

Getty Preservation Grant Interviews

LES LINDOR INTERVIEW

March 24, 2004

[First of two interviews with Les Lindor]

Les Lindor
Northridge Drive
Morris, MN 56267

[Transcriber's Note: Les Lindor attended WCSA from 1934-1938. He was an instructor in the Ag Engineering department and was superintendent of buildings and grounds from 1949 through 1959 for WCSA, and for UMM from 1960-1965.]

Interviewer: Professor Stephen Gross
Interview Location: Les Lindor's Home

Transcriber's Key:

LL: Les Lindor

SG: Stephen Gross

... : Incomplete sentence

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

Tape 1: Side 1

SG: This is Steve Gross. I'm in the home of Les Lindor. It is Wednesday night, March 24, 2004. We're going to get started

LL: Very good.

SG: I first wanted to thank you for participating and giving me this opportunity to talk with you. I'm going to start off just by asking some general questions about your background, where you were born, what your father did, size of family, these kinds of things. If you can just fill in some of that background information. Where and when were you born?

LL: I was born April 14, 1920, and I was born in Nora Township, which would be about 5 miles north of Cyrus. We had a family of 4 boys and 3 girls. I was pretty much in the middle. I was the 3rd child.

SG: Your father was a farmer?

LL: Yes, my father was a farmer...and a relatively small farmer. We farmed 320 acres of land, milked about 12, 15 cows, maybe had 8, 10 brood sows, and a flock of chickens and a flock of turkeys, pretty much diversified farm.

SG: Norwegian?

LL: No. My father was Swedish, and my mother was German.

SG: Were they immigrants, or second generation?

LL: No, no. Second generation. Both of them born and raised in the United States.

- SG: Okay... and what was your education like before you went to school here at West Central?
- LL: I just went to 8th grade country school, 52 students. We had one teacher. We had one room. All 8 grades.
- SG: So about 10 kids per grade.
- LL: Yeah -- 50, and we had 8 grades. That'd be 6 or 7. When your class would assemble, you'd move up to the front, and you had it so full that you had only about 3 feet between you and the blackboard, and that was sort of your recitation area. You went to the blackboard; you had about 2, 3 feet to move.
- SG: In country school, was it pretty much September through May, or was it more erratic than that where you took time off during harvest?
- LL: No, country school was pretty standard. After that, then, when I went to the West Central School, that was tailored then to meet the needs of the farm kids, so we basically started after the summer work was done. About October 1, we started school, and then we were let out the end of March. We were in position then to help with the farm work. And then to make up for the shortened school year, we had home projects that we did during the summer. Theoretically, then, we had 6 months of classroom, and then 3 months of home project work.
- SG: I just discovered at the Minnesota Historical Society these broad volumes of, what's it called, "The Projector." This was the newsletter that had to do with all these home projects. Let's talk about your West Central days, and I think the place to start is your first day of school, if you can recall and describe what your first day of school was like here.
- LL: Well, it was right in the middle of the depression. We weren't used to going any place. We were pretty much confined to home.
- SG: So this was 1934.
- LL: 1934, yeah. Pretty much confined to home, and we got down to the county fair, and to church. It was 8 miles to go to church -- most of the time, in an old car. In the wintertime, it was sled and team; so obviously, our attendance at church was not that good. So when I started up at the West Central then, I lived in the dormitory, and ate at the dining hall. Scared to death. Never really been away from home.
- SG: You were 14.
- LL: I was 14. Yeah, I was 14. I had really... You talk about kids that are socially backward; I would be one of the top ones in that rank. I'd really never been away from home.
- SG: Had older brothers and sisters gone off?
- LL: No, they hadn't. Actually, my oldest sister died at 14. She had an appendicitis operation. She didn't survive. My older brother did not go. So I was the first one in the family. My folks were very interested in me going to school because neither one of them had gone to high school, and I was fortunate. I got reasonably good grades in high school, or grade school, so I can still recall my dad saying, "Somehow we're going to send Les on to school." That's how I...
- SG: It sounds like it was a bit of a sacrifice for them to do so.

- LL: The only thing that helped was it really didn't cost them any money, because we had help from, I think they call it the NYA, National Youth Administration. I think they gave us \$20 per month. We had that then for 6 months. Then, of course, we didn't have the \$20, so then we worked. I worked off \$15 of that \$20. I milked cows. I got up at 5:00 in the morning and milked cows, and wound up correcting papers and doing janitor work, and the only thing that helped was that everybody was pretty much in the same fix.
- SG: I was going to ask...
- LL: A couple exceptions. We had a couple fellows from the western part of the state, and their dad was a road contractor. He'd come up there every couple weeks and give each of the kids \$20, and our mouth just watered to think that someday we would get \$20.
- SG: So there actually were some people whose parents weren't farmers?
- LL: Yeah, these guys were road contractors. You didn't have to be a farmer, see, if you had your 8th grade diploma... was the only way you were eligible to enroll. Then you see, what happened, like that first class, some of these kids had come back from the CC camps, I think they called them at that time, and...
- SG: Civilian Conservation Corps.
- LL: Yeah, Civilian Conservation. And, of course, when they came out of there, they didn't have anything to do, so they clambered on to this opportunity to go to ag school. I was 14 years old and weighed about 130 pounds wringing wet, and some of these guys were about 20 years old and 200 pounds. Our football team, freshman football team, averaged 209 lbs. on the line. I was about 130, so I flew around like a ping-pong ball. It was interesting times.
- SG: Let's talk a little bit about curriculum, and the course of study, the various sorts of things you did. What was the curriculum like?
- LL: It actually was not that bad, but the first thing you have to be aware of that fact is that a lot of these kids were basically going to be farmers, so when they came around to algebra and geometry and some of those things, they weren't very interested. If you're going to farm, why did you need that? My heart always went out to [xxNana Geltrudex] who was the math instructor because she didn't have a lot of enthusiasm in that class. So, I think what had to happen then she was to some extent curtailed in what she could teach because the kids just were not [xxx].
- SG: So it had to have been applied mathematics....
- LL: Applied mathematics
- SG: And the emphases were on being practical, understanding that these kids were going to go back to the farm and they need to know how to balance the books....
- LL: And balance the ration for their hogs, figure the number, a ton of hay is a stack, bushels of grain in a certain sized barrel. On the other hand, if they're ready to, it was equivalent to high school, because you could go... I went from here then directly down into the Institute of Technology down in Minneapolis campus. Admittedly, I had to take a course in higher algebra and solid geometry to get into I.T., but nevertheless went on, and didn't seem to have any problems.

