

Getty Preservation Grant Interview

WES GRAY INTERVIEW

June 22, 2004

[Second of two interviews with Wes Gray]

Wes Gray
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Morris, MN 56267

[Transcriber's Note: Wes Gray was employed by the WCSA as an instructor of horticulture and was the horticultural researcher from 1948-1973. Wes was in charge of the campus greenhouse and landscaping, and was the grounds supervisor. Peter Orr, who joined the staff in 1972, succeeded him as grounds supervisor.]

Transcriber's Key:

WG: Wes Gray

SG: Stephen Gross

FM: Frank Martin

... Incomplete sentence

[xxx]: Unable to transcribe; dialogue not clear on tape

Interviewers: Steven Gross and Frank Martin

Interview Location: Lounge of Camden Hall

Tape 2: Side 1

SG: ...June 22, 2004 and we are meeting in the lounge to the Social Science Office in Camden Hall and I'm speaking with Frank Martin and Wes Gray. Let me see, how to get started with this... well, Wes why don't you talk a little bit about how you got here, when you started in the late 1940s.

WG: Well, I graduated from the School of Agriculture, got a BS in the spring and was offered a job with Minnesota Valley Canning Company, which was Green Giant, their water [xxx] plant working with peas and corn. The corn harvest was in full swing and there had just been a change out here. Ted Fenske had left here [xxx] Minneapolis and Allan Edson took over as Superintendent. I think he must have called me or something and asked if we could meet at Watertown and we talked for a few minutes, and he wanted to know if I wanted to come up here. He had been teaching economics, and that's what they wanted, someone to teach economics. So we agreed on... I got out of the car and was walking away and he said, "Do you know anything about horticulture?" He had the horticulture for several years, he had been the one taking care of the horticulture work... so that's how I got into that. I worked into... well, economic courses, horticulture courses, and as time went on I got a few others. Sometimes they needed somebody to fill in and I'd fill in...

FM: Well, you're a renaissance man.

WG: I taught first aid, drivers training... In the summer when I started... I guess you'd say a two-man crew... We had one instructor here who had been here for a long, long time -- probably twenty years or so -- he had graduated Carlton, he was a wrestler down there, an English teacher... He raked this whole campus...

FM: Oh, that was Ted Long... Yeah, Les was talking about him. He came from Carlton.

WG: Late '20s. That is about all he did. Very independent. Didn't pay any attention to me. I was supposed to be the superintendent of the grounds...

FM: That was part of your job – you were the horticulture instructor and the superintendent of the grounds.

WG: Basically when I started it was mostly superintendent of grounds – there was very little horticulture.

FM: So it was really a lot of... Since you were plant services management of the campus... So what was the campus like when you arrived in the fall of '47... well it was really the spring of '48 when you started... What was the campus like, what condition was it in?

WG: Most of the plantings – shrubbery, greens, foundation plantings etc. – I don't know who had been doing it before that, I haven't the slightest idea... I don't think it was very structured. When I was first here I started taking things out. I'd more or less say [xxx] the powers that be or the people that were around here, "Well, we'd better get rid of that." [xxx] I don't know if we've got pictures... If we have, I haven't seen them. [xxx] Down where we come in from second street, where the break is...

FM: Right, right here...

WG: No, here.

SG: So, that's the main entrance to campus.

WG: Is that the platform?

FM: Yes.

SG: Yes.

WG: That was there. But this whole area here...

FM: And you're pointing to the area by the split roads.

WG: By the split roads right here... was honeysuckle or more likely lilacs – very tall – and people on campus wanted to get rid of that so we took that out.

FM: So this would come from [Allan] Edson? Edson would tell you to take this out?

WG: I don't know if he told me that or not. Maybe he told me to clean the place up.

SG: Who helped you with the work?

WG: Okay, I had two fellows... until... School was out about the end of March. And I think the heating plant was in operation until, I would think the week we had 4-H kids coming in... hot water... we had two people working in the heating plant and they shifted up to me. One did the mowing, and the other would do whatever work was to be done. Early on, I was by myself.

FM: So the first summer you did a lot of clearing and trimming – in '48. Did you... was the experiment station still doing plantings on campus at that point – windrows and testing ornamental varieties, foundation plantings, and so forth.

