is?
- H: No.
- K: It's a mile east of Fowler. He bought a nice farm over there. Okay, I went with all the girls in the country. When I was a young man I did.
- H: (Laughter) Oh my goodness, that's great. That's good.
- K: I went with a girl three years and then we'd bust up, then I'd go with different girls, all kinds of girls.
- H: Oh my goodness. You're called a macho man today. You were something in that time. That's great.
- K: I played ball on the Mecca town team and we went to Johnson the Fourth of July and Johnson beat us. There was a blonde haired girl over there. She just sat back. She was from Johnson and she just hollered her head off and cheered her head off. She was cheering her fool head off for Johnson and Johnson won. After the game I went over to see who she was and here she told me, "I'm Barbara Brobst." And we visited a while and I said, "What are you doing tonight? It's the Fourth of July." She said, "I don't know. Why?" I said, "How would you like to go to Idora Park?" She kind of hesitated a little bit and then she said, "Okay." I told her I'd be down to pick her up. My dad had the Model-T Ford and we took that.

When I got over to her place, she was stuck with the milking and they had twenty some cows that poor girl was going to milk. And she was a ball of fire as far as that goes. So, I helped her do her milking and we went to Idora Park.

I think we got home about two o'clock in the morning. And we were sitting in the car there a little bit and her mother came out. And I thought, "Somebody is going to get holy hell." Barb said, "What's the matter, mommy?" She was looking for Alice, the baby. She said, "She's not in her bed." The Brobst had fifteen children. (Laughter) So, we started hunting for her and she was out in a buggy in the shed.

H: Fifteen kids, oh, my goodness.

K: Well then, you asked me how I ever met Helen.

H: Right.

K: I was mixed up in the Grange. In fact, I was Master of the first and second degree team.

H: What does that mean? Master of the first, what is that?

K: Master is the leader of the Grange.

H: Okay.

K: But the Master of the degree team, he was just in charge of the degree team. He acts as the Master. Well, when we had candidates, you had to initiate them and that's what the degree team did. I'm not going to tell you what we did. That's all a secret.

H: Oh, okay.

K: But we used to go to all the townships had Grange, Johnson, Fowler and everything. Well, we were sent to Fowler to put on the first and second degree team and Helen and her father were there and, oh, I hadn't seen her for years and years and she looked just as beautiful as she ever did.

H: Oh, that's sweet.

K: And we visited a little bit and I said, "I'm going to come over and see you." And she was always trying to put me off, I guess. I don't know if that's the way the girls do or what. But anyhow, I went over to see her and we visited and visited. She was going to Youngstown Business College. So, I made a date with her. And she'd stay in Youngstown and she would come home maybe only once a month. She graduated from business college. She got a job in the A.H. Bhearly Company down at the Wholesale Grocery and Feed Mill.

And I got me a Model-T Ford too. And I learned the way to Youngstown pretty good, I'll tell you. (Laughter) And like I said, she always tried to push me off. I went with her for about two years before I ever got nerve enough to ask her to marry me. And I asked her and she said, "Well, I have to think about it." But I knew what she was going to say all the while. She was stalling. And then we got married in about two and a half years. I went with her two and a half years.

H: Oh, that's interesting. That's cute. My goodness, it must have taken you forever to get to Youngstown. There were no roads as such, were there?

K: I went right down 90. Well 90, what's that? That's 193.

H: Yes.

When you said you were dating, what did you do on dates? Did you court them? Or dates?

K: Oh, court them? (Laughter) Take them to a picture show! My folks were death on dancing. They were religious folks. They didn't believe in dancing. But I was crazy about square dancing. We used to go square dancing. That old town hall at East Mecca was one place that used to have square dancing almost every Saturday night. One night there used to be a dance hall over to Windsor Mills. Do you know where Windsor is? West?

H: Yes.