SG: When you first started, or any time during your days here, what would an average day have been like?

LL: Well, we usually start at 8:00 in the morning. Classes, I think, would start at 8, and then we would run... I don't remember now for sure if they were 50-minute classes... We would have morning, and afternoons a lot of times then there would be laboratory classes, chemistry lab, mechanics lab, and they would do some work in blacksmithing and welding. We'd do some forge work, we'd make log chains, and make double trees, the irons that had to go on to that which we made in the lab.

SG: So where were those buildings?

LL: Alright, the Social Science building, I think is now, where, that's where we had most of our... And then the mechanics, electricity, physics and so on was over in the Engineering building.

SG: Which is...

LL: That's where the bookstore is now. That was a lower part of that....

SG: The Community Ed Building today. I think that's what it's called.

LL: The whole bottom part was just a large, big wide-open space. We could bring in tractors. We'd bring in cars. We'd bring in machinery and we would adjust them in there. Up above were the office and classrooms.

SG: So you did mechanics, and blacksmithing, some mathematics, chemistry....

LL: Yup, chemistry, yup.

SG: Anything in the social sciences? Did they make you take history?

LL: Oh, yeah, we had to take history. We had English. We had debate. We had pretty much everything covered.

SG: How did that compare to high schools at that time?

LL: I don't really know. I looked at it... I've always looked at it this way. Those kids came because they wanted to come. They weren't forced to come. I always felt they were probably just a cut above the average high school because these guys wanted to go to school. I think the way it was set up, they pretty much had to do their studying because we had study hours, and they were supervised. They had evening hours, maybe 7-10, you see.

SG: Did most of the instructors live on campus?

LL: No. Very few did. The preceptors at the dormitories lived there. At the time when I went to school, from where the gate is now over to what we call the courthouse hill, there was nothing in there, in between. It was wide-open, 1934. Then, Bridgeford, Holden and Long, they built houses along that street. Otherwise, they were pretty well scattered, but I think I'm safe in saying that everybody lived within the city of Morris.

SG: So the preceptors, monitors, would be....

LL: They had living quarters in there, and they checked the kids in and out, and supervised their study halls.

SG: So you would go to class during the day and study at night.

LL: That's right, yup. And then there would be class plays or debate, evening activities, and that would be scheduled. Then the faculty would have to come back.

SG: So did you participate in debate and theater? It sounds like you were a football player.

LL: Yeah, I played football.

SG: Were you good?

LL: Let me go back to what I said before. Most of those kids were 180, 190, 200 lbs. I was 130. I could run.

SG: You'd have to.

LL: They had me playing end, then, and I could catch a pass, see, but we weren't that skilled. I didn't do much as far as basketball. If I was going to say I excelled at anything, it'd be in softball. I was a softball pitcher, and I pitched a lot of softball here, and I pitched in the classic leagues in Minneapolis. I did a lot of that. Eventually wound up playing baseball. They wouldn't let me pitch around here anymore, so I had to leave that, and I had to go to baseball.

SG: Good for you. Who were your big rivals?

LL: Crookston, a big rival. And then Grand Rapids had a school up there.

SG: That was the forestry school, right?

LL: Actually it was an agricultural school. Similar to... They had livestock up there, and crops. Crookston and Morris were the big rivalry. Then St Paul had an ag campus down there. And then I think at one point in time Duluth had some up there, but I don't recall if we ever played Duluth. Probably didn't have an athletic program.

SG: Did you play area high schools?

LL: Very seldom. We played Morris, yeah, just sort of, I think, Morris, and then played pretty much within our conference.

SG: Was there a rivalry with Morris?

LL: Yeah. We didn't get along too good.

SG: Not surprising.

LL: They didn't like to play us guys, because most of them were farm kids and they were pretty powerful. They were in pretty good shape. They loved to pick on me, city slickers, downtown Morris.

SG: What in general, was your relationship like, or the school's relationship like with Morris, with the city? Was there sort of this town [xxx] kind of conflict, or...

LL: No, I think it was a good relationship, because I think the faculty that we had up there were active downtown. We had Kiwanis and Lions club, and so on, and I know that particularly Kiwanis had a lot of, their faculty and leaders and so on were based at the

- school. I think they were pretty good. I think during the tough years there, I think they called on considerable amount of faculty members to come and work in the relief programs that they had and so on.... pretty much were staffed because I think I'd be honest in saying the group up there was probably a little more experienced and educated than the rank and file downtown.
- SG: So they brought an expertise to these kinds of social problems....
- LL: The thing that was different then than what it is now, they pretty much depended on the faculty up there to furnish the expertise as far as growing crops, selecting livestock and all that. We would have days up there when faculty would be sort of front and center, and then I think they'd come and spend like 2 days, and have sort of like a short course. Then the politicians would come in, and they would have a real chance, and they would probably have a barbecue, maybe barbecue 1 or 2 steers. And they would feed them, and so it was sort of the political ramifications along with it.
- SG: Then they would do summer institutes.
- LL: Summer institute type, yeah.
- SG: A special institute for women...
- LL: Women's week, yeah, they'd come and spend a week there. That was great for them because there were not many opportunities for farmwomen to socialize, and get away.
- SG: What was the breakdown like on campus between boys and girls?
- LL: I don't know that I can really answer that, but I think fairly close. I think there were probably a little more boys than what there were girls.
- SG: You were talking about some of these older guys who -- the Civilian Conservation Corps guys -- coming back. Would you see older girls, women, 18, 19, 20 attending, or did the women have to be younger?
- LL: Well, you see the opportunity there was, you could come up for the special courses. You could go through high school, and then you could come up there and take commercial law, stenography, and so we had quite a number of those gals from downtown that came up and took advantage of that.
- SG: So, in a way, the school worked for boys, the idea that the boys would return to the farm, but not necessarily for the girls.
- LL: Not necessarily, no. They did sewing and foods, and home decorating, and a little typing, and that type of thing. They were a very good bunch of gals. My wife taught, actually headed up the home economics department. That's what she was very interested in getting those gals acclimated to problems they might have out on the farm, sewing, and so on.
- SG: The problem of rural isolation for farmwomen had to have been really a big problem.
- LL: Yeah. The only thing that sort of countered that, I think most of them were involved in helping with the farm work. I think my mother helped milk cows, had a big garden, canned about a thousand quarts per year...