WG: I don't know if there was testing or not or foundation plantings. I know we replaced some of them with newer materials. One of them was... hmmm... didn't turn out to be very good after disease hit it about ten years later, [xxx].

FM: Yes. Where would you source your plant material. Would you bring it from the experiment station, or would it come from the Twin Cities, or where would it come from?

WG: Probably local. I really don't know. I know where a few things came from. And if the horticulture department had something they wanted planted – trees, something like that – I put them around campus. But as far as formal planting... I don't think there was anything with foundation plantings.

FM: Well, do you remember, for instance, the origins of these. Now this fellow says in '59 or '60...

SG: These are coniferous trees – spruce, umm...

FM: To the south of education and Spooner... Do you remember planting those, or were those here when you came in 1948?

WG: They had to be here.

FM: Yeah. You also found slides of the ornamental annual garden behind Social Science that we believe was removed when the cow palace was built. Do you remember that ornamental garden being there?

WG: That was built – that was earlier than me.

FM: It was.

WG: Well, wait a minute, when was the cow palace built?

FM: 1950?

SG: Yeah, early '50s.

WG: Then it went out... just prior to it. There was... Do you have pictures of the greenhouse?

SG: Yes.

WG: The greenhouse was moved. And they [xxx] cow palace, and I think that went out a year...

FM: Did you maintain other beds? Did the beds – planting beds – tend to move around? The annual beds? On the east end of the mall, for instance, do you remember planting beds there and what you put in them?

WG: On the east end of the mall? Nope, I took some trees out, I'm pretty sure. In other words, in this area right...

FM: And those were planting beds.

WG: They were. And this picture was what year?

FM: 1959, I'm sorry.

WG: I know they were there, but I don't recall planting anything... there were trees, not trees, shrubs over here, around here, that we pulled out. When I came here [xxx].

FM: From your perspective, in managing the campus landscape, what were some of the biggest maintenance problems you had? Was it blight? Was it aging trees? Was it drought?

WG: Up until... I don't know if [xxx] or not... the last fifteen to eighteen years, at least that's what I figured [xxx] '50s, '60s, early '70s – we basically managed [xxx] for a three-week period of drought sometime during the summer. We didn't know when it was going to hit, but it did. We haven't had [xxx] those consistently.

FM: So that meant there were certain species that you didn't plant because they were not drought tolerant?

WG: I don't think we realized what was drought tolerant. We had very limited plant materials available.

FM: Yes, yes.

WG: As far as the conifers, there was just the spruce. Planted a few pine but not [xxx]. And then... you know, in between what is now the... where the old music hall was... and the gymnasium, there are a couple of flowering crabs. I got a group of about 20 or 30 flowering crabs one year and we spotted them around campus. What are there, two left, three left? Most of them died. Some of them were taken out. Most of them died. And behind the – I don't know what it's called now – this building across from this building over there...

FM: Blakely.

WG: Okay. There's a couple of locusts back there. We planted those. I don't know if there's one left or two left. We planted three or four – two different varieties. One did fair, the other one didn't do anything at all.

FM: Did you continue to teach horticulture? Did you involve students in any of this work? Did they do summer projects or anything involving the campus?

WG: No. Yes they did summer projects. In most cases it was something for their 4-H project. Don't know what it was.

SG: I'm still confused by the process by which you got material, and the kinds of material you got. So, Wes, if you wanted to do flowering crabs, did you contact Minneapolis or St. Paul or did people just send you stuff?

WG: They just sent them.

SG: Okay. Who made the decision what to send? Was it people in the experiment station?

WG: Oh yes, definitely. The Department of Horticulture.

FM: From the Twin Cities?

WG: Yeah...no, no...

FM: From here.

WG: No... The people on the St. Paul campus.

FM: The Department of Horticulture.

SG: Did you have to communicate with these guys? Would they...they sent you stuff, would you have to report back to them and say we planted x number of trees and a year later some of them aren't faring well, some of them are. How did that work?

WG: They sent them out. Plant these. And they were included in the research project that people down there had. I had to write reports each spring – well, after the first year. I guess it would be... well something maybe in the spring, recording what had happened.

SG: Were they at all hands on? Did they come out and check them out or would all this happen through the mail?

WG: Depends on who it was.

FM: Were those records published in the experiment station bulletin or something from St. Paul?

