

Lorence Winter
Narrator

Steven Vatndal
Interviewer

1980

Interview done for the World War II: The Home Front in West Central Minnesota Oral History Project



The transcription of this oral history was made possible in part by the people of Minnesota through a grant funded by an appropriation to the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Any views, findings, opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the State of Minnesota, the Minnesota Historical Society, or the Minnesota Historic Resources Advisory Committee.

Introduction:	00:03	This interview with Lorence Winter is part of the World War II, The Homefront Series. The interview was recorded on August 22, 1980, at Mr. Winter's home in rural Wheaton, Minnesota. The interviewer is Steve Vatndal.
SV:	00:50	Where were you born?
LW:	00:50	I was born in Grant County near Hoffman, Minnesota on May 22, 1906.
SV:	01:01	Are you a general Norwegian, or do you have a diversified ethnic background?
LW:	01:07	Ask that question, again; would you?
SV:	01:09	I'm just asking about your ethnic background; are you 100 percent Norwegian?
LW:	01:14	No, I am 100 percent German.
SV:	01:21	My mind got clouded up with the Norwegian encounter last time I was here.
	01:28	Did your family move around quite a bit, when you were younger or did you settle in?
LW:	01:34	No, our family has always been very stable. We moved here in 1909, when I was three years old and they lived on the same farm in Traverse County until my father and mother retired in 1941.

01:54 Now, they had, of course, farmed in Grant County, I would presume, for about eight years after they were married. My father had farmed there, before.

SV: 02:11 What's your level of formal education?

LW: 02:14 I am a graduate of what was known as the West Central School of Agriculture at Morris, now, the University of Minnesota. That's the extent of it, except if you want to include I have taken several management courses with REA, which are courses that cover a day, usually. I've attended, I suppose, a dozen of them.

SV: 02:44 That's a fine description of it.

02:47 Then, I need to know your wife's maiden name.

LW: 02:50 My wife's name was Malva Marie Petersen and she is also 100 percent German. The Petersen is spelled P-E-T-E-R-S-E-N.

SV: 03:05 That's about the extent of the genealogical questions that we usually ask. Now, the questions from here on out will be just about the World War II era.

LW: 03:16 All right.

SV: 03:18 I'd like to begin with asking some questions, again, about the amount of news information that was available to you out here. Did you get a daily paper?

LW: 03:30 Yes, oh, yes. I think we were getting the Minneapolis Star, at that time, though I can't say for certain, but I think that's what—we've always had a daily newspaper.

SV: 03:41 I assume you got some local newspapers, also then?

LW: 03:45 Yes, we always got the Wheaton paper and, of course, we had farm papers. That about was the extent of the local news that we had.

SV: 04:03 Compared with what the local papers are carrying, today, as far as what would be termed national and international news, did you think that they carried about as much then as they do, now, or different amounts?

LW: 04:16 Yes, I would say that the amount was very comparable. I think the percentage of national and international news was

much greater than it is, today. We have a steady increase in scandalous news, is my opinion.

- SV: 04:38 How about the amount of space devoted to editorial comments? Has that changed—seem like it's changed, over the years?
- LW: 04:46 I would say, "No, about the same."
- SV: 04:50 Did you rely on a radio here for any news sources?
- LW: 04:54 No. We were very backward in accepting the electric news services. Even today, my family does not have a TV. We don't want one.
- SV: 05:13 Did you have access to movie theaters in Wheaton?
- LW: 05:17 Yes.
- SV: 05:19 Did you—well, first of all, did they run newsreels at the theater?
- LW: 05:23 Yes, they did.
- SV: 05:24 Were they looked upon as a news source or were they looked at more as kind of a curiosity?
- LW: 05:32 I would say they were more of propaganda newsreels than they were actually news.
- SV: 05:39 So, people didn't look at them in order to be informed, but more looked upon—
- LW: 05:44 I would say so, yes; they were more—
- SV: 05:47 Kind of a—
- LW: 05:48 —most of the people were informed without the newsreel and it was just a picture show.
- SV: 06:00 Before we entered the war, were people around here relatively interested in world events, like in coffee shops and stuff; was that a topic of conversation, often?
- LW: 06:12 Very definitely, I would say, yes, it was.
- SV: 06:16 So, the general level of interest in world events probably didn't change a great deal then, during the war; or did it go up even further?

- LW: 06:26 There was a definite intensification of interest after the war started.
- SV: 06:31 During the war, people were really enthralled with it?
- LW: 06:35 Um-hum, oh yes.
- SV: 06:44 There's a number of events before the war that we like to ask people about to see whether any one of them really caught the community's interest—caught the community's eye—as indicating that a war was coming.
- 07:04 Did any of the events that, generally, are thought of as leading up to the war, events such as the Spanish Civil War or the fall of Poland or the fall of France or our beginning of the Lend-Lease Program, with Great Britain.
- 07:22 Do any of those stick out in your mind as really catching people's interest here?
- LW: 07:28 Yes. Yes, the Spanish Civil War—people were not greatly concerned about that, I believe, but beginning with the entrance into Poland and, of course, during a great deal of propaganda and interest in the controversy between Germany and Poland, before the war actually started. There was terrific interest in that.
- 07:58 The people were aware that we were very apt to be part of this war, before it was over. They still remembered World War I and the events were somewhat similar.
- SV: 08:15 Last time I was here, you mentioned that there was a very solidly German ethnic community not far away from here. Could you—were their views, prior to Pearl Harbor, pretty much the same toward Germany and towards the developments in Europe, as were the rest of the community; or did they take, in general, a different outlook?
- LW: 08:44 I would say generally, 99 percent of their views were the same as the other ethnic groups. Probably before the invasion of the Poland, they probably had a little less interest or they were probably a little prejudiced up to that point. But when the war actually started, I don't think there was a difference in the ethnic groups.