- SG: I think women have always been sort of the reserve labor force out on the farm. Whatever needs to be done, they would pitch in and do it. If you needed an extra hand in the field, they would do that....
- LL: And then as the kids grew, they would need to do less mothering duties, and take care of the house, and the kids came out and helped. It really was quite a situation there. I'm always sort of amazed at how that original guys up there picked together that first group that was in there, like when I was in school. I mean there were absolutely top-notch people. We never had any problem with any alcoholism or drugs or anything like that. They were just real role models.
- SG: It sounds like they were really motivated guys, almost sort of utopian in what they were trying to do.
- LL: I don't know where you'd go to find a group, and just one or two, but I suppose there were 10, 12 of those guys. You would be very happy to have your sons grow up to emulate those people. They were great people, dedicated to work long hours. They'd come back after supper to us guys...
- SG: I would expect, too, that since you were going to school during the midst of the depression, that this would supply extra motivation, that everybody is in pretty tough shape, and people are realizing that this is an avenue for improvement, and avenue to make your life better.
- LL: Move up one notch, you know.
- SG: How bad was it around here? What is bad?
- LL: Yeah, it was bad. The only thing that was sort of helpful was that everybody was in the same shape. We all had plenty of food. That never was a problem. When we would go to town, all we would be concerned with is buying kerosene, sugar and coffee. We'd grind our own wheat for flour, we'd butcher our own meat, and we had our own garden, and a big jar of sauerkraut, and we would take carrots and bury them in the sand in the basement.
- SG: [xxx] mother.
- LL: Other than we didn't have any money, that's really all the problem was.
- SG: I recall that I had a student a few years ago who did some work on Morris during the depression, and he was arguing that there were actually Hovervilles, or a Hooverville, somewhere in town, sort of a shanty town of some sort. Do you recall anything like that?
- LL: Well, I got to be pretty careful with how I say this, but I think... generally thinking that the southwest corner down around the lake, there, I think they were less than desirable lots, and I think that people tended to migrate in that direction.
- SG: Let's talk a little bit about your relationship with the town. We talked a little bit about that just a minute ago, but how often did you get off campus?
- LL: We got off quite often. I think Tuesday nights. It was pretty much standard, we'd go downtown, and go to the show with our two bits, and get a show ticket and a pint of ice cream for a quarter. Then we'd go walk down and we'd walk back.
- SG: One theater, two theaters in town?

LL: One theater, I think, at that time. Bonnie Benfeld was the guy that ran the theater back then.

SG: So it's the same Morris theater as today?

LL: Yes, same place where it is now... the ice cream would be up roughly where Town and Country is, up in that general area.

SG: Why was Tuesday night the night on the town?

LL: I think they had 10 cent show – a 10-cent show on Tuesday night. That brought us all out, you know.

SG: Where I grew up, I remember in the late 50s, early 1960s, it was Friday and Saturday night because that was sort of farmer night. That's when all the farmers would come to town, and Main Street would be packed with people. In the summer, you'd have band concerts, and that sort of thing. Did you get off on weekends then, also?

LL: Usually, we'd have... their own orchestra there, and so then we'd maybe have a little school dance and so on. There wasn't a lot of social life. When you stop and think about it, we weren't used to a lot of socializing out on the farm. I look back; we were up early in the morning and worked late at night. When night came, well, we were ready for bed. 5:00 came pretty early the next morning, and that's usually when we rolled out.

SG: So at home did you have electricity yet?

LL: No, no. Didn't have electricity until the middle 40s. We didn't have indoor plumbing until about then.

SG: You didn't have wind generated... electricity. I've talked to folks who've had, around the basement they'd have this row of batteries, and then...

LL: Yeah, we had some of those. There were a couple of farmers that had the method of generating... and I should remember, carbide lights, I think they called it. Whatever it was. That'd really be only one or two that I could point my finger at and say they were there. Other than that, when we got an Aladdin lamp, we thought we had it made.

SG: The constant complaint on the part of farmwomen is that the barn would be electrified first, before the house.

LL: That all depends upon whether you're Norwegian or German. The Germans would electrify the barn first. The Norwegian would electrify the house.

SG: I suspect there's some truth to that.

LL: I'd be hard pressed to prove it.

SG: So what was the campus like then in comparison to now?

LL: Well, the square, was just absolutely...no buildings on that at all. We had a baseball diamond out there, and we'd play there. Just absolutely nothing in there. The administration building, of course, was off to the west side, the library was....

SG: The square - are you talking about the mall?

LL: Yeah, the mall.

SG: So you played baseball.

LL: Yeah, in the spring. We'd get out about the 25th of March, so a day like today, we'd be out. We'd be playing ball. Other than that, then, in 1930, I think, they built the gymnasium, and what we call the old gym, then Music Hall which is actually the minority building, then the Health Service, and Spooner Hall, Senior Hall, Dining Hall, Social Science, Girls' Dormitory, Home Ec Building, Green Hall, Junior Hall. They were all there.