WG: Yes.

FM: In theory someone was using this data you were assembling.

WG: Not definitely...

FM: Are there any records of that here in Morris? Was any of it saved?

WG: I doubt it.

FM: We've seen things like this – Sue Granger and I have seen things like this -- well, the various bulletins over at the experiment stations have recordings of what survived and what didn't in the early years from what was being planted... I didn't realize this was being done. How late did you continue doing this, up until the '60s?

WG: Until Peter came. That may have been 1970.

FM: So you did it through the '60s. So Peter really took your position?

SG: So was this – I'm not really very smart about any of this so I'm asking some stupid questions – would this include trees, shrubs, flowers – you're using, what's the term you're using – foundational plants... Is that like bigger trees?

FM: It's like hedges around steps and foundations.

WG: Around the foundations of the... where you wanted to break with the lines.

SG: So what plantings would be shipped from St. Paul? Everything, or just the bigger stuff?

FM: Sounds like everything. You were getting some shrubs, some trees...?

WG: Oh yeah. At that time – I'm trying to think – probably as far as trees were concerned it would be more apple trees than maybe all the combined.

FM: And shrubs, were you getting things like currant or lilac, or mock orange...

WG: No we just picked them up ourselves. I don't recall having any plant materials' man on the staff at that time. Maybe there was.

FM: Were you doing anything with the windbreaks? Were you planting in the windbreaks?

WG: Yeah. Most of the windbreaks around here I planted. Or... and that was probably through forestry. There wasn't too much here. Most of the windbreaks on this campus were planted when I got... when I arrived.

FM: When you arrived? So for instance, the windbreak on the north – to the north of the seed house – you planted this windbreak?

WG: That was planted, I think, I'm not sure when, but probably in '42 or '43, something like that. Originally, the planting was planted prior to the drought period.

FM: In the twenties perhaps.

WG: Nope, thirties. 400 trees were planted and three survived, and I used to know which three they were. [xxx] spruce [xxx] and it was replanted. I had pictures, I can't find them now, where all the trees in that windbreak were understumped.

FM: Which windbreaks did you work on then? There was one that used to come over – well, this one came over where HFA is now. Did you work on these windbreaks here near the cemetery. Did you work on this one over...then which ones did you work on?

WG: Actually, there's more of a windbreak I worked on [xxx] but that moved from this... up there...

FM: To the experiment station.

WG: To the experiment station.

FM: Okay. Okay. So many of those, yes [xxx]. Do you remember how these trees came to be? These must have been here when you showed up. By the cow barn. Although there are several new ones...

SG: Is that the horse pasture?

FM: Yeah, this was a pasture wasn't it? Now where we are pointing to the area between the cow barn and the...

WG: Nope, nope [xxx]

SG: So where the parking lot is now is where the...

WG: Yes.

FM: These trees, we're trying to figure out when they were planted – these spruce. So engineering, cow barn... We're trying to figure out when this spruce row just to the south of the north parking lot was installed and who might have done it.

WG: This is the road here...

FM: Yes.

WG: When I came, this area was agronomy plot's grasses.

FM: I'm sorry, say again.

WG: Agronomy.

FM: Agronomy plots?

WG: Grasses. And first...

SG: So that's the area that's west of the machine shed. Okay.

WG: The first year I was here, I had this area here. There was an older building up here. I had this area here.

SG: That's in front of the machine shop.

WG: About two or three years later, I got this area here.

FM: Right to the north of engineering. Were you involved with the experiment station in running test plots up there? In that area? And who would tell you what to put in test plots? Was that your decision or someone...

WG: I put in a few things, but people from the department or maybe the extension people...

FM: And then would you record the progress of these different plantings?

WG: Yes.

FM: Would farmers come to visit these plots and talk to you or the extension people?

WG: At that time horticulture was a dirty word.

SG: Yeah, I'm sure.

FM: But you were doing...these weren't kitchen gardens you were doing...

SG: What kinds of plants would you have in the vegetable gardens?

WG: The ones I remember were potatoes, and I imagine I was partially responsible myself because I grew up on a potato farm. Squash, because they [xxx] down in St. Paul, and tomatoes...I think I had tomatoes too... plots of tomatoes through the years I was here.

FM: And you recorded all the different results.