K: Well, there used to be a big dance hall over there. One night there was ten of us loaded into that Model-T Ford. You imagine how ten . . . ? (Laughter) It was just like that all the while, laughing and giggling.

H: I'm sure.

K: Square dancing, we used to be crazy about it.

H: That's great.

K: And going on picnics and things like that.

H: How many children did you have?

K: Six.

H: What are their names?

K: Robert is the oldest and then there's Anna [Magdych]; then there's Norman; then there's Carol [Coombs]; then there's Tom. You know Dixie?

H: Oh yes.

K: Well, Tom; you know Tom then. There's Tom and then there's Jack. We were doing good. We were having a boy and a girl and a boy and a girl right on down the ladder. (Laughter)

H: That's cute.

K: Helen always wanted a blue-eyed, blonde girl. But the last boy was blue-eyed and blonde. And I have 27 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren.

H: Oh, my goodness.

You stayed in Mecca then just for a relatively short time until twenty six and then you moved out here, right?

K: Yes. When we had the children, that was a small house. First thing, there was nothing there, but there was a good sugar bush and there was a good piece of ground and a good barn and so I could milk cows there and make syrup. And I had to go to the sugar house. And the house was so bad, the roof leaked so that the wallpaper would get full of water and bag down. You had to move your bed and then we'd get a yard stick and one would hold the dish pan and the other would take a yard stick and push a hole in the paper and drain the water out. If you didn't, it was going to bust and come down on you. We laughed and we had more fun. (Laughter) We had nothing, but we had fun, I'll tell you.

H: Oh, that's great.

K: And during the Depression, I tore that house to pieces. I had \$500 in the bank and I went up to Laird Lumber Company and I ordered new windows and new flooring and doors and everything for that house. And when it came, the bank was closed. My father-in-law paid the bill. So, I remodeled the house.

H: How did you know all that stuff?

K: Well, I took what you call "manual training" in school.

H: Was it tough raising your family? Did you have to go without during the 1930's? I remember my grandfather, my mother's father, having to go selling. He was known as Joe the Banana Man. He used to sell fruit to local businessmen. Did you have any problems during the Depression or were you pretty self sufficient?

K: My wife would can stuff. She'd put up cans. We had no freezer.

H: Yes.

K: We had fruit, canned fruit and always had lots of vegetables. Had a little vegetable cellar that would keep pretty good.

H: How was this area affected by it or wasn't it?

K: Oh, terrible. Lots of farmers had their farms two-thirds paid for and they lost it.

H: Is that right? That's unbelievable.

World War II rolls around, how did that affect you? You did not, obviously, have to go. Did you have children fight in that? Sons?

K: There weren't any old enough.

H: That's right, none would be old enough. How was this area, then, affected by that?

K: I don't know. Things seemed to go on. Prices went crazy. They had price controls on things. I know maple syrup, they had a ceiling. What was it? Three something. And sugar was rationed. There was no sugar. People were crazy over sugar. It sold like hot cakes.

H: What made you stay in this area? When you made that move in 1926 to come to Greene, what made you stay here in this area? Your love of the land? Your love of farming?

K: Oh, I don't know. We were just contented here.

H: I see. So, you moved here in Greene. How did you pay for this house? How did you come about acquiring this house?

K: You know where those two farms are over there?

H: Yes.

K: Where I used to live, there's a creek between them?

H: Okay.

K: Okay, there was an old couple that lived next door and we were very close. When he died, I used to look after her. I'd take her eggs and milk and cut her wood for her and look after her. Then I bought that place and I fixed that all up. I done it myself too. Built those buildings myself. I didn't hire anybody. And then Tom got married and he went to housekeeping there. And we had a big dairy, a big dairy. We had around 100 head of Holstein cattle. We were just doing awful good. Dixie says she remembers me like that. She said, "Every month we got a good check." We used to get \$800 or \$900 a month then. She said, "The house was furnished with electricity and we had our milk and our eggs and our meat." She said, "I'll never have things like we had then."