SG: Where was the hospital?

LL: Between Spooner Hall and the minority building, set back.

SG: I was having this discussion with folks about the hospital, and there were, what, 20 beds, something.

LL: Probably, yep, yep, probably 20. We had a school nurse.

SG: But not a doc.

LL: Not a doc. We'd keep him downtown; the doctor downtown would come up. I would assume on a regular basis. I don't know that. I don't remember that. But I remember, like Dr. Behmler and Dr. Cane and some of those guys were on-call.

SG: I just learned that it's Behmler (pronounced with long "a", Bahmler), and not Behmler (pronounced with a short e). Everybody on campus says Behmler (short "e"), but it's Behmler (long "a").

LL: Behmler, yep. There wasn't much that went on as far as changes were concerned. I go back to 1934, and then I came back in 1949 as Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, held that position, actually 5 years into the UMM, the first 5 years of UMM, I was Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds. There wasn't a lot that went on. We replaced the Administration Building, built Edson Hall. Then the building to the north of there, which was the Home Ec building, that was built.

SG: That's now the Humanities Building.

LL: Yeah. Then off Social Science, the cow palace...was built.

SG: So that was in the 50s.

LL: Yeah, 1950. I think I had a bad reputation. I sort of came on in 1949 as Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, and October 1 we burned the Girls' Dormitory.

SG: We have photos of that. Not of you burning it down personally...

LL: Then, we were building that, and then we were building the cow palace right next to it. When we were building there, then the dairy barn caught on fire. Within one year, I'd had 2 major fires. I was affectionately known as "Torchy."

SG: Among the students or among your staff members...

LL: Among the staff. They gave me a hard time.

SG: So, students played ball on the mall. That's interesting. What did they - not everybody, but certainly lots of folks smoked back in those days - where would people go for a cigarette, and what was discipline like? It sounds like people were really pretty devoted and pretty committed, and that discipline wasn't a real problem, but obviously there were codes of conduct and...

LL: Actually, what happened, at so-called Senior Hall, then, the boy's Senior Hall, they had a smoker upstairs in the attic, and likewise in Junior Hall, which is now Green Hall. I think you had to apply in order to be accepted to have the smoking privileges. I think they pretty much had to police themselves. They elected somebody that was sort of President of the club.

SG: Obviously, you could smoke inside back - these days, of course, you can't.

LL: I think the girls - I don't know if I dare say this, but I was always suspicious that the Girls' Dormitory fire was caused by some girl that'd had a cigarette up there. It started burning during the noon hour. I came back at 1:00 and smoke was coming out the north window.

SG: Well, that's the campus legend. The campus legend today is that it was caused by somebody smoking.

LL: Yeah, I think so. There was really no reason for that burning, because, unless, what was happening, the kids were just coming in, and they were taking their empty suitcases and boxes, and taking them upstairs to store, and I'm pretty sure that somebody must have smoked or something that started that fire.

SG: So when you started, campus... West Central had been in existence for 25 years or so.

LL: 1910 to 1940. I came out there in '47, and I worked in Vetter's on the farm training for about a year and a half.

SG: As a student, it had only been in existence for about 25 years.

LL: Yep.

SG: So, obviously, it was not nearly as forested as it is today, or was it?

LL: No, no. John Anderson planted a lot of those trees.

SG: And Anderson was...

LL: Music instructor. What you were trained for and what you did didn't have a lot of correlations. I know one of the guys was assigned to teach mathematics, and he said, I wasn't very good in math. I said, you can always stay a day ahead of those kids, can't you?

SG: I've had courses like that.

LL: It's interesting. The trees were very, very much smaller. I think that north windbreak, those ash trees, I think they were planted right in the middle of the depression. The seeds came from a farm out south of town, and they just planted those seeds.

SG: So was there a plan of sorts, back in the 20s and 30s of what the campus ought to look like? Were they systematic about what they planted, or was it more, well, we have these seeds, let's plant them?

- LL: I think what happened, the campus started taking shape. You came in and it wind over and around like this, and your farm buildings were sort of here, and so they went over here and planted windbreaks. Just sort of practical layout to try to get some way of stopping the snow.
- SG: So who took care of the grounds?
- LL: Wes Grey did it for most of the time when he came in '46...'47, July of '47 he came. He was the horticultural major. That was sort of his responsibility. Prior to that, John Anderson who was... He was an interesting guy. He taught music, and he taught chemistry, and he was a photographer and he had his own dark room. He was a sort of horticulturalist in his own right. He planted a lot of the trees. Then we had another guy, he was an interesting guy. His name was Art Schiller, and he took care of the chickens, and he lived in the chicken house. It was a 2-story building, and he [xxx] in the basement. He wasn't married. He was really quite an individual. He spent a lot of Saturdays planting trees. A goodly part of the Morris park, down there, was planted by him. He'd go out and he'd plant trees.
- SG: Was he an eccentric guy?
- LL: Very eccentric. He had a hair cut twice a year whether he needed it or not.
- SG: Well, you don't want to offend the chickens.
- LL: At one point in time, the University business office got a hold of him and said, "You'd better start cashing your checks." They had 2 years of checks he hadn't cashed. He had them underneath, his mattress...was sort of a bag filled with corn husks, and slept on one and covered up with one, and he put his checks underneath there, and he didn't get around to do that. Heating plant, then, when the heating season went on, he'd go down there about 7:00 or so, and of course it was always warm, you see, and there was a shower in there. I don't think that ever made any difference to him. I don't think he used it. He'd sit there and he'd read, and he was probably a week behind, but he was well read. As I recall, he was hard of hearing, so when he talked, he talked in a very loud voice. When he'd come to eat, he had a Palm Beach jacket that he would put on, and some old, old overalls, and in the wintertime, we wasn't hard up, he had a farm, and he was pretty well off. He wouldn't buy overshoes. He'd take a feed sack and put one foot in one bag and another foot in another bag and hold on to them, and turn around through the snow to the dining room.
- SG: He sounds like an amazing guy.
- LL: He really was. The chickens... He'd come in there and he'd just kind of move the chickens, and they'd just kind of move a little bit and he'd go on by. My job as Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, I was responsible for the heating system, and that was all steam heat, and I'd have to get in and check the traps and stuff once in a while. I'd open the door, and they knew "Chicken Art," and they knew it wasn't "Chicken Art" coming in and they would fly all over.
- SG: So this was in the 40s and 50s, what's his name, Shorn?
- LL: Schiller.
- SG: Art Schiller. Sounds a little German.
- LL: He was, I think he had a niece down in Wisconsin, but he was an interesting guy.