WG: Yep, from the time I started. I had the first one in '48 and I had one when I retired in '80.

FM: Forty years. That's a lot. And were these results published somewhere, in a bulletin or were they sent to St. Paul?

WG: It's [xxx] the extension horticulturists used that material an awful lot [xxx]. As far as the tomatoes were concerned, some of the standard varieties and then [xxx], would be the same with the squash. And then also, Superintendent Edson was interested in some of these things and every once in awhile he'd find something. As a matter of fact, when I first came here...

FM: [xxx] the area...

WG: The superintendent's house was right here. [xxx] Up in here somewhere, I'm not sure. The trees must have been [xxx] up in here [xxx]. And when I took over [xxx].

SG: So what do you mean he had his own garden? Was it for his own personal family use? Or was he a horticulturalist himself?

WG: He was interested in horticulture.

SG: Okay, okay. So it was an experimental garden. It wasn't a practical kitchen garden.

WG: No, for him it was a kitchen garden.

FM: When you were doing all this, was some of the produce then used in the dining hall during the year when the students came back? Was it canned?

WG: We had nobody to do that.

FM: You had nobody to do that.

WG: Are you aware of [xxx] down there?

SG: Yes.

WG: Okay. And are you aware that we had a pretty good-sized orchard?

FM: Yes.

WG: Okay. I imagine about the third or fourth day I was on the job, [xxx] said, "you go down to Benson, to the Fahls down there," which would be... there were several Fahl boys that were in school here... and get some potatoes for the winter. I'd get directions to the farm... of course, they supplied them for years. I just told them we needed 300 or 400 bushel... As far as the orchard was concerned... when I first came...there was an orchard behind, basically where the apartments are.

FM: Yes, yes... sort of down here. Down here? Oh, the apartments are here. Yes, the student apartments are here.

SG: So behind the power plant?

WG: No, no. Over here. You were behind the power plant. No. Where was the herdsman house?

SG: Right there.

WG: Okay, okay. It would be this area here...

FM: Which would be to the southeast, adjacent to the cow barn.

WG: That had been discontinued after I came. At that time it was about all that was left of the stone fruits.

FM: The what?

WG: Stone fruits – plums. At that time it was plums.

FM: But the other main orchard was down where the PE complex is now, right?

WG: That was the west end of it. We had about 800 trees in there.

FM: Is that then what supplied the school? And who would pick those apples? And the other fruits?

WG: As far as the apples were concerned, let's see, probably about where the PE center is now and back, there was 40 rows of fruits trees, basically apples, planted east and west. And when I got here the first 20 rows had been planted. And some of them were fairly old. I imagine before 1930.

FM: [xxx]

WG: Two years or was it three years before I got here, they worked over an awful lot of those trees and they were older varieties. They came out from the horticultural – the fruit breeding farm at that time – came out and grafted. They grafted about 100 trees. But some of the older varieties that were there were [xxgreenxx, patent xxgreenxx, northwest xxgreensxx]. Patent greens didn't do to well. Northwestern did. And that was what was picked and put down in the [xxx].

FM: The apples...

WG: The apples with the potatoes. You're not supposed to put the two of them together, but they were. Basically, the crew that I had or the [xxx] farm crews, at that time we could switch people where needed, and somehow we got the apples in.

FM: Yes, you said that, in a way, for your job as an instructor and plant superintendent, grounds superintendent, the summer months were more important than the winter months because you were doing all this research and so forth.

WG: To us that was more important. None of us were trained to be teachers but we did a pretty good job. Then, the real teachers were the people in the [xxx] department. They went through training to be teachers.

FM: I see, yes. So you were more like professional staff, you were extension staff... or what were you called for twelve months?

WG: Let's see... basically we were all associated with the St. Paul campus, department of horticulture, engineering, and agronomy.

FM: Were you a professor. What was your title?

WG: [xxx]

FM: Extension specialist?

WG: Nope, we weren't supposed to be doing extension. But that is what we did an awful, awful lot of.

FM: Why is horticulture a bad word among farmers?

WG: Because it was the woman's job. She took care of the garden.

FM: What if you just called it agronomy, or something instead. Would that have made a difference?