- SV: 09:15 So, would you say that the opinions were very compatible even before Pearl Harbor, then, or did it take Pearl Harbor to really bring everyone together?
- LW: 09:28 They were very compatible before Pearl Harbor. You see, the war in Europe had been going on for several years and the opinions, I don't think, changed too much after Pearl Harbor. The feeling was already developed. The newspaper propaganda, the radio propaganda, had pretty well taken a hold.
- 09:54 The people were—and, of course, we knew, we had had the Lend Lease program; we had given England quite a bunch of our ships and the people accepted these things as being necessary, generally. They weren't, I don't think they were 100 percent sold on going into war.
- SV: 10:18 Would you say that there was relatively little of what's become known as "the America first" sentiment in this area, prior to Pearl Harbor—that is, the opinion that the United States should do everything it possibly can to just keep out of the affairs of Europe?
- LW: 10:34 No. No, they were, generally, convinced that we had to be a part of it.
- SV: 10:49 There were a lot of questions at that last set.
- LW: 10:55 Am I taking too much—going into too much detail?
- SV: 11:00 No, this is just fine.
- 11:02 Once we entered the war, then, the United States became actively involved, did you—did this community feel like it was an active part of the war or did the war seem like it was something that was quite far away that you just read about?
- LW: 11:21 No, I think they definitely felt they were part of it. They immediately became a part of it, I would say. Of course, there were already a lot of our boys were in uniform and the ladies had been doing charitable work—the Salvation Army, the Red Cross—those kind of organizations before Pearl Harbor.
- 11:51 I suppose it speeded up the work; there wasn't much difference. They felt they were part of it, before that.

SV: 11:59 It seemed like the thing that led people, perhaps, mostly to feel that they were a part of—were their activities in mobilization activities, do you think?

LW: 12:09 Yes.

SV: 12:13 So, the mobilization activities served, in fact, two purposes, then?

LW: 12:17 Yeah.

SV: 12:17 In providing materiel and giving people a sense of activity.

LW: 12:23 Participation. Yeah.

SV: 12:26 I'd like to move on to a set of questions about your farm, during the war and how the war affected that.

12:36 First of all, what size was your farm, during the war, acreage-wise, approximately?

LW: 12:46 Eight hundred acres.

SV: 12:49 And what types of crops were you growing?

LW: 12:52 We were growing the grain crops: wheat, barley, rye, oats, flax, and corn. We were not raising beans then, yet; not on our farm.

SV: 13:07 There were some farms around here that were raising soybeans?

LW: 13:09 Yeah.

SV: 13:13 Did you have any particular concentration of livestock on your farm?

LW: 13:18 Yes, we had 80 head of livestock. Eighty head of cattle and, I suppose, 40 head of hogs. I don't really know, but somewhere in that area and a lot of chickens, turkeys.

SV: 13:39 About how many people did it take to actually run the farm, before the war?

LW: 13:48 Actually, two full time.

SV: 13:50 Two full time people were tilling the land and taking care of the stock. Did that number change, during the war?

- LW: 13:58 No. No, we always hired a little extra help during harvest, but otherwise, two of us. There was my brother and I were in a partnership.
- SV: 14:09 Both of you were still able to farm, during the war?
- LW: 14:12 Oh, yes.
- SV: 14:16 What do you think was about the average size acreage size of a farm during that time?
- LW: 14:22 Now, at first, I better clarify this. This 800-acre farm was owned and operated by my brother and I. I would say that the average farm was about 400 acres, possibly a little less—maybe 360 would have been, yeah.
- SV: 14:45 As we got into the war, as our economy got up to a war level, could you see a marked difference in the agricultural economy around here? Did the business pick up; did prices seem to pick up?
- LW: 15:05 Yes, mildly.
- SV: 15:11 Did credit seem to be more available than it had been before we got into the war?
- LW: 15:15 Well, I think so, though I'm not an authority on that.
- SV: 15:20 Just from the talk of people, it seems—
- LW: 15:22 Yes, I am quite sure that the banks had been told to make credit available, because people did farm quite a bit more intensively, during the war. It was a patriotic effort, that's what it was, actually.
- SV: 15:41 Did these changes—mostly these benefits—seem to come to about all sizes and types of farms in this area equally or did some types of farms seem to be in a peculiar advantage? Say, perhaps, a very large farm or say, perhaps, a farm that grew one special type of crop or something?
- LW: 16:06 No, I think the—percentage-wise, I think it was about the same between the various sizes of farms. It was not a terrific increase in profits, but you have to realize, of course, farmers had been farming at a loss and, I guess, it did change it to the extent that they were making a little money, yeah.

SV: 16:40 Did you have commercial external electricity on your farm, during the war years?

LW: 16:47 Ask that again, would you?

SV: 16:50 Did you have—well, when did your farm get electricity?

LW: 16:55 Our farm was electrified in October of 1941, just before the war.

SV: 17:00 Just before the war.

17:04 So then, from the other farmers that you spoke with and that didn't have electricity, during the war, do you think that the lack of electricity was a considerable hardship to them?

LW: 17:18 Yes, I definitely think so.

SV: 17:20 Was it mostly a hardship in the sense of performing chores and doing labor and that type of thing, rather than—or was—let's leave it at the first half of that question.

17:35 Was it mostly a labor problem that the hardship came in with?

LW: 17:41 Yes, yes, the farmer was shoveling his grain and milking his—shoveling his grain by hand; milking his cows by lantern light. You know that farmers worked until 10 and 11 o'clock at night. Probably, they put down their hay to the cattle in pitch darkness, but downstairs, they had a lantern. The housewife was still using the scrubbing board or the hand-operated washing machine .

18:20 I definitely consider that a hardship, when everyone else in the United States, I mean, in the cities of the United States and even in the countries of other nations, the rural people had electricity. I definitely felt that these people were operating under a hardship.