SG: What's the story about the trees? Why was he so interested in...

LL: I don't really know why he was interested in those trees. I think he wanted something to do, some variation in his activities, so he'd take care of chickens all week, and I think he just wanted to get on out, and...

SG: Was he scientific about this? Did he think, ok, we'd really ought to do some elms here, or we really ought to do...

LL: I rather think he planted what was available. I don't think it was any scientific procedures...in place.

SG: So where was the orchard?

LL: The orchard was about 8, 10 acres where the center is on. What do we call that?

SG: The RFC?

LL: Yeah, that's where it was. It started at the bottom of the hill, and then it came on up.

SG: It was huge; it was 8, 10 acres.

LL: Yeah, 8, 10 acres. And I know all about that, because in about 1935, I wanted to hunt pheasants, and the trees were about that high, and the guy I worked for, he wanted the trees wrapped that day. My brother came in, and he and I, we wrapped all those trees in that orchard. Got out of there about noon, so we could go and hunt pheasants.

SG: So they just put the orchard in the early 1930s.

LL: Yeah, it'd be about 1930 would be about when the orchard went in. I was wrapping those in about '34, and they were about that high. They were a good bunch of apples. Haraldson's, I think, and I think some of the real good varieties that Minnesota developed.

SG: The orchard had to have been in existence into the '60s.

LL: Yeah, pretty much right, yeah. The heating plant cut into it, you see. Then the RFC cut into that.

SG: Too bad

LL: Yeah, really, because it was really quite a nice orchard.

SG: So, you were here from '34....

LL: '34, yeah, and then I retired in '86.

SG: You were here as a student from '34 to...

LL: '38. '34 to '38.

SG: And then you went to St Paul?

LL: Yeah, actually, I moved to St Paul, and I went to the Institute of Technology on the Minneapolis campus, registered in I.T.

SG: Did you feel you were well prepared for I.T.?

LL: Other than my math. I was short on math, so I had to take two courses. But other than that, like as far as the chemistry is concerned, and English, and so on, I didn't have, I didn't do like my kids, they went on to pretty much straight A. Like I told those guys, I never got over 5, 6 hours of sleep for 4 years because I had to work and earn my way and so on. I probably wouldn't have done any better if I didn't have to work, but it took a lot of time and effort in order to earn my way so I could keep paying my bills.

SG: Had to have been an interesting time to be at the Minneapolis campus, because Eric Severeid was there in those days, young Hubert Humphrey...

LL: Yeah, there was a lot of activity around. You'd ride the streetcar to get to the other end of campus. Cars either went between two campuses [xxx]. There was a lot of activity. Of course, we had tremendous football teams.

SG: [xxx].

LL: xxxBrey Bermanxxx did. Great teams and so on. It was a lot of fun. I'm well pleased.

SG: Had to have been a bit of a culture shock.

LL: Yeah.

SG: Had you been to Minneapolis before?

LL: When I was 6 years old. I remember going on down to go to school, and everything I owned I had in one bag. Rode the train, of course. I got on... I don't even know where I got on. Up at Kensington, perhaps, and rode the Sioux Line and got on down and got off, and made up my mind, that, well, I got to learn something about this city, so I had an Aunt that lived down on Clinton and about 19th. Walked on Lyndale, so I walked from the depot on down to there. I spent the night. I got thinking about, hell, I wonder what that University looks like, so the next day, I got up and walked from 19th and Clinton on over to the University and made one loop around. I didn't want to go too far for fear I'd get lost, and I walked back home. I must have walked 15 miles.

SG: Did you stay with your aunt while you went to school?

LL: No, I just stayed with my aunt until I got located there, see. Then my first place that I stayed was 1393 Cleveland Avenue on the St. Paul campus. What happened, I think there was 3, 4 of us guys from here that went on down, and we kind of stayed together.

SG: And you all finished?

LL: Yep, we all finished. All did pretty well. We all wound up with jobs. We were used to work. There was no problem as far as hard work was concerned. When I got through there, then I went to... It's sort of interesting how, I sort of tried to pick where I wanted to go because money was always in such short supply, so I got a listing of the assets of all these various companies, and I picked the one that had the greatest amount of assets, and that's the one I wanted to be associated with. That was Ingersoll-Rand Company, and they were in Athens, Pennsylvania, where they had located. So I applied and went to work with Ingersoll-Rand.

SG: And you did, what?

LL: Engineering. Mechanical engineering work there. I was there for... I was only there for 6 to 8 months and then the Battle of the Bulge came, so then, I have to back up a little bit. When I was going for ag engineering there, I was in engineering, so they deferred the engineers. They needed engineers. Then when I graduated, then they put me in this Ingersoll-Rand, and they would contract work with the government.

SG: For defense stuff.

LL: For defense stuff. So I worked there. So then the Battle of the Bulge came on, and so then they decided they were going to do some more drafting, so they sent me on back, I decided I'd come on back and go with the guys from here. So when I went to take my physical, I found out that I had a small hernia, and by that time, then, the war had let up enough so they weren't quite that demanding. Then, when I got unlimited service classification, then I went back home and got thinking about that. My gosh, all the... The engineering degree and the experience I had and so forth, I went down to the draft board and said there's got to be some better way for me to serve my country than sitting around doing this. They said, we'll guarantee that we won't call you for 6 months, so if you go back into a war industry, we'll guarantee your employer that you won't be [xxx]. I went back then. I worked on hydraulic equipment and machinery for the war effort, not just hydraulic. Then, when the war ended, that was sort of the juncture for those people because they had to go from making war materials to something different. At that point in time, I decided that I was going to come back and go farming because these guys that came back from World War II and started farming, they bought a farm and paid for it in one year. Land prices were low and prices were relatively high. So I came back then and went out and bought a farm.