WG: No. It's still that way. You have people on the West Central Council, who when we plant the alumni garden, one of the fellows, he wife told me, she said, "Well, we're not going to be there." He told me earlier that they wouldn't be able to do it, "I'm not very good at planting." But he's planting all the time. He's using machines. But it just... and horticulture was big at that time – vegetables and fruit, vegetables more of all the... It supplied the entire – I shouldn't say the entire – but an awful lot of the food supply. Canning. Freezing hadn't come into the picture at that time.

FM: It's interesting, since the beginning of the WCSA, farmers did come to campus to look at the hogs, and to look at the test wheat plots and so forth, but they didn't associate it with horticulture. So I don't understand why they associated your test plots when you were growing things like potatoes and so forth, why that was horticulture.

WG: Yes, but they were not associated with them – those things. We had a summer field day, which was the second week in July. I had a plot trial out there, and I would be out there on the field day. And some people...but usually it was the wife that would come up and talk to me.

FM: Perhaps because they were doing it more for the kitchen garden at home, and home canning, and, where as the monocrops, the big crops -- the corn, wheat, beans, and so forth -- were more the man's realm.

WG: Yeah.

SG: Well that's interesting.

FM: So your test plots were generally smaller than the ones that the agronomists, the larger scale...

WG: Yeah, yeah.

FM: What was the average size of your test plots?

WG: I don't know. I don't remember. Weren't too big.

SG: How many varieties of tomatoes, or how many tomato plants would you do every year.

WG: I don't know how many I had down here, but I know when we moved up to the top of the hill... I did the same number of varieties every year. It would be approximately 800 plants.

FM: 800 tomatoes?

WG: Not tomatoes, the plants. [xxx]

SG: So if the one garden feeds students, what would you do with them?

WG: I never... when I was up there, students weren't here at that time.

SG: If they weren't canned, ultimately what happened to those tomatoes?

WG: Okay. Now I'm talking about a new location. We could sell them, usually.

FM: Did you have sales or just sell them to a cannery?

WG: People knew we were picking, and they'd call the office and they would be put on a list for so many bushels of tomatoes.

SG: I wonder why anyone would maintain a backyard garden. You could just go up and I'm sure you could buy produce really cheaply from the experiment station.

FM: In your experiments, what were some of the variables you were looking at? Were you doing different soil amendments? Was it mostly just testing varieties?

WG: Basically testing varieties...okay, I have to go back a long way here. You are probably acquainted with the climatic conditions now. If we go back to that period, the late '40s and '50s, and I think at least up until '70, we had a shorter growing season. Basically, quite a bit shorter. We figured the last spring frost would be about the 25th of May, so called killing frost, and any time after the first of September, almost invariably by the 10th, we had our fall frost. And many of the new varieties that came out did not mature in the growing season at that time. So the pressure was getting earlier, earlier, earlier produce.

FM: Finding products that could...

WG: Finding varieties that could stand... first the drought conditions, if we didn't have water or irrigation, and the growing season.

FM: The short growing season.

WG: As an example, one of the very common pepper varieties now, was not available at that time. It would be a week and a half to 2 weeks short of maturing before the frost. And that was the big push, temperature or drought conditions.

FM: It's really a noticeable difference in the warming... what is your killing frost up here now?

WG: It's gotten into October.

FM: Yeah, where I live in Excelsior it's usually around my birthday, which is October 9th, a little later. And then my grandpa used to say you shouldn't plant things before Memorial Day, but what they say on seed packets is May 10th for Minneapolis.

SG: I think we are one zone removed from that.

FM: Are you Zone 3?

WG: We are the borderline 3 and 4.

FM: I was going to ask you also about the different experiment stations and the HRC down in Excelsior and Victoria. Did you know Leon Snyder, did you work with him down there?

WG: Awful, awful lot.

FM: He came up here didn't he? I thought I saw his name on some experiment things. Or you had correspondence with him.

WG: I don't remember what Leon was really working with before we started the arboretum, and when he got there... well that took all his time. Then he became [xxx]. But I knew Leon the entire time.

FM: You're right, you knew him well. Were they sending, did he ever send you [xxx] shrubs and things to test up here in Zone 3A or B, or whatever....

WG: Not that I remember.

FM: Because I got the sense that when these experiment stations were set up, the one in Victoria became the arboretum, was the state horticultural research center, the state fruit farm, and it's still there.

WG: Yeah, the fruit farm but not the arboretum.