H: No, my goodness, that's good money.

K: Well, you know what happened. Well, what heppened, Jack came to me and he said, "Dad, I'm going to get married coming this spring and I want a place to live." And I said, "Well, why can't I just get a good trailer and put you in there? We've got lots of yard." "No," he said, "we don't want no trailer. We want a house." So, I went down to Gibb Denman's Lumber Yard and building houses and I got the plans that I was going to build a house, \$18,000. It was going to be a nice house too.

We had rented this place with nothing. You wouldn't believe it. You couldn't see the house for brush. There was no paint on it and the fields were full of brush and the buildings back here were all falling in. But we had rented this land from Mrs. Rowleigh. She was an old widow woman. And she come over and she said, "Charlie, I come over to sell you my farm." I says, "All I see is work over there." She says, "I don't know of anybody that likes to work like you do." And I said, "What do you have to have for it?" She says, "Twelve thousand dollars." She didn't beat around the bush. She had it all figured out. And I said, "I have never been in that house. And she said, "Well, here's the key, you and Helen go over and look at it." We went over and nobody had lived here. My wife was a worker too. And I said, "What do you think?" She says, "Just what I wanted."

H: Is that right?

K: And so I went up. She [Mrs. Rowleigh] was staying with her daughter and I went up and told here, I said, "That's too much money for the work that's got to be done. There's no plumbing. There's no heat and there's nothing in there." There was no kitchen. Well, she said, "What'll you do?" Well, I said, "I wouldn't give you over \$11,000 for it." "Oh, I couldn't sell it for that." And she called up the next day and told me she's going to sell it. And that was in 1961.

H: Is that right? That's fantastic.

When you were involved in all your farming--and you do a lot of it--you had the maple syrup and what else did you farm, you and your family, your children?

K: We raised corn. We raised soybeans. We raised oats, and we raised wheat. We all make syrup together, all of us.

H: Today, all your sons, correct?

K: Just Tom and Jack.

H: Just Tom and Jack?

K: I gave Bob an acre of ground and he built a new house up there. He's a carpenter. He's a finisher. He does most of the finishing work. Like these winding stairways and stuff. He's got all the work he can do all the while. The second son lives in Florida. The rest of the children are all around me. All but the one in Florida. They're all right around here.

H: Oh, that's nice.

I: That's probably why we stayed here. That's probably why they stayed here, I don't know. But what I did with this house, the fellow hp here, Harlan Kuhn, that does decorating and stuff like that and I paid him to come down and I said, that I want these walls cleaned clear to the plaster. So, he steamed all the paper off. I said, "I want the wood work all done, all cleaned," and so we had that all done. Helen said, "Don't you let anybody paper it." She said, "I'm going to paper that house." She loved to hang wallpaper. And she got that all done. That's why that stairway, that was dark. The kitchen, that wainscoting around there, that was black. He cleaned that all up for me. We put the new carpets down and

new linoleum. My oldest boy was a carpenter and he put the kitchen in for me. Harry Brand put in the heating system. I got heat in every room. He done my plumbing. We got a bathroom upstairs and downstairs. I fixed it up and put some money into it.

H: I'm sure of that.

Tell me a little bit about the maple syrup business. Is it still a big business now as it was then?

K: No.

H: No?

K: We make as much as we ever did, but it was a whole lot better. It used to be that pretty near every farm made a little syrup. There's something about it. It's the poorest paying business on the farm for the amount of work. But it's the time of year that you can't do anything and you get started and it gets in your blood. Oh, I love to see the sap come out of the spile when you drive it in and I love to see it boil. Dixie helps me make syrup. Did she ever tell you?

H: No, does she?