SG: Around here, or...

LL: Yeah, out by my home territory, and that was a little bumpy, because that was an estate, and I had bought it. The heirs got together and they were really unhappy that it got out of the family. I'm not that proud of it. Give me back my thousand bucks, and you can take back your farm. So they did that.

SG: So did you work it for a year or so?

LL: No, it never really got working. Then....

SG: A thousand bucks is not bad.

LL: Right. Then what happened, I was home, sort of waiting for another farm to open up, and then Superintendent Edson came out to the farm, and of course he had known me for....

[End of side 1]

[Tape 1: Side 2]

LL: ...3 people in the class, and I've got 46, and I've only got one instructor, and I need an instructor, and I want to hire you. Oh, I said, no way am I going to be a teacher. I wasn't going to be a teacher. Well, this is Friday afternoon, and we jawed a little bit, and he said, ok, Monday morning then, he sent my football coach out there, and he came with the paper. Sign here. This was October. And he said, well, help us out for the winter anyway. I said, okay, and I went and I worked through the winter, and then I started getting a little encouragement to, that I should do some more of that. Then one day, my door opened, and in came the Superintendent, the principal and my football coach. And they said, "We've got a job for you. We can't tell you what it is. We can't tell you what the pay is. You know us guys, we know you, sign here."

SG: Interesting way of doing business.

LL: Yeah, right. So then what happened was, it hadn't cleared the board of regents yet, so they couldn't announce it, the appointment until it cleared the board. The board cleared it, so they hired me. They hired me as Assistant Professor with tenure. Normally you go 7 years to get tenure. They just hired me with tenure. So that how I got started up with...

SG: So when did you become in charge of the physical plant? At the same time?

LL: No, what happened you see, the reason they came to me was that A.C. Heiney, who had that job, he was the Assistant Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds, and they moved him down to Rosemount. [xxx]. They wanted Heiney down there. There was nobody, they had to get somebody in Heiney's place. That's how I got into it.

SG: This was what year?

LL: 1949. I started in '47. I worked with veterans on the farm training for a little over a year.

SG: What was teaching ag engineering like?

LL: It was a new experience for me, in that I didn't have any education courses whatsoever. Of course, I'd done enough work in mechanics and had gone through the ag school myself, so I didn't really have any problem making the adjustment.

SG: What was the most challenging thing about that?

LL: I think the thing that was challenging was to try to teach like physics and electricity with those kids not really interested in the mathematical end of it. That pretty much limited what I could do....

SG: Was that frustrating that they were so uninterested in the math and the physics?

LL: Well, I think what happened, I think I generated a little interest for those guys; so I had to do some of that math stuff in my class, see. I had some interesting experiences. Our Superintendent had two adopted daughters, and one of them...

SG: This was Edson?

LL: Edson, yeah, Edson at that time, had two adopted daughters. The one of them, she was musically inclined and got to be a good trumpet player and so on, but she wasn't a very good student. So he came to me one day and he said, "Les," he said, "I'm in real trouble. I'm Superintendent up here and everybody knows that, and my daughter is flunking out of chemistry and physics in high school. I want to know if you would agree to tutor her." At that time, then, I had kind of started my farming operation a little bit, so when I finished up there at 5:00, I'd come home and eat, and I'd go out to the farm and work awhile. I said, "Well, I'll see if I can help her, but why don't you, if this is ok with you, why don't you send her over about 4:00, and I'll work with her until about 6:00." I said, "I'm not going to charge you anything for that. I'll just do that." So I worked with Betty and I was tutoring her, and pretty good shape, and then word came back around...she then, in turn, was running tutoring class at the high school, and she was charging them.

SG: An entrepreneur.

- LL: Entrepreneur, yep. I kind of grin when I think about that because I worked them pretty hard because I felt that, Edson was a real good friend of mine, worked with him for a long period of time.
- SG: Was there anybody else like you, somebody who was both a student and then came back and then worked on campus?
- LL: Yeah, Roy Thompson was the other guy. And Ralph Smith actually. Ralph Smith wound up as Superintendent up there. Roy Thompson was an agronomist and he worked out of St. Paul, and then me. I think we were the only three that ever came back and worked.
- SG: You have to have a very interesting perspective because you were both a student and an instructor, and in charge of buildings and the grounds...
- LL: And then had been out in industry enough, had a little feel for what was out there.
- SG: Did you see changes in the students from the time that you were a student to when you came back? There's not so much a difference in years, there wasn't so much a gap in time, but certainly a gap because of the war.
- LL: Yeah, that's what I was going to say because I think the students had matured a lot. Most of them had experience in the service.
- SG: It sounds like students were pretty mature to begin with.
- LL: Yeah, and I think one thing, I don't think I'd be wrong in saying that I think, generally speaking, kids out on a farm get matured pretty early. Most of them get assigned duties that they got to be responsible for this and so on. I think I'd be honest in saying I think those farm kids, and of course again, I think that those kids that we got were a cut above the average. They wanted to go to the ag school because they knew what they wanted to do. We didn't lose very many students once they came on up. They pretty much hung in there.
- SG: What's your sense? Do you think that most of them went back to the farm, or do you think that most of them used this as a way of getting off the farm?
- LL: I think there's some of each. I know I've got a couple three guys that are electricians. They've come back and say they kind of got interested in [xxx]. And two, three, four of them that I'm aware of got to be engineers. I think early on, I think quite a few of them took a shot at farming, but of course, farming is a tough game to get into. If your father can't help you, it's rather difficult to begin, generate the capital and so on. I think there are a lot of them that would have preferred to be farmers if they had the wherewithal to get going.
- SG: Do you think that most people were coming out of farms in which the parents owned the farms, or did they go out of them with tenants? What's your sense of the class background of the students? Pretty middle, middle, more poor, more...
- LL: No, I don't think they were the poorest ones. I think they were pretty much middle class. I don't know that I have any real good feel for that, but as I now look back at these kids that were graduated up there, it was surprising the number of them that went on to become commissioners, school board members... I guess if I were going to make a generalized statement, I'd say that I think they were a cut above average.
- SG: You also saw the grounds and the landscape on campus change and develop over time. How so? How was it different in the '40s and '50s than it was in the '30s?