FM: No. But the arboretum didn't start until '55 so...

[Side one ends]

Tape 2: Side 2

FM: ...sent them back to St. Paul or something like that. So how did you know Leon? Did you go down there to see him, or was it faculty staff meetings you knew him from?

WG: I don't know.

FM: Interesting. He was really the founder of the arboretum. He wrote the sort of classic book. What's it called? "Ornamental Shrubs for Northern Climate." It's all the different...back in the '60s you know, most of this stuff you couldn't grow. You couldn't grow magnolias, azaleas, any of those...all of them have been hybridized. He did a lot of that.

WG: I imagine Leon, when he was the extension man... when he wasn't there, when he wasn't traveling... very long period after I got here... But as I mentioned earlier, we got an awful lot of trees in the orchard out here. When I came here, about 20 of them were complaining to the others that maybe there's a tree here and maybe there's a gap [xxx], and we almost filled that with 20 trees to a row with new varieties – not necessarily new varieties, experimental...I don't know if you want to call them varieties now, experimental plants...

FM: Some of the new introductions that Minnesota boasts. When you moved over to the new experiment station in '67, is that when...

WG: '73... no, no, I'm wrong. You're right, '67. We bought it in '65 and... okay what was your question now?

FM: When you moved over there, did you stop taking care of this orchard here? When was this orchard abandoned?

WG: You left the machine on [xxx].

FM: It's off, it stopped, it ran out of tape.

SG: No, it reverses. But we can stop it.

[tape is shut off]

FM: So we are talking about the experiment station and the new gardens.

WG: When I left Steve didn't like the vegetable work very well, and he had become very involved... I let him run the small fruits. He worked for me 16 years before I retired. Then he... I had an awful lot of shrubbery up there. A regional... 7 states and three Canadian provinces, plus Alaska was involved with it, and they took it.

FM: This was up at the experiment station?

WG: Yep. Up there. And now it's [xxx]. The whole area all the way back I had [xxx] in my plots for, I think it was twelve or fifteen years or so. The soil wasn't as good as it should be. Several years...if we could plant an area we put [xxx] crops and so on and built up the soil. And there was a change, all of a sudden the [xxx] companies, basically the ornamental companies, wanted testing done. I was doing it to a smaller scale to what they are doing it now. That along, of course, when a company comes along [xxx] from Chicago says they have something up here, and their competitors find out about it, why they are going to have get something in there.

FM: Can you remember what size companies they were, their names? These were big ornamental shrub growers?

WG: Of course there was Burpee, [xxx], I don't think of the other names because we had quite a few companies at that time.

FM: When was this, in the '70s?

WG: The '70s. The '70s and '80s.

FM: And are they still doing contract testing with those people?

WG: That's all they do up there.

FM: And they pay the university to do this?

WG: Yeah.

SG: Was it that way in the '40s, '50s, and '60s?

WG: If I had to test something... basically, once in awhile your run across one of the salesmen, or one of the salesmen would show up and [xxx].

FM: The windbreaks you planted up there? Were those experimental, or demonstration, or both?

WG: I'll have to decide. No one told me to plant those windbreaks. We moved up there and I realized that was where the buildings were going to go, and we needed protection from the northwest wind. So as soon as, I think in '67, maybe in '66 I started putting a windbreak along the road. And then the one on the west end... I don't know if you've been up there, around that area, way back where they've got the larch...

FM: I didn't see... you've got a larch windrow?

WG: I don't know if you can get back there... but if you go back there where the planting is now, just continue around [xxx]. And we did quite a bit of work with larch. We had one fellow in the forestry department and extension who thought we should be working with larch.

FM: There must be several layers of deciduous and spruce trees and so forth... Would you have any recommendations for the Getty Project for restoring the north windbreak and so forth here. Do you have any recommendations on how to go about that, because obviously the north windbreak is declining fast and appears from cutting down small sections...

WG: I guess if I had to make a decision, I would plant only one type of plant...

FM: Oh, you'd use a monoculture.

WG: Yeah.

FM: And what would that be?

WG: Black Hills Spruce.

FM: Why Black Hills Spruce? Because of its durability?

WG: Well, I had a couple of the extension horticulturists who traveled the state for years and years and years, told me that the best stands of Black Hills Spruce are found in this area of the state. Which is surprising...not Colorado, but the Black Hills.

FM: How long do they live?

WG: What do you mean by live... live or look good?

FM: Well, let's start with look good.

WG: I doubt if they could go over thirty years.

FM: So that is the question about these demonstration windbreaks that were started after WWI. Farmers have these now, I'm sure, all over this part of the state and they are dying out, they are reaching their maturity or they are past it. How do you terminate them? Do you cut them down? Do you interplant new species?

WG: That's what they're doing.

FM: What?

WG: They're interplanting.

FM: Yes. And is that something that could be done with the windbreaks here. It would be kind of hard. I mean you could put in a small spruce... 40-foot locusts... or do you start a windbreak next to the old one and then cut the old one down. This is the question we are facing because we're finding, for instance, there were distinct... There were eight rows in some of the north windbreak. As you know, that there were triple rows of locusts, they would use spruce, then they would have... to the north, a smaller row of [xxx] to create a drift for the snow, to catch the snow. All experimental. So if you're going to be historically accurate, in a sense, would we create at least that diversity if not those exact species? On the other hand, in the spirit of purpose rather than the literal, maybe we'd replant entirely with one species, or a new type of experiment. These are some of the questions...

SG: Because something has to be done because there's not going to be a north row left in a few years.

WG: To answer your questions, I don't know what... If you want to go back to earlier years, it was just a monoculture. The windbreak that you are talking about where you have spruce and other deciduous and so on... That involved [xxx] in the forties, the early forties, and that's what we were selling, selling to extension workers...

FM: You were promoting that.

WG: Promoting it.

FM: What was the term for that kind of windbreak?

WG: Farm shelterbelt.

FM: You were promoting a mixed deciduous and coniferous species.

WG: There's a reason for it.

FM: It's more dense, and when mature it provides a greater wind reduction and enclosure.

WG: Yeah...on the outside row, is a shrub of some kind that will trap the snow. And then what problem many people had is that you're suppose to leave a 30-50 foot strip before your first trees. So your first trees, I forget the exact... how many rows you put in... they will be a relatively tall growing tree.

FM: Like a poplar...

WG: Yep. On the inside you have spruce [xxx] something to catch the snow that slides through. I don't know if you're familiar with the way the wind curves or not, the way the wind blows. t hits the windbreak, it goes up, and it falls in lengths. Ten lengths times the height of the tree. So if your trees are 20 feet high, it doesn't come down until its 200 feet away. And the idea was to

force the wind up... catch the snow first, force it up, and anything that slides through is kept by the spruce. And a couple of the farmsteads [xxx].

FM: Yeah, I've read it in old bulletins in the archives. That's what so interesting. And if this is a historic landscape element because farmers would come to see this, presumably and earlier they started it, much earlier than that, but it died. So the question is how do we interpret that. Maybe this is something that we interpret through signage or a small demonstration and not the whole windrow. Maybe you just do a cross section that is 100 feet long. But it's a very important part of the history of the state and it'd be interesting to know... if you go around to see more of the extension bulletins that were done to promote this, mixed type. When do you think they stopped promoting the mixed type and started just the monoculture?

WG: I don't know. I don't know what they're doing now.

FM: Do you know someone we should talk to in extension who would be helpful now? Are there people over at the station who could help us with current windbreak issues?

WG: I don't think there are windbreak issues. There's nobody in St. Paul anymore.

FM: But why do you think... with all the concern about soil conservation and all... this is actually about soil conservation. Why is it that nobody [xxx]?

WG: The windbreak work has been taken over by the soil conservation service because there's planting money available for planting.

FM: One thing we talked about is maybe getting a federal grant, maybe from SCS to restore these windbreaks here on campus. And we have sort of a research question here in that these are aging windbreaks like millions – well not millions – but thousands of farmers have and it would be an interesting research experiment for that. Do you know...should we contact... are they in St. Paul? Or where is SCS based?

WG: The local unit is here.

FM: So the university is out of the windrow business. That's kind of what we heard.

WG: We're out of... okay, today is Tuesday. Sunday I talked to one of those we had here a few years ago who was a director of the experiment stations out state on the St. Paul campus. In other words, St. Paul campus [xxx] probably a couple other branch stations were part of that. He's retired. Living in St. Paul. He said, as far as the St. Paul campus is concerned it's just [makes whooshing noise] like that – going down.