SV: 18:46 From your response, earlier, I understand that the labor shortage associated with the war probably didn't affect your farm very much.

LW: 18:55 That's right; it didn't.

SV: 18:57 But did it seem that your neighbors, any of them that you can think of, were adversely affected by the war?

- LW: 19:05 Not seriously; very little, if any. I wouldn't be able to pinpoint any.
- SV: 19:14 From what you've heard and what you saw, do you think that there were many needed farmhands that were drafted into the war effort in this area?
- LW: 19:29 No, there were some, but the draft regulations put a high priority on farm labor and, while many of the boys went, we have to realize families were large, in those days. It wasn't always a great handicap.
- SV: 19:55 This may not be the case, but I know in some farm areas, where I've talked to farmers, before, they said that women picked up a considerable amount of the farm labor during the war. Did that seem to be the case, here?
- LW: 20:16 Yes, I would say considerable and that jogs my memory a little bit, that quite a few of the businessmen in the towns, if a farmer was definitely short of help, they'd come out at six o'clock and shock grain until nine.
- SV: 20:39 So this town help was mostly during harvest, then?
- LW: 20:40 Yes.
- SV: 20:43 Do you recall if they came out as individuals or whether they came out as teams to do the work?
- LW: 20:48 Well, they'd come out five or six in one car. I would guess you'd call them teams, because they'd all go to the same farm and they probably set up 50 acres, yet that evening.
- SV: 21:03 Did any of these people from town ever come out and give you a hand with your harvest, out here?
- LW: 21:10 No.
- SV: 21:13 Getting back to the question on the amount of labor that women were doing on the farms, during the war, does it seem to you that—can you think of instances where women were doing farm labor, during the war, that they wouldn't normally have been doing?
- LW: 21:34 I think I can only think of one and one farm—there were several of the ladies that did quite a bit of fieldwork, but they had done some of it, before. I think all the farmers put in a couple extra hours, during the war and they had a little

more work and, while I said they weren't handicapped, a farmer never considered it a hardship if he had to work two extra hours.

- SV: 22:12 You mentioned, the last time I was here, that there were people that came from the Twin Cities, that moved out to this area, during those years, to work on farms. First of all, did those people generally seem to be ex-farmers or people that had grown up on a farm that had moved to the Twin Cities?
- LW: 22:34 I would say, "Yes," and there weren't many of those in this area. There were a few, but not many.
- SV: 22:41 Did they tend to stay with one farm and live on their farm?
- LW: 22:45 Yes. I think, in many cases, probably they were acquainted with the people that employed them, when they came out. They had some understanding of farming, before they came; they weren't just green hands.
- SV: 23:06 So they didn't have to be trained a great deal, then?
- LW: 23:08 No.
- SV: 23:12 Concerning the rationing, during the war, there seems to have been two areas that most farmers have said gave them the most problems, if any, and those were the areas of rubber rationing and of machinery rationing.
- 23:27 First of all, speaking to rubber rationing, the rationing of tires, did you consider that—did that get to be a burden?
- LW: 23:37 I wouldn't go so far as to say that it was a burden on our farm, but I know it was to some people. And it was an aggravation. It wasn't so much the fact that you needed a new tire and had to wait, maybe, two months to get it, but when you got it, it was made of second-class rubber and probably only went to town once and then, it blew, or if it was on a tractor, it wore out quick. It was an aggravation, certainly. It wasn't something you couldn't stand; I don't think anybody suffered.
- SV: 24:19 You can't think of any instances, where people actually couldn't do a certain job, because of the poorness of the tires?
- LW: 24:28 No, I can't, no.

- SV: 24:30 You mentioned the poor grade of the rubber of most of the replacement tires that were available, during that time. I've heard that, at times, there were rumors circulating in various areas that actually, what these tires were, were the tires that had been turned in at the beginning of the war that had merely been painted over and sent back.
- LW: 24:55 Well, I don't know of that, but I do know that we got a bunch of retreads. But I always felt that you could see that, whether they had these tires painted over, I wouldn't know.
- SV: 25:16 You don't recall any rumors similar to that circulating?
- LW: 25:19 No, I don't. I'll take that back; I do, too, recall it where a farmer would discover, later on, that he had had a tire sold to him as new and he could tell. Well, actually, it was a retread that he couldn't tell it, at first.
- SV: 25:41 So, they were misrepresenting the age of the tires?
- LW: 25:44 Yeah.
- SV: 25:48 For the town tires—for tires on cars, there was always the easy of checking for compliance with the way the tires were being used, but whenever you came into a service station, they could be checked.
- 26:00 As far as tires for use on farm vehicles, did a tire inspector ever come out to your place, that you recall?
- LW: 26:06 No, definitely not.
- SV: 26:10 Was there—I know that there was some paperwork involved with getting tires for farm work. Was there also paperwork involved with the disposing of them, after they became unusable?
- LW: 26:23 No.
- SV: 26:24 Were you left to dispose of them however you wished to?
- LW: 26:28 No, you were expected to trade them in. If you had a tire allocated to you, the provision was that you turn in the used tire.
- SV: 26:44 So, if you couldn't come up with the used tire, it was going to be pretty tough to get a new one?

LW: 26:47 I would presume so; I never heard of anybody trying it. They were glad to get rid of the old tire. It was shot.

SV: 26:56 Concerning rationing of machinery, did you consider that quite a burden, first of all, for your own personal operation?

LW: 27:04 Not at all.

SV: 27:06 Did you know of any farmers in the area that had any considerable problems with it?

LW: 27:13 No, I don't know of any. I don't remember that there was any problem getting machinery. I suppose one reason I don't remember it, because I don't believe we bought any right at that time. Or, if we did, we bought something second hand.

SV: 27:29 Yeah, I understand that the used machinery was not rationed.

LW: 27:32 No, I don't think so.