LL: I think what happened, we started doing some work to improve the buildings, to see... In the dry years, when it got exceptionally dry, I think the soil lost the moisture content, and then the buildings out on campus started cracking. Corners started going out.

SG: You see that in Camden today.

LL: Yeah. And prior to the extreme drought that we had in the '30s, I don't think we had any of those problems. So then, when I first started out, and in the early 50s, they went to the legislature and had the so-called Senior Hall, which is when you come around the [xxx], you know where that is already. That building, the corners were going out on that, 45 degree angle, the southwest corner, northwest corner, started cracking, so they went to the legislature, and they gave them \$25,000 to repair that building. When they took it back out and advertised for bids, there wasn't a contractor that would touch it because they said, how do we know when it's repaired? We'll be there forever, if we start fixing that and it doesn't hold, and so on. Then, what they decided to do, they'd heard of a company, Etrusion Prepacked, out of Chicago, maybe out Cleveland, and they'd come in, and they said what they proposed to do then was to go on, put the dry pipes around the outside of that and then pump concrete down into the gravel filled [xxx]. So they went down and they went out 15 feet. And they went all the way around, and they went down and they drove this plate...

SG: So they went around the entire building?

LL: Went around the entire building, all right. When they would drive the pipe, then they would come to the [xxx] of gravel, and when they'd hit with the standard 600 pounds of [xxx] it would go like that. Then the next hit and then it would go slower. That would tell them they had just gone through a xxxlensxxx....

SG: So all it is was was like a layer of gravel...

LL: Layer of gravel, yep. So then, what they would do then, they would keep a record of that, so many feet down. And then I think they went down about 43 feet, and then it'd maybe have about 2 or 3 xxxlensxxx. Then they'd pump grout, cement, with practically no sand in it, they'd pump and come up to where that lens was and then they'd pump, run about 2 pumps, pressure would always run, and they would fill that xxxlensxxx, move over about 10 feet to another plate, do likewise, go all the way around. Then 15 feet out. Then they'd go 10 feet out. They'd make a loop around like this, and then 5 feet.

SG: So, like an underground stockade.

LL: Underground stockade, they filled all of those xxxlensxxx with a mixture of concrete, and they used something... sort of as a lubricant, an ash. I don't know. I'm not really sure now, but I think it was an ash that served as a lubricant to allow the concrete to flow, so they did that. The \$25,000 that the legislature put up, we only used \$10 of it.

SG: That was only for Senior Hall.

LL: Only for Senior Hall. We had 15 [\$15,000] more, see, so we started taking the next building. We took practically all the buildings. We went from Senior Hall, Spooner Hall, gymnasium, and this was interesting because this so-called new home ec building that we built in 1954 to counter the bad soil condition, we put that on a slab about 2 feet... We didn't have the building finished yet and we got word that we were going to pump grout underneath that, so we went through the two feet of concrete, drilled through that, ran pipes down, and filled underneath that. We pretty much did all the buildings. We did engineering, we did practically all the buildings on campus.

SG: What would have happened if you hadn't done that?

LL: I imagine that they would have deteriorated. Like Senior Hall, that cracked about that wide at a 45-degree angle. They would crack from the top of the window.

SG: Did you know this was going to work, or was it more experimental?

LL: We didn't really know, but interestingly enough, the guys, when they got through with the gymnasium, they had a contract to go and stabilize the Leaning Tower of Pisa. They didn't want to straighten it, but they wanted to keep it from going in further. I don't know whether they ever did it or not...

SG: We could have the leaning tower of Camden.

LL: Yeah, right. But that was moving on them, and they wanted to arrest that movement. That was Chicago Prepacked, I think, out of Chicago.

SG: Before we started recording, you talked a little bit about meeting your wife on campus. Can you talk about that a little bit?

LL: She came about in '46, I suppose, and I came pretty much in about '47, and they had a faculty table in the dining hall where the faculty all ate. She ate there, and I ate there.

SG: She was from where? She was from Plainview?

LL: Yeah, she was from Plainview, and she had gone two years to Macalester and then she two years through the Home Ec department in St. Paul. She had a degree in Foods. We got acquainted, and eventually married.

SG: You were talking earlier about the first 6 months were tough for her.

LL: Yeah, she came from the Southeast corner of the state where you got a different landscape. You got trees and you got hills, and you don't have the wind that you have up here. She came here about 1st of October, and it was windy, windy, windy. She wasn't very happy to have moved out of that area up here. But she was eventually got acclimated. We were married for about 45 years, raised 2 kids...

SG: Were there other folks like that, other romances on campus?

LL: Yup. There was Ted Nelson, met his wife on campus. Wes Grey married a secretary. There might have been more, but those are the ones that come to mind anyway.

SG: I was looking at copies of the West Central News, like during the war years, and they always had this little column of marriage announcements, and there were always students that were marrying students. So, John Doe, class of '39, marries Jane Smith, class of '41...

LL: It really was a pretty efficient way of doing it. I think like for me, I had meals, 3 meals a day. The table was about 16 feet long. You really got to know each other. We worked together, and then, of course, we'd have committee assignments, like we had junior/senior prom and we'd rotate, 2 faculty members would be in charge of doing that. So we had opportunities to work together and so on.