FM: No research money? Are they...

WG: Research money and the change. We don't have the people. Conditions have changed and we don't have... our extension people are not thoroughly involved, not very much involved in agriculture. There not involved in the same fields that they used to be involved in.

FM: Yes, yes. I think that's... I went to Wisconsin and we have a very powerful extension service, but it's really changed. It's also been cut back because of finances, but they are more into community development and economic development, sustainability... And the research, my school, landscape architecture, was in the ag college and they had moved away from a lot of this stuff towards genomics and biotech, where they were getting corporate sponsorships.

WG: That's the name of the game now. You get to wherever you can pick up money.

SG: Yeah that's the privatization of the university, and the corporatization of the university.

FM: That's like you were saying. The Cenex and some of the developers have taken over the demonstrations of certain types of plants and so forth.

WG: Of course the seed companies are doing a lot. They are now what the extension people used to be.

FM: They have the field days now. They do it probably as a marketing campaign.

WG: Well, definitely. They actually have people out there taking care of the crops.

FM: That's an interesting point too. In a way that whole concept of a field day for this campus is out of date now because of this corporatization – the seed companies have taken over some of it – you've got Burpee experimenting on the university lands, but the university is no longer the prime research agent and promoter of this stuff, other people are. So the question is what is the next generation of field day for this campus?

SG: Actually you have miniature sorts of field days. During the spring people practicing alternative agriculture take over a part of the mall and have little stands where they promote their products. But it is so modest... it is not designed for the larger community. It's designed for students who are interested in organic farming and vegen diets and these sorts of things. And it's become marginalized, it's seen as being alternative. It's not seen as being part of the mainstream.

FM: One of the [xxx] too is now making this campus a model for sustainability with wind generation, biomass energy and so forth. In a sense the campus could become model for that.

WG: Somebody's got to do it and we're...

FM: That's what really interests me because we can learn. As you say history can be usable and we can learn from history. Say what's the next generation to help this region from this campus. It could be all sorts of things. I mean the small [xxfilmsxxx] center here is basically about outreach, right? Extending the university ideas and research out to the [xxball fieldsxxx]? I think it's fascinating. This plan is much more than about whether we plant currant hedges or not it's about the whole mission and the need and how it's perceived -- the landscape – to the next generation.

WG: You mentioned field days. Waseca is having their field day today... yeah, Tuesday, today... They're pushing it pretty hard on the radio. But...

FM: How far is Waseca from here?

WG: I don't know.

SG: It's a ways.

FM: Lowell came from there.

SG: Yeah. I drove it once, and it took me a good four hours I think.

WG: Do you drive slow?

SG: I took the scenic route.

WG: It's about... is it forty miles west of Owatonna?

FM: Oh, okay.

SG: There's not a good way of getting here.

FM: From where I live you just go down 35.

WG: But they've got their field day and they said they had registration at 8 o'clock and tours are starting at 8:30. If you're not there, you're going to miss the tour. You go out and you come back and they're not doing that...

FM: Are they bus tours? Are they going out on a bus?

WG: I don't know how they're doing it but anyway, the tours are leaving at 8:30.

FM: I'll have to do it sometime. You still have yours here every second week of July?

WG: But down there also... there's a charge of \$20 and that's for the transportation some refreshments and so on. An awful, awful lot of people who used to come to these field days were retired or maybe some of these people from town had an agricultural background are not going to pay for something like that. If there's free coffee, yes.

FM: Speaking of [xxx] you are coming to our conference tomorrow?

WG: I've got to make up my mind.

SG: It's sort of like a field day but it's for campus managers.

WG: I think I'll come out for the meeting, session tomorrow afternoon.

FM: The part tomorrow night won't be so... it's not worth coming in here at night for... But I think that the part where Mary Hughes talks about Virginia will be very interesting, and Sue will talk about the history of this campus but you know that.

SG: You should make that...when Sue talks.

WG: I've been on her... but...

FM: She's worked so hard. She really deserves all the credit for this. She has worked so hard on this thing. And I think the tree guy, what's his name? You know, must know him...he's coming...speaking on Wednesday morning?

SG: Jason Carlson.

WG: I don't know him. When is that program?

SG: Let's stop this.

[tape ends]