SV: 27:33 As you recall, was the used machinery quite available, during that time?

LW: 27:38 Yes.

SV: 27:38 And of pretty good quality for used machinery?

LW: 27:43 If you wanted to pay the price, yes. I don't mean to say, by that, that the price was unreasonable, but sure, you could buy real poor machinery.

SV: 27:57 Some people that I've talked to concerning machinery rationing, have said that the rationing of new machinery caused a burden, because through the lean years of the '30s, farmers were often letting their equipment—just getting by on the equipment that they had. Then, as the '30s turned a little better, they were saving up to try and replace the equipment. And about the time the machinery was rationed was the time that they had enough money to replace their equipment. Was that a familiar situation, around here?

LW: 28:32 I think it probably was, when you mention it. I had said that we had no problem, but we did have a little problem. We bought a new combine; that was already in '46, but it still had the war problems.

- 28:58 We had to go to Hankinson, North Dakota to get it. We couldn't buy it here in Wheaton; well, they just didn't have any. So, I guess there was some problem and, like you say, there had been a lack of finance, so that people that run their machinery a little longer than they'd like to.
- SV: 29:19 How far away is Hankinson, about?
- LW: 29:22 Hankinson isn't so far—30 miles.
- SV: 29:34 Some farmers have also mentioned that the shortage of machinery, especially new machinery, caused a time of black market of machinery in their areas. Do you recall hearing of any of that in this area?
- LW: 29:48 No. I heard of it during later years, but not that time. I don't recall hearing of any.
- SV: 30:03 Black market on machinery after the war?
- LW: 30:05 Oh, yeah. There's been machinery shortage now and then—
- SV: 30:09 Oh, yeah, but—
- LW: 30:12 Not by wars. This had nothing to do with this.
- SV: 30:19 There are, of course, a number of government programs initiated—government agriculture programs initiated during the war. Do you remember being contacted by government people, during the war, that were taking surveys of crops being grown and the way the farms were run and things like; do you recall being contacted by them?
- LW: 30:43 No, not directly. The only thing I could think of—produced to the best of our ability, but otherwise, no.
- SV: 31:11 Do you recall people coming out, whether they be county agents or other government people—people coming out with information about new programs—new information on crops; new emphasis on types of crops?
- LW: 31:33 You're not talking of things like the Triple A Program, are you?
- SV: 31:41 Yeah, anything really that was going on during the war that provided—this question dealt with any government

programs, during the war, that provided information to the farmers.

- LW: 31:56 Of course, we still had the Triple A office and the county agents, who were very anxious and able to give us information on ways to produce more. I don't know whether that was the beginning of the heavy fertilization or whether that came a little later.
- SV: 32:21 I think it may have. I heard that some of the early phosphates were available.
- LW: 32:26 I would think they were at that time.
- SV: 32:29 But it was still quite—as I have heard, it was still quite spotted, as far as the use of it.
- LW: 32:36 Yeah, I think that's right.
- SV: 32:38 Do you recall any of as the first fertilizers being used around here, during that era?
- LW: 32:45 No, I just can't say whether they came that early or not. I would guess, yes, but it's just a guess.
- SV: 32:54 In general, would you say that the information provided by these government farm programs was quite helpful?
- LW: 33:02 Oh, yes.
- SV: 33:08 Thinking of the neighboring farmers in your area, do you think that whatever war hardships there were caused any greater sharing of labor between your farms—any greater cooperation?
- LW: 33:27 Yes.
- SV: 33:32 There also seemed to be a greater sharing of information between the farmers. I know I've heard some farmers say that people were more open to talk about new things that they'd tried on their farm.
- LW: 33:45 Oh, I think so.
- SV: 33:48 Did they seem to continue on after the war was over or did things go back to a little bit more of a less cooperative?

- LW: 33:56 I think the tendency continued. I don't know. It seems to me like, in the use of the more modern methods of farming, that there's a better exchange of ideas from farm to farm, today, and from government programs and extension agents, county agents. I think it's better than it ever was, before.
- 34:29 You can go to your neighbor and he'll tell you just what insecticide to use, what herbicide to use. Those are pretty technical things, but they are certainly willing to give you all the knowledge they have.
- SV: 34:45 Those are all the questions that I had on farm life, during the war. If there's anything that you think I've neglected about that topic, anything that you think needs to be mentioned, you're certainly welcome to do so.
- LW: 35:02 Well, of course, you didn't say anything about gasoline rationing or you're probably going to get to that?
- SV: 35:10 I'll touch it somewhat in talking about the rationing board. I didn't deal with it so much in the farm area, because of the exemptions that farmers had for it.
- LW: 35:19 Yeah, I was wondering if you weren't particularly interested. Farmers, really, got along well, but I would say that they also conserved well. Probably the only trip that somebody might say they didn't need to make was to church on Sunday.
- 35:37 Otherwise, they were—one of the interesting things I think about was that, when their city cousins would come out, they took it for granted that they were going to get a fill of gasoline out on the farm.
- SV: 35:54 Were farmers pretty generous?
- LW: 35:57 They were, in that respect, yes.
- 36:06 I don't think that farmers were ever convinced, and I am not convinced today, that fuel rationing was necessary, except as a propaganda tool, to make you feel the need of the war. Otherwise, I don't feel it was.
- SV: 36:23 Do you feel that that's also true of some of the other programs; for instance, maybe the scrap iron salvage or the rubber salvage or things like that?

LW: 36:34 To me, the rubber salvage program was a waste. Scrap iron, I feel entirely different about that. The rubber program, I just felt that they didn't conserve a thing, because the second grade products that they put out was no good; they just as well have used good rubber.

36:59 And we had been told—of course, you can always hear those stories—that rubber was stacked sky high in warehouses all over. We had been sold the stuff that you couldn't depend on.

37:18 But scrap iron, I felt different about that; I felt good. That was needed.

SV: 37:24 Could you recall how the scrap iron salvage drive was carried out in this area; did a group of people come to your farm and go over the farm looking for scrap iron?

LW: 37:37 No, but the farmers would ask the scrap dealer to come out and tell them what they had available and they could pick it up.

SV: 37:49 So, you dealt directly with the commercial dealer?

LW: 37:51 Yes, and they would often—oh, I think they contacted every farmer. If the farmer didn't ask them to come out, they went anyway. I don't think any farms were missed.

38:06 As I told you the other time, scrap iron was even stolen.

SV: 38:11 Yeah. The store that stole them, bought them. The boiler was stolen, during the war?

LW: 38:18 Yeah.

SV: 38:20 Was there ever any other—the boiler to a steam engine that had been scrapped, that was removed, during the war. Was there ever any indication as to who stole it?

LW: 38:39 No.

SV: 38:40 It just kind of disappeared from the entire area.

LW: 38:44 These—I suppose there was speculation; these scrap iron dealers came from all over. I suppose some of them weren't the most reputable people.

SV: 38:59 So you had commercial scrap iron dealers other than the people that had normally been in your community?

LW: 39:05 Oh, yeah.

SV: 39:06 Didn't know that.

LW: 39:12 The people that—our old scrap iron dealers, most of them didn't have the equipment to handle the kind of scrap iron that they were picking up, then. Well, like these old steam engines, they've been setting around for all the way from 10 to 20 years and they had to be cut, before they could be loaded. Although this boiler, I'm sure, was loaded all in one piece.

39:39 Some of them, you see they had cranes on their trucks.

SV: 39:47 Do you recall—you mentioned that some of the war mobilization programs seemed to be almost solely for the purpose of boosting morale. Do you recall any programs that were specifically acknowledged as being just for morale boosting; things like parades, rallies, speeches?

LW: 40:14 They were certainly there, but I can't just put a finger on them. Sure, they had their Red Cross rallies and patriotic meetings, the fairs or any kind of that thing. We had patriotic speakers, but that's all I could pinpoint.

SV: 40:39 Speaking about the war effort was quite common in most any social gathering, then?

LW: 40:43 Yes.

SV: 40:46 Do you recall whether these speakers were generally just private individuals that were part of this group that got up and spoke or were these people that were sent out?

LW: 40:54 Very often, they had been obtained just for that. They were probably a senator or a mayor from another city. Something a little different so it should attract a few more people.

SV: 41:11 Did it seem to be an increase in the number of, they're not exactly social gatherings, but community gatherings as far as for information sharing and things like this? Things like neighborhood gatherings for classes on, perhaps, canning or gardening?

- LW: 41:33 Yes, there were some. I think there were more on the—rather than canning, but along the same thought—making bandages and sewing garments, that kind of thing. Food packages, well, everybody, I guess, knew how to make food packages. Many things were done in considerable quantity.
- SV: 42:02 Did the war bond drives reach out to the rural areas?
- LW: 42:06 Oh, yes.
- SV: 42:08 Did they—
- LW: 42:10 Now, when I say that, I don't mean that we had it door to door, but we had the local papers mainly took care of it. Farmers went into town to the bank and bought war bonds.
- SV: 42:23 But no one came around to solicit at the farm?
- LW: 42:26 I wouldn't say that there weren't any, but it was never door to door, like it was during the first world war.
- SV: 42:32 Is this also true of the Red Cross War Fund drive?
- LW: 42:36 Yeah.
- SV: 42:38 So, that was all—you were encouraged to come through speakers?
- LW: 42:42 Yes.
- SV: 42:49 Did you notice any degree of children's participation in these mobilization activities; do you recall whether they were recruited to, perhaps, go around the town collecting a certain type of material or things like this that stick out in your mind?
- LW: 43:10 No, I don't recall that. I know that the children were encouraged in school to help with the gardens, raise a little more food, but that's as far as I can recall that they went with the children.
- SV: 43:28 Do you recall ever hearing about changes in classes in the school or changes in the types of activities in the school, so that they would have a war related effort; for instance, more of an emphasis, perhaps, some manual art or something?

- LW: 43:49 No. There probably were some war songs introduced is all I can think of.
- SV: 44:02 Some people have mentioned that, because of the drafting of people and the other movements of people during the war that there was, at times, a teacher shortage in various communities. Do you recall any of that?
- LW: 44:18 I can't recall that particularly in the war effort, during war time. I know we've had shortage of teachers, but I can't pinpoint it to that area.
- SV: 44:29 I've got no evidence that there is in Wheaton; I'm curious—
- LW: 44:34 No, I don't.
- SV: 44:39 Were there any traditional community activities; things like county fairs or community celebration that you recall that had to be skipped some year, because of the war?
- LW: 44:56 No.
- SV: 45:00 Was there quite a feeling of community pressure to participate in these mobilization activities; did most people seem like they were participating in, perhaps, a rally or a class gathering or a war bond drive or something—did it seem to be out of a spirit of getting involved in the war or did there seem to be an underlying community pressure?
- LW: 45:35 Not community pressure, I don't think so, but I imagine to some extent. But the pressure was more from the publications that were designated to do the job, I'd say.
- SV: 45:55 So the newspapers must have carried out a very important role—the local ones?
- LW: 46:00 Yeah, they did. So did the daily newspapers out of the cities. There were advertisements from various places, of course, to do this, do that—enlist in the army, the navy, the marines, and so forth.
- SV: 46:28 We talked about a number of the large mobilization programs; we've spoken of rationing and war bonds and the scrap yards. There's a couple of others left—one, specifically. The selective service, the draft programs in the area.

46:51 You mentioned that they seemed to be quite effective in their ability to keep sufficient amounts of labor on the farm. Did there seem to be a pretty good understanding among the town people as to the necessity of this?

LW: 47:10 I think so. Yeah, I don't think there was any enmity or distrust, at all.

SV: 47:19 And the program seemed to be carried out pretty well?

LW: 47:25 Yeah, I think it was fairly administered.

SV: 47:32 I'd like to go to some questions on your service in the army, during the period.

47:41 When did you first get on the REA board?

LW: 47:44 June 11, 1944.

SV: 47:49 Was this a county-wide board?

LW: 47:53 It's not exactly county-wide; it includes all of Traverse County, part of Stevens County in Minnesota, Grant County in Minnesota, Wilkin County, Big Stone County, and parts of Robert and Marshall in South Dakota. I believe we had 18 members in the southeast corner of North Dakota. It's not a large co-op.

SV: 48:29 I didn't realize.

LW: 48:29 We picked up the area that was a little too far away for—well, there was a co-op in Benson; one in Alexandria; one in Pelican Rapids; and one in Milbank, South Dakota, surrounding us and we tend to pick out what they didn't want.

SV: 48:55 How did you get on the REA board, initially?

LW: 48:59 It's an election. They have a nominating committee and, if you want all the details, I didn't know I had been nominated. The day after the annual meeting, the REA secretary came up and told me I was on the REA board and I was shocked. What do I know about REA?

SV: 49:27 But you decided to stay on the board?

LW: 49:30 As long as I was on it, I was going to do my part.

SV: 49:37 Did you receive any pay, any compensation?

LW: 49:39 Oh, yeah. We got three dollars a day and seven cents a mile.

SV: 49:45 This was three dollars a day for the days that you were working?

LW: 49:50 Yes.

SV: 49:54 Did the job involve a considerable amount of traveling, during the war?

LW: 50:00 Well, I guess you would say no. There were state meetings and meetings with other cooperatives, but in those early years, I don't think it averaged more than two days a month, which, of course, it's 40 days a year.

50:28 Then, of course, if you went to the national meeting, which you were expected to do about every third year, that would take six or seven days in one crack, because they're held in—oh, they've been held in Spokane, San Francisco, Washington, Atlanta, Chicago, and so forth. They are four day meetings and it takes you three or four days to go and come.

SV: 50:55 As far as the time that you had to devote to the board, during the year, then there was the time spent going to meetings; was there other things that took your time, also, serving the board?

LW: 51:08 Well, these other meetings, it's mostly meetings; we have committees. We have a committee that negotiates the labor contract every year; that takes one or two days. Those are the kind of things—we don't go out and do any labor on the lines or anything like that.

51:38 I know of board members who have done that in emergencies, you know, but unless you have some knowledge of working on electricity, they don't want us.

SV: 51:53 Then, it seems like even during the war, it was a job that took a considerable amount of time?

LW: 51:59 Oh, yeah.

SV: 52:03 Concerning the amount of travel that you had to do, during the war, was there some—did that give you any advantage concerning the getting of ration goods?

LW: 52:15 No.

SV: 52:16 One had to make do with tires?

LW: 52:19 Yes.

SV: 52:24 About how large was the board for this area?

LW: 52:27 There are nine members on the board and they are distributed to give an equal representation all over the cooperative.

SV: 52:40 During the war years, were they all male members on the board?

LW: 52:46 Yes. We have not had any female members. A few of the co-ops have. I wouldn't mind seeing it, but that's what they've elected.

SV: 53:05 Were most of the members of the boards farmers?

LW: 53:11 They were all farmers. When they leave the farm—well, as long as they are members, if they maintain a service, why they can be on the board; but if they move to town, the service goes—is put in the name of their successor. They're automatically off the board. I don't mean they're off that day, but if the annual meeting is two months hence, they must resign and a new one is elected in their place.

SV: 53:49 Thinking of the people that were serving on the board, during the war years, did it seem that most of them were from, perhaps, larger farms than the average or was there quite a spread there?

LW: 54:03 No, I think they were very average. They were, as a general rule, members of REA—not only Traverse Electric—are a little bit older people, probably, than the average. One reason being that, if they're elected at 40 years of age and they stay on for 15 years, they start to get a little grey-haired.

54:40 This is probably not in line with what you want, but I think it's very necessary that board members, if they really have the interest of the co-op at heart, that they stay on for a

while. Because the first few years, you don't know what the thing is about. You shouldn't resign or quit as soon as you know what you should be doing.

- SV: 55:07 During the war, did it seem like—were most of the members a little older?
- LW: 55:18 Yes, they were.
- SV: 55:23 Do you remember what year REA began supplying electricity to farmers in this area—not supplying electricity to all the farmers in this area, but the year they began running lines out?
- LW: 55:35 You mean Traverse Electric? Yeah, that was October of 1941. We weren't in the first. Maybe it was May of 1941. We were not among the first 140 that were energized, but it was the fall of 1941, anyway, that Traverse Electric energized their lines.
- 56:08 I was just reading in a pamphlet that I have there. It says October of 1941, but I think it's wrong; I think they actually energized some people in May.
- SV: 56:21 Did the expansion of the lines network, during the war, did it seem that that was being slowed by the war?
- LW: 56:30 Definitely.
- SV: 56:34 As far as the causes of that slowing concern, was it lack of materials in any way?
- LW: 56:39 It was very largely lack of materials. Part of it, of course, was because of the unit system, which the government, through REA, imposed upon us, you had to have a certain amount of units in order to be allocated so much material.
- 57:06 If you were going to build a mile of line, there had to be a qualifying number of units on that mile of line. Otherwise, even if we had the material stored in our warehouse, we didn't dare go out and put it up. We had poles standing for many months with no wire on them, because when this ruling came on, those miles didn't qualify under the unit system, so the construction was halted right there. We had to go and put our material on a different—
- SV: 57:42 Must have been frustrating for the farmers?

- LW: 57:44 Oh, it was, oh, yes. Some of them were desperate; they were so determined that—well, in fact, they saw the REA coming and all of a sudden, they couldn't get it.
- 57:57 We had men that ran for the board, because they thought if they were on the board, they could beat this allocation, but they couldn't.
- SV: 58:09 The main materials that were short then were the wire?
- LW: 58:13 Copper and aluminum, yes.
- SV: 58:21 You mentioned that the guidelines, the unit system, was imposed upon you from the federal government, I assume?
- LW: 58:28 Um-hum.
- SV: 58:30 Did you run some kind of a program to explain to farmers why a line was going down this way instead of this way—an education program?
- LW: 58:41 Well, yes, we have our newsletter, which tells them. Of course, they came into the office and, I would say, that's where they got most of their information. They'd come in and say, "Well, here you've started; now, what's going on?" We explained. They accepted it, generally.
- SV: 59:09 Was there any way that a farmer could—if a farmer decided not to accept the unit system that determined to the line wasn't going to run past his place, was there any way that he could appeal that decision or was that it?
- LW: 59:27 I don't know who he would appeal to. What he could do is go and buy himself another 20 cows and add a considerable amount of units. Otherwise, I don't think there was any way to beat it.
- SV: 59:44 As far as getting the necessary information to determine what farms had the most units on them, did your board hire people to go out and make surveys of the farms?
- LW: 59:58 We had—no, not extra people. We had a manager and our public—no, we didn't have a public relations man, but the manager and his staff—what you had to do, of course, an engineer—supposing you couldn't just run a line here and there. You want to run a line five miles out.

- 01:00:26 Well, maybe, if you were going to run that line four miles out, you couldn't have done it. But then, the guy on the end there, he had enough units so that we could use material for the whole group. That's the kind of things you had to look for.
- SV: 01:00:47 That sounds like quite a job, considering the area that you were covering. It sounds like quite a job to get that much information about all the farmers in the area to be able to decide where to run the line?
- LW: 01:01:00 Yeah, of course, the area was not as large as it sounds, because we were just getting started. I don't remember when they took this unit system off, but it's not like if they had had it and you'd had to turn them off. Sure, it was a real hardship, in a way. But, like I said, the people understood; they didn't like it. They understood it.
- SV: 01:01:36 By the end of the war, could you make some kind of guess as to the percentage of farmers in the area that were being served by the electricity—rough estimate?
- LW: 01:01:53 We didn't get into South Dakota. After the war, I would guess, that we had in Traverse County, probably about 50 percent. In South Dakota—I can't tell you whether we had built any lines by 1945 or not, in South Dakota.
- 01:02:20 This was a separate deal. We had a meeting of the managers and some of the directors, the manager at Milbank, the manager at Milnor, North Dakota, and our manager, and some of the directors. There was this chunk of territory that had not been given central station service. Along with the engineers, they figured out how it would be most economical which co-op should pick up this group and which co-op should pick up that group.
- SV: 01:03:04 As far as that extra area in South Dakota, there was no new generating facility that was put there, but rather, you just extended your lines that much further?
- LW: 01:03:13 Yeah.
- SV: 01:03:18 You just mentioned that some of the members of a number of co-ops met to decide this. Was the communication, during the war, between the various co-op directors pretty good?

- LW: 01:03:34 Um-hum, yeah. There was some exchange of material to alleviate some of the shortages. This guy might have had a stretch that complied with the regulations and he didn't have the material and maybe we had a little pile of that stuff that we didn't have members that could use. There was exchange there.
- SV: 01:04:05 Then, with that meeting with members from the other boards somewhat frequently, did you get an idea of about how Traverse County fared, as far as being electrified, by the end of the war, compared with the other co-ops in the area?
- LW: 01:04:25 Yeah, I think it was the same, except for the fact that some of the co-ops in South Dakota weren't organized until probably '46, '47. Those areas that were so sparsely settled and had no source of power, were told to get organized.
- SV: 01:04:58 As far as the co-ops that had been in operation about as long as your co-op had been—Traverse County—was about on average?
- LW: 01:05:08 I think the experiences were the same.
- SV: 01:05:14 That's all the questions that I had listed for the REA section. Again, if I've neglected anything that you feel needs to be mentioned, you're certainly welcome to bring it in.
- LW: 01:05:23 I don't know that I have. I have a few little pamphlets, there, which you can look at if you wish. You can take them along. Otherwise, I don't think of anything else. There are some quotes that you might be interested in.
- SV: 01:05:48 Okay, if that's the case, I've got just a few questions that throughout the interview, I'll send.
- LW: 01:05:54 All right.
- SV: 01:06:01 Generally, it seems that community involvement in most areas was very high, during the war. People were more likely to get involved with community activities, whether it be war bonds. Did that level of community involvement seem to carry on after the war was over?
- LW: 01:06:19 No.
- SV: 01:06:20 Dropped down to about what it had been, before?

LW: 01:06:22 Yes, and less.

SV: 01:06:24 And less.

LW: 01:06:25 Yeah, well maybe I'm thinking wrong, here. I'm thinking of community social life, which has definitely suffered, since the war. As farms get larger, commercial entertainment becomes more available, your community social life really deteriorates, just automatically.

01:06:58 We've got farms here now that constitute a township and a half.

SV: 01:07:04 How about activity on community service organizations; things like the REA; things like, perhaps, the PTA and things like this. Did that level of activity drop off also?

LW: 01:07:16 Very much. Here, the PTA died. We get fewer members that are needed every year.

01:07:27 Of course, no. I was going to say, we have fewer members; we don't. We have fewer farms. More members—of course, the new members are largely cottages. There has been a tendency for people out of town to live out of the city limits a little more.

SV: 01:07:53 How about people's political activity; did the war seem to spark people's interest in local and county politics? Did that seem to carry on after the war was over with?

LW: 01:08:08 Yeah, I think that's been the same. I don't know as if there was any great intensification of interest in politics, during the war, and I don't believe it's dropped off since. After all, we get more political propaganda all the time, we can't help getting a little nauseated by it.

SV: 01:08:38 When the veterans came home from the war, when the war was over with, I heard from some people who stayed here, during the war, and worked on farms or in town, that they were sometimes a little bit aggravated by some of the returning veterans in that they would get to form kind of cliques, with the attitude that they had been doing something important, during the war, while the rest of the community, apparently, had not been. Was there any of the sign of this kind of attitude?

LW: 01:09:17 You mean that the veterans formed sort of a clique?

SV: 01:09:21 Yeah.

LW: 01:09:24 I don't think so. Sure, they had their American Legion and their veterans. I think the veterans were entitled to a bit of a beef, for..... Well, a lot of them came home and, when they left, they'd had a business and when they came home, they couldn't pick up their business where they left off. It was pretty rough for them, for a while.

01:09:55 Also, of course, you know and I know that, when these veterans came home, they had some adjustments to make, naturally.

SV: 01:10:09 Adjustments to civilian life?

LW: 01:10:11 Yes.

SV: 01:10:13 Did those adjustments seem to go about as smoothly as can be expected?

LW: 01:10:19 Yes, I certainly think they did. Yeah, I think the veterans did a wonderful—we should really give them credit for the adjustments they made. Some of them, of course, couldn't make it and some of the others of us can't make adjustments, either. I don't think the adjustments are as great as what they had to make.

SV: 01:10:43 You mentioned the rest of the community as far as making adjustments, were there economic adjustments being made by the rest of the community in this area; did the economy seem to slow down a little bit?

LW: 01:10:57 Immediately after the war, it did slow down. One of the things, of course, that aggravated the farmers, though, was that the retail prices of farm products kept right on going up, while the wholesale market price off the farm went down.

01:11:19 But of course, the farmers have been through that so often that they can take it, pretty well. I have to tell you. Right after the war, wheat was selling for three dollars a bushel and bread was eighteen cents a loaf.

01:11:40 A year later, wheat was selling for a dollar and a half a bushel and bread was twenty-four cents a loaf. And that's a common thing of course.

- SV: 01:11:56 I don't know. I didn't listen to the closings, yesterday. I'm not sure what wheat is selling for, right now, but bread is—
- LW: 01:12:04 I don't know why it is, but I know it's way up—completely out of line wheat.
- 01:12:12 You know, there was one time—you don't want this in there. Well, I'll tell you any way.
- 01:12:21 I sent a box of Cheerios to Congressman Odin Langen. The oats for the box of Cheerios cost thirty-four cents. The farmer got seven eighths of a cent for that. For the trading stamps that he got with it, the store paid nine cents. They paid more for the trading stamps than the farmer got for the cereal.
- SV: 01:12:58 A couple more questions on some things that happened right at the end of the war and how the communities' attitudes were toward them.
- 01:13:08 First of all, did the community have any particularly pronounced attitudes at all toward the Soviet Union and their part in the war prior to the division of Germany?
- LW: 01:13:26 The consensus seemed to be that the Soviet Union was pretty much our friend, because they helped lick Germany. That, I think, pretty much summed up the attitude at that time.
- SV: 01:13:41 But then, with the division of Germany, things got—
- LW: 01:13:44 Even that, I don't think—I don't think the people changed their attitude. That's been going on over a period of years. I think it took more years before the people began to realize that Russia had come out of that war with a pretty nice stake.
- SV: 01:14:06 From such things then, like the blockade of Berlin didn't really stir people?
- LW: 01:14:12 The blockade of Berlin did, yes. That started to wake them up. Then, of course, we'd had the iron curtain before that. I don't know if we had the Berlin wall before that, or not.
- SV: 01:14:26 That would have been a little bit after that.
- LW: 01:14:28 It was, huh?

SV: 01:14:29 I think, yeah.

LW: 01:14:34 But it took some time after the war, before the people began to change their attitude towards Russia.

SV: 01:14:44 Did the people in this area have any particular opinions about the formation of the United Nations, after the war?

LW: 01:14:53 I don't think so.

SV: 01:14:54 Or was it something that just kind of—

LW: 01:14:56 I think it's something that they thought was a little beyond their scope. We'd had the United Nations once before, you know.

SV: 01:15:11 The League.

LW: 01:15:13 Yeah, and I think they just thought, "This isn't going to make a heck of a lot of difference, whether or not we have the United Nations."

SV: 01:15:27 Was there a feeling, after the war was over, that it had been handled about as best as it could have been; satisfaction as to the way things had been carried out?

LW: 01:15:36 I think, there again, immediately after the war I think, Yes, that was the feeling.

SV: 01:15:42 You think it changed after that period of time?

LW: 01:15:43 Oh, yeah. Well, let's see, how far are we beyond the war? Thirty-five years. I'd say it took 25 years to change their opinion.

01:16:07 Franklin D. Roosevelt was no longer capable, when the treaties were signed. People were not aware of that, until a long time afterwards. I don't know if everybody agrees to it, now, but it's a fact.

SV: 01:16:31 Very bad shape.

LW: 01:16:33 Yeah. Stalin was able to bully him.

SV: 01:16:46 Those are all the questions that I have listed for the interview. If there's anything that you think needs to be mentioned that I've left out?

LW: 01:16:58 No, I think you've covered it.

SV: 01:17:01 Covered a pretty wide swathe of territory.

LW: 01:17:03 Yeah.

SV: 01:17:04 Thank you, very much for the interview.

LW: 01:17:05 You're sure welcome. I hope I was helpful and I hope I didn't put things in there that I shouldn't have.

SV: 01:17:14 It was a good addition to our collection.

LW: 01:17:17 Good.