SG: It sounds like it really was a community.

LL: Yeah, it really was a nice community. And I think the single biggest thing about it was the people that were involved. They were really good people and caring people. One of the things that strikes me, if somebody was ill or ran into trouble, somebody else just came in and filled the holes. There was never such a thing as checking to see if your job description covered that. If there was work to do, we just did it. Nobody paid any attention...

SG: What was the best thing about it?

LL: I think the people that you had associations with, top-notch people that'd do anything for you. Honest. You could go with any kind of a prop that you had. I remember one day I was in Edson's office and this student came in, and he reached down and he gave him \$20. The kid left.

SG: Did he make him sign an I.O.U.?

LL: No. I said, Edson, I said, did you make a note of it? No sir, he says, that guy wants to beat me out of it, I don't want to know it.

SG: That's amazing.

LL: That's just the way the whole thing worked up there, see.

SG: Let me put you on the spot a bit. What's the worse thing about it? Can you say anything negative?

LL: Well, I really can't say much negative. I think probably what I would say is that I don't think it really challenged me as much as I would to have been challenged. I think I had more to offer than what I had a chance to exhibit up there. I look at that now, and I look at like my kids, going to Morris school up here, High School. I think they were challenged more, and were probably better prepared to move on than I was.

SG: Do you think it's because the school had really a limited kind of mission of practical scientific agriculture, and we're not here to turn out rocket scientists....

LL: Yeah, I think that's a lot of it, and I think the fact that we were so hard-pressed to try to generate money to live on. We didn't have a lot of energy to go the extra mile. I can't say much negative about it, because when you factor in all the conditions, shortage of money and all this and that and so on, they did a tremendous job.

SG: Who's the most memorable person that you met while on campus?

LL: I probably have three of them, and I think that Allen Edson sort of served almost as a surrogate father to me. I could go to him, and he was tough. I remember coming to his office when three of us guys came in, and he said, here comes the three laziest guys on campus. When you other guys get as lazy as Lindor, I'm going to kick you out of here. That's his way of spurring you on. And then there was Roy Bridgeford, and he was an agronomist out of... And he had sort of an interesting background. He came out of Chicago, and one of the high schools in Minneapolis was having some real discipline problems, so they needed somebody that was going to be able to handle those kids. They got him coming out of Chicago and took over classes, probably on... I'm not going to say that for sure, but I rather think it was Johnson High School down there. Apparently, he got that all straightened out and eventually came out here. I think one of the things that I recall about him was that when he came in to a class, he was 100% organized. The bell rang and boom. He had everything ready to go, and he kept right on

- going, giving you information and leading the discussion until the bell rang, and so on. And the kids, they loved it. I recall a couple teachers that came on, and they'd get the class going, and pretty soon open up the book - we're going to read from page 65 today, so everybody would take the book out and read. I thought, what a cop out.
- SG: I know, I know.
- LL: Bridgeford, you'd never see him doing that.
- SG: What did he teach?
- LL: He taught agronomy. Agronomy and crop selection and variety selection and that sort of stuff. Soils. He was a sort of a little, short guy, and a peppery sort of guy. He'd go [xxx] and I can't quite visualize him... He'd gone down to North Minneapolis, and I'm sure there were a bunch of big minority kids down there that were pretty difficult to handle. But my guess is he probably handled them that same way. He would just, had this, and stuff already to go, and sort of overwhelmed them, I think, is what it amounts to. Those were probably the three guys...and they were Ted Fenske, Edson, and Bridgeford...
- SG: Who's Fenske?
- LL: Fenske was the preceptor at Senior Hall, and he finally wound up as Superintendent, and then I think he was Associate Dean down on Minneapolis campus, St. Paul campus. Am I being recorded?
- SG: I can turn it off if you want me to.
- LL: I guess I can say this. He was the type of guy that he goes down to legislative sessions, and University maybe send down 12, 15 people to make the presentation to the legislators. When they'd get done then, they'd wait until everybody cleared out and they'd get a hold of Fenske and say, ok, Ted, what do you really need? Pretty much dictate what they needed, see. That's about what we would want.
- SG: That's how business was done.
- LL: He was honest with them, and he didn't give them any bum steers, and if there was something that, some request made that wasn't really that essential, he'd tell them. The next year if he thought it was essential, he'd bring it back in, and away they'd go.
- SG: That's not surprising at all. Let's talk just a little bit at the end about the landscape, about the campus grounds, and if there was one thing above all that you could preserve on campus, what would it be?
- LL: I liked that West Central garden. I liked that. I'd like to see that stay. I think, this is new, Oyate Hall, I think is really a pivotal deal. That you need because that really ties everything together. Really, I'm not that acquainted with Briggs Library, but I think that like Oyate Hall and the West Central Flower Garden, I think that's very nice.
- SG: If there were anything that you could bring back...
- LL: I don't know that there's really anything, because there's been improvements made, you see, and I think they done a good job on that, no question about that. A lot of that stuff, when you look, be honest about it, like I think of the old gymnasium down there, I go in there and put in tie rods, big rods, [xxx] to keep the thing from going this, you see. That, I think, had served its time, built in about 1930, and I think that like they'd do about the same thing on the south wall of Engineering, where they had the bookstore at one time

and the post office. That thing started spreading and we had to get in there and tie that back together. A lot of that stuff was built rather cheaply, and we just didn't have the money in there, just sort of put it together and try to make it go.

SG: Any changes that you would take back? Anything that you'd do differently?

LL: I guess I'd kind of like to see that road, where you come in from the north and you can come around square. I think I'd like to see that. And that may be scheduled to be reopened. I don't know.

SG: I think, it's all experimental. I don't think they've made any decision yet.

LL: I don't like that. I think that continuity of flow there is great. I think you have to give them credit for, the changes they've made have been good, well thought out changes.

SG: Ok, good. I think we're going to wrap it up.

(END OF TAPE)