K: She takes care of the syrup and I do the firing. We have an evaporator that's five feet wide and sixteen feet long. It takes four foot wood. I'd fire that and it's almost automatic. The sap stays in two inches or an inch deep all the while. There's a regulator. It comes from a big tank into a pipe and the regulator keeps it an inch deep. It feeds around and feeds around and gets around a certain place and the dial on the thermometer tells when it's syrup. And all she has to do is open the valve and out comes the syrup. Then she has to filter it and can it. That'll keep her busy. She's a worker too.

H: Oh yes. She's a delightful lady. How much does maple syrup run for? This past year, what have you sold it for a gallon?

K: We sold it for \$15 and everybody around us got more. They have a maple syrup institute every year. It has been over at Corey's. The boys and I like to go over there and they set the price at \$15. Then when it comes time to make, why, Mr. Manes and the Millers up here, they come down and see us and told us that we're selling it too cheap. We have people that get syrup year after year after year and if they call up

in January and order syrup and how much it's going to be and you tell them \$15, well then you're not going to raise your price to sixteen and a half. You can't do it. So, we stuck to the price that we stated. We made 600 gallons.

H: That's amazing.

K: And you get to see people every year and gradually they die and you'd be surprised. We've made syrup over there since 1926 on that farm. People, year after year after year, come and get syrup and then you wonder what happened they didn't come every year; they're gone.

H: That's unbelievable.

You were going to tell me a story about Herman Love.

K: Well . . .

H: Go right ahead and tell me.

K: He had a big cider mill down there. Now, every one of these farms, the first thing they did when they settled here, they planted an orchard. When I used to come home from school, we'd walk home two-thirds of the time when the weather was good in the fall, we'd go through one orchard after another and pick out those big pound sweets. We picked apples and just as sweet as honey. And everybody had apples.

Well, he had a cider mill. He made jelly and apple butter too. And it was down on that Love place. Back off the road there's a scale in that little old barn off the road where the horses used to drive in and weigh them out. In the fall of the year, you'd see wagon load after wagon load of apples going down by the school house, going down there. In the morning, about nine o'clock, you'd hear this whistle go boop, boop, boop, boop. He was ready to make cider and pretty soon the wagons would come with their apples. Yes sir.

H: That's crazy.

K: Now they [other people who were interviewed] never mention that.

H: No, they don't. It's not mentioned.

K: They said he was a raiser of livestock. He had some cattle too.

- H: That's very interesting. Has Mecca changed a lot since you were a young man till now?
- K: Why sure.
- H: Would you like to see it go back to the way it was?
- K: Oh, I don't know if I would. It's all houses from Mecca to Cortland. They used to be farms. They used to be farms.
- H: Has the change been good for Mecca? It's a growing community, goodness.
- K: Has the change been good? I don't know. People have to live somewhere.
- H: Sure. Would you advise people to move out here? Life has been so good to you and it still is.
- K: Yes, but we don't like to have neighbors too close. I've had ever so many people who wanted to buy lots around here. I don't want them. I don't want them. I like it the way it is.
- H: Yes, you like your freedom and the open air, sure. And property is very expensive out here now and people are just moving in. It's unbelievable. You could probably, then, just see the growth over the years. It's just amazing.
- K: I have seen the value of property. I never dreamed it would get this high. You'd get \$5,000 for an acre for lots right around here. This place down here, I was offered \$75,000 for my frontage and I just keep this place. Keep my place and a little bit back here. I've got frontage on both sides of Route 46. I've got frontage on this one. Well, I don't know what this place is worth. My brother Dick, he's a banker in Cortland. Didn't you know Dick Knight? Did you ever hear of him?
- H: No, I know Tom. I know your son Tom through Dixie. I think that's it. I don't know any other ones. I don't know Earl.
- K: Dick is chairman of the board of directors. I told him I had a notion to sell out and get me a trailer and move over in my daughter's yard. Give up farming. He said, "Oh, don't do that." He said, "Don't give it away if you do." He says, "Oh boy, what you can get for this."

H: Sure.

Did you or do you now belong to any organizations other than the Grange?

K: I'm one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

H: Is that right?

K: Same as Toni.

H: Are you a practicing member?

K: I sure am. Sure, the Kingdom Hall was built on my farm.

H: So, you're still active with them today? Had you always been a Jehovah's Witness?

K: Ever since 1937.

H: Were your parents Witnesses?

K: They were Methodists. My wife took up with it before I did.

H: How did you get involved? Because of your wife?

K: Well, I got to reading, found out what the Bible taught and that's when I took up with it.

H: You liked it? You liked what it told you?

K: I give talks around different places.

H: Oh, do you? It's a rather interesting religion. Being out here, there's a lot of witnesses and I never realized that before. It's very interesting.

K: It's the fastest growing religious organization there is.

H: Is that right? I see.

K: We have over 100 down here. Around 120.

H: Do you belong to any other organizations?

K: Not now.

H: Not now?

K: I used to be a Granger. My boy belongs to Farm Bureau.

H: Were you ever a trustee on the Board of Education in Mecca, any of that?

K: Not Mecca. I was in Greene.

H: Were you?

K: I served twelve years in Greene.

H: Are there any other stories that you can share with us about Mecca that are delightful? You've given me just a wealth of information. The story about Phillips-Rice Road is just beautiful. I just can envision that in my mind. Are there any other things that you would like to share with us?

K: Well, one thing that the lake did, it done away with our old swimming hole. On 88 West, where the bridge crossed Mosquito Creek, there was a deep hole just south of the bridge. The deepest hole in the creek. And every warm summer evening, we children used to go down there to swim. We had a pony--that was when I was a kid. We used to get the pony and the buggy and start to Mecca and by time we got to Mecca, we had the seat full and some hanging on the back end. Go over and, didn't know what bathing suits were.

H: Ah! You skinny dipped. (Laughter) That's cute. The old swimming hole. Just like you read in magazines.

K: That's right.

H: That's great.

Do you know of anybody that can help us with this project? Can you name any names of people who are still living in Mecca that . . . ?

K: I think you got them all.

H: Or are they all deceased?

K: They probably told you all about the oil boom they knew?

H: You can add a little bit to it. Scantly I have just some information. Go ahead, tell me about the oil boom. What can you remember about it?

K: Oh, I don't remember. My father and his father . . .  
All I know is what my father told me.

H: Go ahead, what did he tell you?

K: Why, the people just rushed in. You had two or three  
hotels over in West Mecca and they were packed up.  
Beer parlors--west of the Center on the south side,  
there was Frazier had a "hot spot" they called it.  
They had go-go girls and everything. (Laughter)  
He did! And my folks used to hate that place.  
They used to wish somebody would burn it down. Oh,  
that was some place. (Laughter)

H: Go ahead.

K: Didn't Frank Benton ever tell you about that?

H: No. He did not tell me. You wait till I see him  
the next time. He did not tell me about that.

K: You ask him about Frazier's place. They called it  
the Pool, but it was everything.

H: People just flocked to that area then during the  
oil boom?

K: Why sure. People just flocked in there. Land went  
up \$30 an acre to \$500.

H: My goodness. After awhile then, that oil was just  
good for machines? It was that type of oil?

K: The oil was just in pocket, and Mecca oil, when that  
pocket was pumped out, that's all there was. All  
cleaned out.

H: After the boom then, everyone just went back and  
just moved back? That's interesting. That's inter-  
esting about the go-go girls. He did not tell me  
that.

K: Well, that's what my father told me.

H: Oh, I believe you. (Laughter)

K: Why sure, where oil drillers and things come in,  
that always goes together. (Laughter)

H: Well, I want to thank you for spending this time  
with me. You've just been a delight. I've learned  
a lot and I appreciate you taking out the hour and

a half to go over all of this and it has been really enjoyable. I've learned a lot. You're a delightful man and I wish you many years of good health and happiness.

K: Thank you.

H: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW