

G.W. Powers
Narrator

Steven Vatndal
Interviewer

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



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SV: 00:00:04 This interview with G.W. Powers of Wheaton, was done on August the 15th, 1980, in Mr. Powers' corn shop in downtown Wheaton. The interview is part of the "World War II: The Home Front" project. The interviewer was Steve Vatndal.

00:00:31 —in later years. Where were you born?

GW: 00:00:39 Chokio. [inaudible 00:41]

SV: 00:00:46 And what year was that?

GW: 00:00:48 1911.

SV: 00:00:51 And what ethnic groups are you from? Primarily German?

GW: 00:00:59 German. German and Irish. A German family used to [inaudible 00:01:06].

SV: 00:01:12 Did your family move around much before you settled down?

GW: 00:01:17 No. They got married in Chokio and they stayed right there. They had four girls and three boys.

SV: 00:01:30 I was just going to ask what your father's occupation was.

GW: 00:01:37 My dad was an old thresher. There were machines and stuff, he was an engineer [inaudible 00:01:43]. He spent half the year threshing.

SV: 00:01:56 And how much formal education did you have?

GW: 00:02:00 High school, only. The girls got educated, but I was the fourth boy. So, my mine was self-education.

SV: 00:02:11 Yeah, sometimes that can be more effective as much as the formal, I think. And then, what was your wife's maiden name?

GW: 00:02:23 Ida was a Deal. They were about seven miles east of town.

SV: 00:02:29 And is that D-E-I-H-L?

GW: 00:02:32 No, D-E-A-L. Deal.

SV: 00:02:38 D-A-L?

GW: 00:02:38 Yeah, the New Deal.

SV: 00:02:41 Oh, I see. That's about the extent of the background questions that we had. Like I said, I'd like to get right into the business questions, first. First, just some technical questions about the business. What was the name of the plant that you operated here in Morris?

GW: 00:03:06 I operated the Power's Produce Company.

SV: 00:03:08 What would you say was your first year of operation here?

GW: 00:03:17 1938.

SV: 00:03:26 Understanding that you did not have a good deal of capital or anything else to get started with, I'd like for you to—

GW: 00:03:35 That was putting it mildly. I think we had slightly over \$1,000 in the bank when we came back from working with [inaudible 00:03:44]. At \$25 a week, you don't put too much away.

SV: 00:03:53 I'd like you to briefly describe, if you would, how you put together that much capital to start a business like that, here.

GW: 00:04:03 My wife went through the ASC. I think she saved something, \$300 or something like that, during the period we were together. She was very helpful as far as the money is concerned. And we just saved nickels and dimes. We both had the same idea, there was only one way of possibly getting away from control of either family was to be totally

independent. So, you can imagine trying to get away. I mean, on peanuts we practically lived.

00:04:53 But it was sort of an unbelievable struggle, but it seemed so impossible to get enough money. And yet, I probably brought that out as a reason for failure because I maintained that effort, know-how, something-or-another to get that money. If it wasn't going to be a new way, I was going to make it. The rule was just finding guts. You couldn't get all that stuff today. You talk to people that were dormant. the banking set-up was dormant. They only had one method, and that was know-how. You have no ideas, until they got [inaudible 00:05:45]. I think very few of Midwestern banks had any idea what was to come. They couldn't see it.

SV: 00:05:57 You mean as far as the war coming?

GW: 00:06:00 The whole thing. The whole picture. I believe this survey of all of Richland County up here, and the Wahpeton area, every different house [inaudible 00:06:12] every farm place in that whole town, all the way up to my own, down through Fairmont, really, the corner of the state, just planted. Every farm place, how many families were on it? How many children were on it? A rough estimate of the age. On those families, what those children were going to do? Invariably, everyone is going to scatter. There was too much soup and potatoes to eat. You wouldn't believe it. I would say, at that time, at least half the houses were those tiny little one-and-a-half story houses with a little shack on the side for a kitchen, and a barn very much similar. Hardly enough to take care of a cow, a couple of [inaudible 00:07:09] and a few chickens, and that's what they did.

00:07:12 That was it. And they put a whole family of, on average, maybe five or six kids. You wouldn't believe it was possible. [inaudible 00:07:23] little sod shack, but [inaudible 00:07:29] fast bust through what we were going to be [inaudible 00:07:34] as you have in any country when the population starts developing. Because years back, there wasn't that many farms. The farms... a lot of the land was vast areas of prairie. I can remember seeing sections of land for prairie land. That grass has been farmed with that old sulky plow [inaudible 00:07:59]. So, if you were able to dream, which some people never were given the gift to dream, you could visualize what the Great Plains probably looked like 70 years ago. [inaudible 00:08:22] upset

everything, and start talking about all those changes, kind of make a comparison of [inaudible 00:08:39].

00:08:42 You keep thinking that way, you see. You keep living that way. You keep following that thought.

SV: 00:08:48 Speaking of changes that you saw coming, would you please relate once more the story you told me the last time I was here, about your experience up in North Dakota, and how that made you think that we were probably going to be entering a war, and how that affected your decision to go into the food processing business?

GW: 00:09:13 Well, with any individual that has those thoughts in his mind, he starts to relate those every now and then, different things that makes you keep improving on those ideas. I will always remember the time we were up to that [inaudible 00:09:34] North Dakota area. This is a 100 percent Russian-German settlement. And they spoke Russian. These people were very, very hard-working people, a very distinct breed. You could tell right off the bat that they were Russian. Their dress was more formal. There's plenty of Russian settlements in North Dakota, those Russian-German people.

00:10:08 And I always remember the time I needed pliers, so I'd go to the store. Pliers at that time were often five cents. And Hitler was giving a speech. There was nothing surprising to me about that part, but the thing that was surprising to me was considering all those farmers were in there hearing everything, and they didn't want any conversation at all. So, I went to pay for the pliers, I made the remark to some extent that—I don't exactly recall the phrasing and that, but something to the extent that, if he kept on influencing people like he's influenced these people, indirectly he was going to have a hell of a power and we were going to be in trouble, because this was a growing [inaudible 00:11:17] and we weren't involved, we didn't want to get involved in stuff over there.

00:11:20 The mess we had before with the old country, it was bound to develop. And when I made that remark, they bristled up just like a bunch of very angry people. And I literally got kicked in the fanny out the door. And I didn't question it. And even after I got in the company car to leave, there was no animosity as far as the individual, for you. The thing that hit me right off the bat was, there is something there

I've got to watch, because that isn't common. I think back, how could [inaudible 00:12:06] how could that have instilled so much for me and those people wanted [inaudible 00:12:16]. Because for me, that was a turning point. That stuck with me.

00:12:22 They had a little test. I found my wife with a little pinprick. And she was just laughing about it. I said, "No, no." I said, "You know me, in normal times, had someone had done that, there'd be two or three of those fellows knocked down." And I had no resentment about it at all, except I was disturbed by the group, the fact that these people were so absorbed. Truthfully, they were 100 percent behind him. Right, and here, we were nothing but a normal society, with nothing going on. But it started me thinking. And after that, I remember going home, and I thought, "Boy, I've got to start planning what I am going to do with myself, because it occurs to me that someday not too far away, we're going to be involved in something and I don't want to be carrying a gun wading through some godforsaken country. If there's some other means that I can do this, and I can keep working."

00:13:37 So, that's when I started turning very strongly to the idea of developing my school, because I could feel it. And that's exactly what happened. It just gave me that incentive to learn the whole business, all the way straight through. Most people would never have felt that way. But it hit me. And I was hungry enough to get out of that rut. I wasn't going to stay there.

SV: 00:14:13 So, then you studied the chicken processing methods and stuff at the plant that you were working at?

GW: 00:14:23 See, at that time, I was field manager for Cutty Packing Company, and the old method of the farmers would ship their cream to Minneapolis, or to Mandan, or St. Paul, the Sylvans and Sunshine Creameries and all those large packers too. We had at Fairmont, Cutty Factory Company in Fairmont we'd get several loads of cream every day. I used to ask them, if it was tagged, read the names. Had about five different formulas that'd check out which one of them had answered the form at one time. So, for me, after seeing so many cans blow up in the summertime, and not having the proper cooling facilities, and a lot of that was made into food, and I wouldn't even thinking about feeding it to the pigs.

- 00:15:29 I knew the [inaudible 00:15:29] sooner or later, the public would know all that stuff to be. And it had to happen. the Land O' Lakes came with [inaudible 00:15:37], they started to organize these little creameries. When they started organizing these little creameries, I started thinking, maybe if I'm close to those creameries, I'll be able to drain off a lot of merchandise away from them myself. I gradually built my line of reasoning and that's what would happen. And it did happen.
- SV: 00:16:07 Besides your job-related experience with Cutty Pack, you also studied their other operations, their poultry operations and stuff?
- GW: 00:16:23 Oh, yes. After setting up the turkey dressing operation for Cutty Packing Company in [inaudible 00:16:33] North Dakota. Which is more or less of a spite deal with Cutty Packing Company against North American Creamery Company, because it set up right close to their door. And they figured a long as they send this tiger out there, he'd upset the apple cart for them. So, we went out there under the most unbelievable conditions. They had a \$15 a month-old international harvester building, it had an old what they used to call a pot-type cooker, small boiler, and a stock tank, and a cut of lines hanging from the ceiling with a leather washer to hang the scalded turkeys on.
- 00:17:25 We would scald them, and rough them, and hang them up to cool off. In the November run, I know it wasn't too cool with a lot of warm birds shipped. If you shipped those now, because then before - down on the truck. Not that...I'd.. after that run, I wanted to get all the information I could from the parent plant. So, I told Faulkner, the manager there, what I wanted to do, I wanted to work with every division in the plant. I said, "No use sending anyone." He didn't agree with me, no use in sending somebody out to the field. But he didn't know everything about the operations so the manager, anyway.. I gave him a reason why, I wanted to see what kind of operations they had.
- 00:18:30 Because the town was only located in Fairmount because it had two railroads going through there, direct shipping. The town had possibly, maybe 1,500 people at the very most. But they hired people from, I suppose, a radius of 60, 70 miles around, farmers' wives and [inaudible 00:18:51]. Yet, finally he agreed, and I started right off with the feeding of the chickens. What they were feeding them, and I'd check

the amount of feed and amount of growth and see whether it was practical. A lot of times, it wasn't practical. I was fully convinced that the chicken in its own habitat out in the farm would do a better job if the farmer was educated, instead of just letting the old hen lay some eggs out in the granary, and maybe 30 eggs, and 10, 15 of them would hatch and she'd come out with that many to start with, and half of those would live under poor conditions, and that was the way they brought those scatterbrained chickens.

00:19:45 But as things changed, those things always came to mind to me, was to educate the farmers to raise their chickens. And those things progressed. We got into the business, and as the farmers got feed for them, we were buying chickens for five, six, seven cents a pound. So, as this evolved, the war clouds started to develop, a lot of these farmers made no move to make any change, though. And it took a fine bit of maneuvering but we finally got them there and that was starting to pay a certain amount of money for chickens. Well, just paying them the money for chickens wasn't in itself the key to the vast growth of a chicken operation, because it took an awful lot of work from the Department of Agriculture to send out different plans for the chicken coops and how to increase their crops. The whole thing developed very rapidly, because the incentive was way out of line.

00:21:07 All of a sudden, they were getting 35 cents a pound. Well, 35 cents a pound, that item in itself had to have a lot of steps. The farmers had to be educated about the chicken coops, and the mills had to be educated on what type of feed they got. Everything opened up. Because it was like a storm cloud coming up. It was brewing. In the plant, I could see a path that was your pale skinned chickens were developing into a nice creamy color. Their breasts were developing. Instead of the old razor-type breasts chickens used to have—the old four- five-year-old rooster got to be a thing of the past, as a lot of people [inaudible 00:22:17].

00:22:22 In going through that whole operation, that plant was quite an experience. They were diversified in many ways, the large packers. They had their total chicken operation, one, the Dutch operation was another, and then the wax operation, too. The turkey operation was more similar to the chickens, except it was a more massive field. You got into the scalding of chickens with the automatic conveyor system. They got them queued up, a little violence, didn't

take them very long before they got them queued up so they could handle a pallet of chickens in a day. So, it made a lot of difference. They built large coolers for cooling chickens, it was...

- 00:23:28 I could see the cycle was something I wanted to get into. They were changing times. I was right in the middle of it.
- SV: 00:23:37 So, then, when the opportunity came, you quit your job in Fairmount and moved up here to Wheaton?
- GW: 00:23:44 Yes.
- SV: 00:23:46 To set up a plant like that, like the one you set up here in Wheaton, it obviously took long lines of credit. I'd be interested if you'd—
- GW: 00:23:59 It was like dipping into the cookie jar without having any control of the cookies because we didn't have the money. I knew exactly what I wanted. And I was able to get a store with [Roost Bankers 00:24:14], people to draw our money from, but I knew what I was doing. It's hard to borrow money from a banker that has no relationship to a till, just working for a large corporation. They're very stern in their ideas. They're very limited to what they can do, unless they're jive.
- 00:24:41 I assume the young fellow that actually has some fire. There was [inaudible 00:24:48] that was working for them or something like that, and they had a time of it. But it wasn't very long before I had to get active there. Not because I had the time, but because they insisted. But we started. As the thing developed, money got to be the same thing as far as, it just happened to be something we happened to have need. There was no relationship to a normal banking procedure. We were way out on a limb. We only borrowed money on the potential lead producing the merchandise and a rapid turnover. I had fully convinced them that I could turn over a dollar faster than any business in town.
- 00:25:48 My inventory was, indeed, shelf bound. The [inaudible 00:25:51] was killed and packed and had to be shipped. I needed to go down the bank. They never had anybody working faster than I did, because I wanted to get it into the bank before the war. And as the volume increased, the amount of money I would use did. And it was about the

same thing as a fast con operation. Well, it really was very similar, only mine was, I believe, 100 percent resilient. When a man is fully convinced of its resilience, it's a lot easier to sell that story. Then these smooth boys without [inaudible 00:26:28] A bulk of the people knew me. I made total survey of the [inaudible 00:26:35]. I knew more about the farmers than the bankers knew. That's a fact. Because nobody came in their house, had coffee with them. Even when the flies were so thick in the kitchen, you could hardly see the individual you were talking to, a lot of times. As hot as it could be. But there is where I found out just exactly if I had a potential family that would raise chickens for me, turkeys, or whatnot, not that dozen of birds that came out of [inaudible 00:27:03] granary. I really knew the business.

00:27:07 I'd have to make another run to get along with all the peoples going again. It developed, and it developed fast. And then, the Land O' Lakes people, they had a creamery here. They were working hard, but their contact with the farmers is, the farmer would come in, they could talk to him. They had ordinary laborers. They didn't have an individual out there that was going to push them. It developed rapidly. As the government started increasing the price for good merchandise, the average eggs that were produced before the raise would hardly grade any more than 25 percent top-grade eggs. And they wouldn't be what is classified as top-grade eggs as the price got up. They were a very mediocre egg. You can imagine, with the eggs laid out in the open, not gathered maybe once or twice a week, they wouldn't be very good eggs.

00:28:26 It was just what they used to get small items. It was a very fast resilient operation. It didn't take very long before the farmers could borrow money to buy a chicken coop for raising chickens. A lot of them raised their own chickens under the new method that the Agriculture Department sent out information to them. It wasn't very long before hatcheries got involved in most towns, to take advantage of chickens that no one wanted when they had things ready.

SV: 00:29:03 So, as we began to enter the war, it seemed like credit was quite available to farmers.

GW: 00:29:07 It got to be available to anybody that had [inaudible 00:29:16] if you didn't ask for it, you say what you wanted to do, and if they approved it, you got the money. Because

most of these farmers didn't have the means to do anything. But there is one thing you've got to bear in mind. As the war developed, there was an unbelievable amount of daughters and sons that left the farm. Anyone at all, as they got older they moved over to the large plants. We didn't have the best of help. The age of the people working in our plants during the war was almost unbelievable. You'd never think there'd be five people that were 70 years old working for them.

00:30:09 But nearly every place in town that had a vacant room would have two or three girls in there, all over town. [inaudible 00:30:16] The restaurants started up the feeding them all, the different restaurants. It was a mass change, the whole movement.

SV: 00:30:26 Did you employ young people, too?

GW: 00:30:28 Oh, yes. Most of the makeup of the plant would be 80 percent women. During the war, I think we had four rejects, or men that couldn't go in the Army. And it was a chore to break them in. Every employee had to be taught what their jobs would be.

SV: 00:31:07 So, some skill was required—

GW: 00:31:25 —50 cents for a dollar a day. Of course, when we first started up, the first part of the year was in the fall, our bottom pay was 25 cents an hour. That was the standard pay from all the factories. Thirty-five was better, as you got better. The men had 35, 45, 65 cents an hour. It's unbelievable. It didn't stay very long because as these aircraft factories start paying these enormous wages and the government had us frozen on these low wages, I had to get the George S. May people out from Chicago. We paid them \$15 an hour to set up a fast time study, and an incentive deal so as an individual would produce more, we could make that our wage deal, which got us up into as high as a dollar and a quarter an hour, at the best.

00:32:46 Some never increased in production, and they were [inaudible 00:32:52] let off, and we'd use the better help.

SV: 00:32:57 These George S. May people, was this business management?

GW: 00:33:01 Business management, yes.

SV: 00:33:04 You mentioned that the government had you locked in on wages?

GW: 00:33:07 Yes, [inaudible 00:33:08] you could only pay so much money. That thing was frozen.

SV: 00:33:13 The wages were frozen. I see.

GW: 00:33:16 But the aircraft office said they could pay \$2.50 an hour. They'd get out there some way or another. All the tigers, the young fellows, and the skilled farm girls that were able to run an old Model T truck, they could learn how to run a Pearson truck that we got out there. That was good help.. But we made do with what we had. We trained them.

SV: 00:33:50 About how many people on the average did you employ at one time during the war?

GW: 00:33:56 Only about 100 people. In times, it'd be more than that.

SV: 00:34:13 It'd fluctuate quite a bit?

GW: 00:34:14 Yeah, it would fluctuate because as the cycles would run from your eggs to your poultries, and your turkeys. Turkeys were terrible, heavy and hard for the girls to handle. It takes more help. The smoothest operation we had, the one I liked the best, you had better control over, was the egg operation. We'd have 30, 40 women to candle the eggs. You could train a girl, and she could educate 10 of them, and she'd keep right on top of them. As she got better, she could take care of maybe 15 of them. It wasn't very long before two girls could take care of one whole room.

SV: 00:35:16 You were talking about the different—

GW: 00:35:20 Oh, the breakdown of the plant management. You have to understand, I had to teach every one of these people. It was just like taking a raw bunch of people and gradually developing them into a skilled crew. Our first attempts to sell them to the Army, we weren't able to put up a pack of eggs. I could say that I didn't have full control. But in the following year, by that time, I had the girls squared away. I stole the girls from other plants.

00:36:05 I got them from Fairmount. We got about 10 from up there.

SV: 00:36:14 So, you were drawing labor from as far away as Fairmount?

GW: 00:36:16 Yes. Well, Fairmount wasn't so far away. That's only 25 miles or so from here. Maybe a little more.

SV: 00:36:24 Did you draw labor from farther away than that?

GW: 00:36:27 Oh, yes. Yes, we had people come here from Benson. We got help from Benson Plant. They needed help down there.

SV: 00:36:41 But you got it up here.

GW: 00:36:42 Well, some of its field help. We scavenged a lot of help where I could get a hold of it. That's what I want to point out, I would work on them.

SV: 00:36:55 One thing that I wanted to clear up, yet, before I moved off the line of getting started and the credit lines, was the credit that you got from local banks, or did you have to go to larger institutions to get started?

GW: 00:37:11 We did get \$10,000 from my mother-in-law and my wife's brother. And then, we borrowed money from a farmer. He was a very good hard-nosed German, but he knew when he had a good deal. He knew we'd pay more interest than he could get at a bank. He was the type of fellow that was, he liked to make money, and the type of fellow that was always here watching. We could borrow \$10,000, \$20,000 any time we needed it. Like on a short run where we'd be wary to draw on the bank and the main office would be putting a lot of pressure on them. So, for a few days, we could draw money from them, but we had to pay them way more interest [inaudible 00:38:11].

00:38:12 It was a matter of just keeping the flow going, somewhere. That's how the businesses today, I think they'd be run out of town. [inaudible 00:38:20] 9:15 in the morning. It would be impossible for a person to start up that way today. The means of checking on a person now are [inaudible 00:38:42] in those days, it's remarkable [inaudible 00:38:45] those banks to the fact the income was there, a person was able to [inaudible 00:38:50]. But to raise vast amounts of money [inaudible 00:38:57] there were times I owed half a million dollars. My quarter of a million dollars would be riding on immediate [inaudible 00:39:07] of checks. That was something.

00:39:18 Now, the one thing about that loose money at that time, those conditions are so vastly different than normal times. There's no comparison in doing business. Now, today, you

have to have an itemized account of everything you had. I was able to borrow money from the Jewish people. I borrowed all my packaged goods, we borrowed thousands and thousands of dollars' worth of stuff. We had truckloads of stuff coming in from the live place. I'd use it and pay them as they used it. The volume of stuff that was used was that fast. But I convinced them, I never owed more [inaudible 00:40:05] package company. I wanted [inaudible 00:40:09]. I would complain that was a lousy way of habit, and a lot of stuff got buried and whatnot, and I said we're putting food into it.

00:40:20 I said, "I can't pay them for a carload of merchandise. One thing you can bear in mind, my place is open for an inventory checkup any time you want it, you've got a fieldman that stops in there a couple times a month. I do an inventory at the end of the week of what I've used. You can keep very close tabs on me." I says, "I'll pay you a little over the market price for the inventory. What I'm paying will be moved out a lot faster than a lot of the stuff you've got in your place."

00:41:01 So, they went along with that. But he'd call up, "Powers, I need about \$20,000, or \$25,000," and I'd say, "Morris, you're the best banker I've got. How about this, how about 10?" And we'd come to a deal. One thing, if you said you're going to pay 15, there'd better be \$15,000 in that check, in that mail. That was the law of business. And never could you renege on those. These Jewish bankers, the same thing. When I'd send them a financial statement, that had to be right.

SV: 00:41:42 These Jewish bankers that you refer to, were these people that were large bankers from out of the area?

GW: 00:41:46 Chicago men.

SV: 00:41:52 Just briefly, do you think that the conditions you described as far as accounting for money and stuff were, by today's standards, quite loose during the wartime.

GW: 00:42:04 Loose? Absolutely impossible. If the strand of profit hadn't been such a rejuvenating thing for the bankers, they wouldn't have been involved. They could borrow money from the government, you had to be able to get more, there was an enormous amount of money being handled. And most of the stuff was just like ours, money in transit.

- SV: 00:42:31 So, this situation just started up as our entry into the war became clear, then.
- GW: 00:42:34 Yes, and it gradually tightened up as the war developed, because by 1940, before Truman got in, we were getting squared away. We had developed quite a reserve. We didn't have time to spend any money. Everything we made was turned right back into incentives. It was remarkable to get squared away because at that time, when Truman dropped the ceiling on all supplies, the chickens were coming in, I imagine we took over \$100,000 loss on the big drop. The channels were all full. You had commitments to make.
- 00:43:33 It didn't fit. I knew it was there. We were hedging against it. We had a larger spread. We accumulated an unbelievable loss [inaudible 00:43:50]. But everything we got; we would sell. We would sell, dang, I would even sell inventory on the line in advance. We'd get a commitment on it. At that time, after that blow, we had the large corporations went down because North American Creamery Company gradually started folding. We had an awful time getting our money out of them. We sold them [inaudible 00:44:16] operation, we sold them stuff right off the line, all hoping to get our money.
- 00:44:24 But you were still obligated for a complete cleanup.. It was a lot of stuff. We operated so far out. At that time, we were spread out a long ways. We went down as far as Freeman, South Dakota. That's 45 miles west of Sioux Falls, way out West.
- SV: 00:44:51 These are places that you got eggs and chickens from?
- GW: 00:44:53 Yeah, yeah. We went well past a lot of packers on the way going down there. We had semi trucks hauling it in. A lot of the stuff coming out of Fremont was full of cows in fact. It was a Mennonite colony. They were terrific people. They got a lot of good ones, in there. They could teach them fast; it wouldn't take them too long. We brought down a couple USDA inspectors. We'd pick out the girls and watch the group [inaudible 00:45:26]. We trained our best help to handle it, and they were operating a miniature plant. They'd put up a pack that'd meet our qualifications.
- 00:45:42 So, actually, I gradually developed into a packer broker.

- SV: 00:45:49 Kind of a chain of operations.
- GW: 00:45:50 Yeah, because we could never have that buy in myself, and nobody ever thought about being a record [inaudible 00:45:58], I was buying, at a loss, like the brokers [inaudible 00:46:02] a lot of the stuff never, never hit our door at all. An unbelievable amount of stuff never hit our door. We shipped it right from those different places we'd start up.
- SV: 00:46:17 So, in buying your eggs and your chickens and stuff, you really didn't buy too much from small local people, but rather keyed into large operations throughout this whole region?
- GW: 00:46:28 We bought everything that came into the door, but the larger ones would be the...we'd help along. A lot of those operators had no idea what it was all about. You'd have to go out there and get them going. South Dakota..Brookings State was good. They do a lot of work, the farmers.
- SV: 00:46:55 The college down there?
- GW: 00:46:55 The college, yeah.
- SV: 00:46:57 They helped you out with teaching people how to raise the right kind of birds and stuff?
- GW: 00:47:03 No, we'd influence them to help the farmers. It always appeared to us better to be on the backside, pushing them. And they did a good job. Because that farm school did a very good job in those Swedish areas, where the Swedish colonies were, they did, I would say, as good a job as any place there was. And that [involved 00:47:36] like Northern, Lake Preston, clear down into the Madison area. The concentration of eggs we got out of there; we'd send semi trucks down there all the time to pick up there. They were good farmers, real good farmers.
- 00:48:00 The [inaudible 00:48:00] plants, it was a divided deal. They had a creamery operation, and they'd build a dressing deal for hogs and what not. And the one part was mainly used for feed. I remember we revamped the whole setup. First, they were broke and wanted me to take it over. I told them that I could revamp their setup, break away from the divided creamery operation and put it all into one roof and have them ship a pile of stuff. I was meeting with the board of directors and they didn't think it was possible.

- 00:49:02 They were about ready to give it to me. I said, “No, we’re not in the business, you should be in the business. You people around here are closest to your own business. Frankly, you’re practically all one nationality, I don’t see no reason why you people can’t get along in business yourself. In fact, I know you can. I’ll help you get squared away.” They had no money. I said, “Don’t worry about the money. If you get the merchandise and put it up right, you’ll get the money.” I said, “We didn’t have any money when we started.”
- 00:49:33 They did really well with it. In the first nine months after we got them squared away, they made more money than they had in the last 10 years. It was just unbelievable. They spent a lot of money. They bought some high-priced equipment and they put in the best of creamery equipment. They had moved the creamery over. They were switching into the milk deal. Had gotten in mind and devised to bring the milk in, make the butter, and sell the dried milk and what not. They developed into a powerful creamery. A lot of it was [inaudible 00:50:25] I can’t remember the amount of money they made, but it was almost unbelievable.
- 00:50:33 After the first year, I told them this [inaudible 00:50:38] what you’ve got now is just the seedlings. of what you can do. The president of the board said, “If that’s the seedlings, we’ll buy you the best Western hat you can possibly get.” Next year, I got it. I’ve still got. I’ve never worn it. But it was a very, very high-class Western hat. An old Lyndon Johnson special. But they made good money, big business [inaudible 00:51:17]. Their manager nearly came to work with me, when they were having trouble. I told him, you stay right there, be your own boss, your own operator, and they did. His son is running the place, last I heard. That’s a good area.
- SV: 00:51:44 You yourself with this plant here in Wheaton put in very new and very automated equipment when you furnished it, didn’t you?
- GW: 00:51:50 We had to. The rapid change of equipment, see, your equipment people, they started evolving. In a matter of a few years, [inaudible 00:52:02] equipment it was just continually changing all the time. But once they did, it didn’t take too long. I had made a trip to the East after the war got squared away, and we were so badly that we allowed the Japanese, we’d gone in there, and that time,

we'd gone into the George Heinrich, that was a subsidiary of the [inaudible 00:52:45] company. We got him to take a day off [inaudible 00:52:50] and see this unbelievable change of the poultry and egg business, the broader business. Here, you've got the doctors and lawyers and whatnot involved in putting up a 1,600-acre plot there that looked like a swamp from the old Tennessee, that dike we filled around it. There was 25 boiler units, 600 feet long, 20 feet wide.

00:53:30 They had a three-unit plant, one for what they call a New York pack, then they had a cut up deal, a cut pack, and they had an Army pack, and any one of those branches was far bigger than our operation. They would dress for several of these operations. They're all controlled by this group. When I saw that, I was fully convinced that now was the time to move on. So, we gradually stopped expanding, altogether. We had bought the armor plant over at Webster, South Dakota, before that. We had that through all the Japanese setups.

00:54:28 But by 1953, I was fully convinced then that we made a pretty nice piece of change. I could live a very comfortable life from then on without expanding and taking over more plants. So, this was a real hectic deal on my wife, because she had taken up bookkeeping. But the bookkeeping had gotten so—she was putting in 16, 17, 18-hour days trying to keep up. She had two girls working for her besides that. And then, we hired outside help to help, too.

00:55:21 But we both were beat. It was a tight year, we put in a long run, and we still didn't get too much of a break as far as amusements or anything, it was a long run. So, we gradually took the stand that we had to be ready to, as far as I was concerned, if the whole thing was shut, we'd be squared away for life with that [inaudible 00:55:59]. So, it came up to the Harry Truman's deal and in about 1950. By 1957, we were trying to make plans as to [inaudible 00:56:25] and wanted to get out of it. We had a labor strike. We had a labor strike first, that was in... [inaudible 00:56:35]. The labor struck in spring of 1958, when the ceilings were off, and the market was poor, and it wasn't really any good. Competition was highly competitive, then.

00:57:01 My wife and I had talked it over, and we couldn't imagine a better time than to just let the thing die as it was. So, we never paid any attention to these labor boys or anything.

All I would do is reach into my pocket and organize with who wanted to talk to me. I had Marty Weldy as my manager he used to be the manager of the Cutty Packing Company in Wadena. I'd take out my keys and I'd just roll my keys over. When I'd talk, I'd talk to Marty. We both had offices in the same room. This went on for about a week, we ran through their program in organizing help. They won by a few votes. They came in and he was all just happy as could be. He said, "What do you think about it, Mr. Powers?" All he got was a passing of the keys. That was on a Tuesday, Tuesday was the election. On Thursday morning, when we...I always took inventory on Thursday so, Friday, I would have our full cost just exactly whatever unit would cost, our supplies, our inventory, everything, so we knew exactly what to bid on. Our total operation, we would sell in advance. We always hedged our bet all the time.

00:59:00 So, Thursday, we got the cost estimate on all the inventory on Thursday. Friday morning, I told the boy that this is the last estimate you'll have to make on anything as far as the [inaudible 00:59:22] is concerned, because we finally closed on Monday morning. They couldn't believe it. We couldn't possibly [inaudible 00:59:31]. We dumped everything. We took a loss on all the equipment and shipped over the unfinished products to the Webster plant, the semis and such were rolling stock and we closed... It costs us a lot of money to close. There happened to be another stroke of luck. And then, after that, it just went on a year or so, then the big North American Creamery had closed, Litchfield Creamery folded, Cutty Packing folded, there was nothing left except, I remember Cutty and those places now, Cutty must have totally diversified altogether, not Cutty, but Swift, all these...the whole thing was changed.

01:00:31 I never could understand why those packers couldn't see, why they didn't [inaudible 01:00:34] fast like I did. They felt it was still going to continue. They certainly had access to the East Coast to see what was going on there. They certainly had access to the sun belt area, where they can raise chickens a lot better than you can up here in the cold weather. I used to make trips down to the sea every once in a while. But man, I've got a lot of friends to talk to. I saw the future up here was very, very thin as far as a long-term deal.

- 01:01:11 And my health was getting awful bad. Here, I was going down, scaring the doctors and half their patients to death every time I went down trying to get some information fast enough to keep going. But the move wasn't just overnight. It was something I planned. I knew we'd take a large loss, but we were squared away. We started investing in stocks and whatnot. That was a very nice time to be investing, too. That's exactly what happened.
- SV: 01:01:52 When you began the operation, before you started taking contracts with the military to supply them, were you selling to anyone else?
- GW: 01:02:02 Oh, yeah. We had to sell part loads. You couldn't make any money on part loads. I would sell part loads to different packers. We'd ship part loads to the Cities. During the war, there were times when the Army would get in the ship with the European deal to the islands over there in Japan, the battle over there, we had to store an awful lot of merchandise. We had our money by then, we would only borrow 80 percent.
- 01:02:46 We had to store that poultry and eggs in Minneapolis, Chicago, New York, all over. We had an enormous amount of money. In fact, we had the bulk of our money tied up in—we had 80 percent with it, that 20 percent was gone to stuff we had stored. We had a lot of money tied up in there. Things were so high. The old idea in my head, I don't want to see my hard-earned cash tied up in something I don't have full control over. So, it put us in the mood to get us squared away to get out of it. We had everything we wanted for it and we put in that 20 hard years. We still were young enough. I was going down fast, as far as health was concerned. And my wife, it was really hard. It was tough on my wife.
- 01:03:50 So, when it came up, it just gave us a legitimate excuse to get out of this business and then we got out. We ran the Webster plant until '61, and we closed that too.
- SV: 01:04:04 How did you get your first contracts for the Quartermasters in the Army to set up contracts?
- GW: 01:04:17 The brokers we were selling to in Chicago, the contacts in the Army would be with the brokers, and they'd contact us. And the brokers would contact us to ship stuff to the Army as a better deal for them. They were writing the same big

billing at the quartermaster Major Christensen. And it was a smooth deal for them because they had no way of having that kind of money. You had to be very close to the Army to get money to get the stuff. And the Army is slow paying, but as long as they can guarantee the work, the merchandise, the brokers could borrow money from the big banks.

- SV: 01:05:05 During the war, then, did you do, by far, most of your business with the Army contracts?
- GW: 01:05:12 Oh, yeah. The Army was the big thing. It was by far the best deal. You wouldn't think of it. You know about that big warehouse out in Seattle? Those huge, big coolers they used in all those ships? I was almost dumbfounded, the amount of our brand eggs were just piled up in big rows of them. I thought it would fill four, five ships, but I guess it didn't. It was an unbelievable amount of stuff we shipped out.
- SV: 01:05:48 Did you make some kind of guesses as to about what kind of volume you did with the Army during the war years?
- GW: 01:05:56 Oh, no. But it was very high. Very, very high. It was high. Because we had weeks where we'd ship 35 cars of eggs in a week. That's a lot of merchandise.
- SV: 01:06:18 Did you ever have problems not getting as many eggs and chickens as you needed?
- GW: 01:06:23 Oh, yes. Then you'd buy off your competitors, you'd bleed a little bit. Then they'd be over barrel and buy off of you, and they'd bleed a little bit. After we got into business, and after the boys, we'd have these poultry and egg conventions down in Kansas City, and they were a lot looser and freer, you had [inaudible 01:06:50] before, we were so busy you didn't have a chance to talk to them. But we made a lot of deals with competitors down there and working arrangements. Once we convinced the competitors we were going to be the ones to set the price, they were always scared that we were going to be the ones setting the price. And after we bought ourselves in, we settled back and bought on an even basis.
- 01:07:20 I said, "If I couldn't buy on an even basis, I couldn't stay in business." So, we had no trouble at all. They couldn't do anything with it. It was a little different from somebody

that owns a place, going out and seeing those boys, inviting groups of them to spend an afternoon and evening when a manager runs the packer. And it was a nice family relation, very close relation with these managers. They would often get nice birthday presents, Thanksgiving presents, Christmas presents, you name a holiday, they got one.

SV: 01:08:06 You mentioned to me last time I was here that when you were in contact with the Quartermaster Corps, they had told you that the corps didn't want to deal so much with the large packers, and rather, wanted to deal with the small independents. Could you recount that, please?

GW: 01:08:22 Well, when it first started out, the packers had everything their own way. But as these creameries got larger, the creameries would put out a fresher pack, because they'd [inaudible 01:08:40] the farmer, they'd pack it up, and we collected possibly three times a week. And we'd put it up and be ready, so that stuff would get out of our house. The packers were having a slower operation getting it through their plant than we were [inaudible 01:08:57]. We were putting out a pack of eggs that was actually way better than what the specs called for.

01:09:04 The specs called for an 80 percent egg, and they were getting a jam-packed top-grade egg, because these creameries, we had instilled on just exactly what they had put up. The price was good. They could put up a good pack. There was no reason for it. Any time they'd have any trouble, we'd get over a couple of our inspectors. Lay out the grading tool. Here you would have maybe a three-cent difference between the first and second grade, if we made three grades of eggs. It wasn't justifiable to be down, and lose that difference. To have a pile of farmer's eggs being rejected, because they weren't putting up a good pack. They'd put up a good pack.

01:09:45 So, the farmers had enough volume, then. Instead of those pigeon eggs that were being raised beneath the old granary, these were beautiful, first-class eggs. The hatcheries were in business, putting out good poults, good chickens. There was no question about it. The average egg that came out of the chickens were very right at the top snuff. There was no blood in the yolks, there was no...the shells of the eggs were stronger. It was a simple thing, very effective. If the [inaudible 01:10:24] didn't damage the egg, If the house was arranged right, clean, you wouldn't have very much

trouble grabbing any egg, it'd be a very good egg, except for a few soft-shelled, or little spots, but that stuff gradually spread away.

01:10:50 Just think of those henneries, now. They put out top-notch eggs, no question about it. A little more fiber than we had, in those days.

SV: 01:11:01 During the war, did any of the items that were rationed give problems for your operation?

GW: 01:11:13 We were able to get anything that was necessary to operate a plant. All we had to do was have the gumption to fill out the forms, and inquire, and dig after, and you got it. Sure, it was tough. But we got anything we needed because we just got right after it.

SV: 01:11:31 The government saw to it that you could survive.

GW: 01:11:34 Yes, sir. A lot of times, we had to kick around a little bit, and we'd get it, because we had no trouble getting supplies. I ordered egg case nails by the carload. That's a fact. One order, I ordered three cars of strapping wire, a carload of egg case nails, I think the nails at that time was selling for about 13, 14 cents a pound, I think we got it for four or five cents a pound. And everybody thought I was crazy, working a carload of egg case nails. I had no trouble selling it at a nice profit to the competitors.

01:12:15 The strapping wire. Man, we used a lot of strapping wire. Every case had to be triple strapped. We used a lot, an unbelievable amount.

SV: 01:12:24 Yeah, I've heard from farmers and other people that, for instance, machinery and this type of thing, that was short at the time.

GW: 01:12:35 We could get machinery out of California, and new type of equipment out there. We'd get a requisition from the Army, and we'd get it. As long as we stayed in the good graces of the Army, they were good. Any time we wanted something; we'd put pressure on the army to give us a little boost on something. Plus, Major Christensen was an uncanny fellow. He was awful busy. If you could explain to him using the least amount of words what you wanted, they had the name, everything right to that seal, and a forwarding address for the letter for them to do a check on, it was done. The whole thing was a mechanic. Tell you how to simplify the

question. If you fumbled around and wanted him to dig it up for you, you were cooked.

01:13:31 You got to have everything lined up so all he had to do is check it off and go in the order he needed it, as far as getting the okay, if everything was fixed, all he had to do was just okay it. Nothing to it at all.

SV: 01:13:48 This major was your contact in the Quartermaster Corps?

GW: 01:13:51 Major Christensen was head of the buying of the Quartermaster Corps. In order to get something done, he wanted our merchandise. And we had no trouble with the Army, different branches through him, to get it squared away. And when we'd tell him, when they'd reject a carton of eggs of ours, we'd tell them, "That carton of eggs is good." He says, "I'll get it double-checked." And he'd go out and get it double-checked. We'd let 'em, we were right, and we were lucky. Everyone was happy.

01:14:29 We were fortunate enough to have some good inspectors. On the one hand, they're a human being and have a tendency to get slack. But we'd keep them well-paid and keep peace in the family. It was more like a family [inaudible 01:14:51], it was a strapping bunch, but we'd always work together.

SV: 01:14:57 These inspectors that you're mentioning, were these the USDA-certified inspectors that you—

GW: 01:15:03 Yes, they were health-certified, but we'd trained them well. The Department of Agriculture, old Sandals, he came out to our place, and his family stayed out in the [inaudible 01:15:15] too. He kept his ties with these people. I think because we were an individual operation, an open, individual operation, we were able to get closer to a lot of these people and have friendships than large packers working for somebody else. Sandals, and his wife, and some of them were out for weeks at our cottage, summer home. We never used it but we had we even let the Army boys use it. It was just one of those things you had to keep—

01:16:07 The Army, the inspection part, were after us a lot of time. They thought there was some collusion going on, and we were able to do something in the areas of packing. We were checked several times. The Internal Security department

would think there was some collusion going on. That's one thing we'd have to be absolutely not right in the head, there'd be no—the Army wanted us to stay away from the individuals. Well, out in the small towns you don't stay away from the individuals, then they'd come out here [inaudible 01:16:46] out there, we wouldn't think of putting a net in the lake and getting some nice, fresh walleyes and frying them. Sometimes, the net fell in, though, because there was fish in it. You could see them.

01:17:07 The captain, too, inspectors, and they were running out three, four cars of eggs for us. We got a chick back from them, I don't know if the tackle was—oh, we invited them out to the lake, and we had drinks, and we fried steak and fish. It was illegal, at that time of year, to have fish. We got Internal inspection from the Army, real tough cookies. But they weren't too hard to handle. They thought they really had some collusion going on, but before they left our plant, there was absolutely nothing at all, because that's the last thing we could possibly afford, to have any friction with any of the boys, because you had the normal individual. You had the high and low, good inspectors and bad inspectors. You had to live with them.

01:18:20 If you tried to influence the way they were taught, you were going to get in trouble. So, we kept away from them. All we could do, if their inspections didn't grade the eggs we knew the eggs were graded, they rejected them, they got right on the other end. The God dang reinspections they were right... But this one time, I remember they're really hard-nosed on it. Boys came out, there was a lieutenant colonel, we were selling a lot of stuff, there.

01:18:58 They ran through the setup and they questioned all over town, they questioned businessmen. When they got all through, when they left, they came back again, and they wanted to know about the cottage deal. Any chance [inaudible 01:19:20] you've got just about exactly 25 minutes, you had to go out 12 miles to the cottage. I said, "Do you boys want a ride? Let's go. I'll take you out." So, they got an education about 125 miles an hour out there. When we went out there I showed them the set-up, showed just exactly what it was. All it was, was a large summer home we built. It was nice. There were three poker tables to playing cards with, and with Sylvie there, there'd be a sizable crew, three beds if you wanted to sleep there.

There's no problem at all. And they wanted to know how I happened to have this.

01:20:20 I said, "We got a vast amount of deals. A lot of times you can't get close to a strange dealer, but you bring them out and their family, and talk. I like to cook. I like to have good food. I like to have good drinks. You can't work all the time without a little bit of play." And so, they left there fully convinced it was just—I operated in a small town and had a big business. So, we had no more trouble. But our first year, when we first got the inspections, they had what was known as the 21-day wonders that didn't know a damn thing about eggs.

01:21:09 We had a little trouble with them, so we got squared away. And mostly the other operators had the same problem. It was just a matter of them trying to get the best eggs they possibly could with not the best of help. But the Army gradually squared them away. I remember we bucked horns a few times. At that time, we needed to get—the Army's price was way over anybody else. We did get it squared away. But the Army hadn't trained their boys too well. Our girls showed them - we had a local [inaudible 01:22:04] she'd run through the same 100 eggs that they ran through; her grade would be 10, 12 percent higher than theirs, and it'd cause friction.

01:22:20 But the Sandel, the head of the US Department of Agriculture, he'd back us up and we got squared away. We got back into the Army program. We damn near got booted out all together, because you couldn't buck up against the Army. But we weren't bucking up against the Army, we were trying to prove a point. And we got it squared away.

SV: 01:22:47 A business this size in a small town like this is always something that's interesting to look at. About how much of the money that was dealt with and doing the business, about how much of the business stayed in a small-town area, do you think?

GW: 01:23:09 These salaries the people got; I imagine that quite an amount of that was dumped into town. Our operation... we had started with an enormous amount of money in town. When we closed the plant, I had a big meeting, they were doing a lot of pleading. Of course there was terrific amount of jealousy, because I'd make a lot more money than most of the businesses. But that was the only real expression, but

it was too late. But that's normal for a small community. That had no influence on us, we knew exactly... I had to quit. There was nothing I could do about it. I didn't mention the fact that was one of the main reasons, but man, they were having problems with me, and I was going to specialists in the Cities, I was going to specialists in Chicago trying to figure out what the deal was. When you start losing your lungs, it's a—man, I had that. On top of the trouble, I had that goiter. It was called a retrosternal goiter. I was swollen up, just like—and they thought, first, the goiter was shutting the windpipe off, so then they had to clear the windpipe.

01:24:45 But that wasn't what was causing me trouble. Between the goiter and the windpipe was a massive tumor. I spent three weeks down in Rochester going through all the examinations to figure out what they could do. I was on such high doses of cortisone. See, I had to take, I had more cortisone, I'm taking a pill with two shots every day to keep going. Then, now, I'm taking 16 milligrams of cortisone a day. You can't do it. That's the only way I keep breathing. And going through those tests, man, I had platoons of doctors. I lost my insurance on a little back operation. I had two large insurance bills, both corporations paying into it. They were close to \$1,500 a month, each one of them. Accident insurance wasn't [inaudible 01:25:53].

01:25:56 I injured my back on a hunting trip out in Wyoming. Came back, just one of those tweaks in your back, more of a pain in the neck cuz if you're not stooping over trying to lift something, you can get by on it. And it healed up in about nine months. Then, I had to go to a chiropractor would run down, and the hospital, first stop there, and I'd go to the chiropractor, to the doctor, when I got home, I'm usually on the hospital ward. I still had to go from the chiropractor to the hospital. With the loss of these big policies the corporations were paying in, I had to pay that through those. That was an ungodly big bill.

01:26:53 I had to set back a whole nickel [inaudible 01:26:53]... It took them over a week to decide whether they were going to operate through the back or through the front. It was one day they had to operate through the back, so it wouldn't spread you see. It wasn't, they were going to operate through the front. And I got so tired of getting up there at the seven bells and the last one to leave in the evening, and I was having an awful lot of trouble just breathing, and I

was beat. My brother-in-law was a doctor, over at, Dr Sydney, Watson over in Morris, isn't he? His brother is my brother-in-law over in Little Falls, Doctor Sidney Watson. I called doctor Sid and told them, "I've had it. I'm through. I'm going home." So, I told him that I had [inaudible 01:27:56] doctor to take care of me that I had it. I said, "I don't think I'll be coming back." I had come back with the doctors [inaudible 01:28:10] They had spent enough time....

01:28:20 But they immediately called Dr. Sid, of course. Dr Sid says you better go back and they are going to make up their mind. I said, "Why don't they make up their mind?" "Well, they don't know whether to operate through your back or through your chest." I said, "My God, tell them they'll cut open the neck and find out what the hell they've got and they can make up their mind. Flop me either way you want. We've got to get it done; I can't cut it any longer." God, they had me on those treadmills and doing the shock you know..

01:28:50 But they finally operated. That was a long, long-drawn-out affair, boy... See, the trouble was that medicines don't help that I'm a poor healer, I just don't heal. A slightest little thing will [inaudible 01:29:10] and won't heal. And they finally got me squared away, but it was about a year and half before I did get squared away. So, I knew if we continued much longer, my wife was fully convinced that—I was down 137 pounds. I was all bones. But it got so we just had to quit, there's nothing we could do about it. The incentive was gone, too. We'd always made up a plan that if we ever got squared away that we could live off of four percent money we're going to leave it go. So, we bought quite a bit of land, we were heavily investing in stocks, and stocks were cheap at that time. So, we just got out of it. Lucky when we did, too. It appeared to be a terrific loss at the time, it was just—

SV: 01:30:23 I've got just a couple more questions about the business. During the war, I know with some businesses, not necessarily in this area, but around the country, had mobilization programs within the business. Were there things like this within your business, like bond-buying plans for employees?

GW: 01:30:46 Yes. We'd steal every good help they had. We couldn't keep any...they either had to have something wrong-they

had to be rejects in order to keep them. But we did, too. You'd be surprised what a woman could do. By God, we had them doing everything. It was just a matter of [inaudible 01:31:14].

- SV: 01:31:16 But you did have bond-buying programs and stuff like that.
- GW: 01:31:19 Oh, sure. You had to have that. Remember, you were in a war-oriented setup. You had to be part of it. If you weren't, man, all they had to do was notify who was buying from you, and you were in trouble.
- SV: 01:31:33 So, that was one of the government conditions.
- GW: 01:31:36 Oh, God, we had to buy. No sir, we had to turn in a lot of money to them. There's no....
- SV: 01:31:48 You'd mentioned a little bit earlier, too, that if I understood you correctly, that in order to deal with the people in town, and the business stuff, you felt that you had to join in with the Wheaton Commercial Club and certain things like this.
- GW: 01:32:03 We didn't have time for any of that stuff, and yet, we had to be a part of it. Where you'd have problems with the plant and you should be there, a lot of times I'd have to go to the Commercial meetings. I remember they wanted me to be president. I was vice chairman of the Commercial Club, normally they shluff you into being president the next year. And I told the banker, he's president now, "No. You're the banker. You know damn well I haven't got time for any of this. I'm only doing this as a courtesy for the organization, as your vice chairman. But now, as far as making me chairman, I'd have to take away from the plant. I've got my hands so full; I can't do that. Now, if they make an error and push me for chairman you'll lose an active member. Now I absolutely can't do it and you should know that. If you can't convince them, they'll lose an active member"
- 01:33:17 So, I kind of came back with Ken [inaudible 01:33:20], and they pushed me into chair. I told them that was it. I said, "You need somebody, fine, I'll give it to you." I said, "You 12 went to the meeting?" "Yes." I said, "Okay. You need money, you need help? I'll send somebody down to help you with your new project, but that's it. I'm beat."
- 01:33:56 [start of new tape] And we had a sloppy deal. So, I had [inaudible 01:34:03] friends, they had the old retired fellow who was running the hospital, the second in command was

the banker. They never had an agenda. They never had a witness of the meeting. There was never any accounting going on. So, the mayor put me on the board, so I got on there, and I saw that mess. Well, that was something to do, either I get off, or I set it up. So, with the health conditions I had I got to set it up or nobody else was going to do it. So, I got a buddy of mine, he was mayor for years afterwards, we got him activated, his whole family in Houston.

01:35:03 Family is very, very influential people. I talked him into being mayor. And then, I talked in to - as long as he's mayor he might as well be on the city owned hospital board. "Oh, I can't do that." I said, "Yeah, we've got to have one more member. We've got the hatchery men." So, when we got to three, the next meeting, I says, Sam Farm, who owns the banks over here, he says he never had an agenda, never knew how much money there was at a time. So I says, "Sam, I have you on the agenda for today." He pulled out an envelope from his pocket and looks at it, and I says, "Sam is that your agenda? Will you kindly read it out for the board members so they have an idea what we're working on?" It's always the same thing, "No, Sam, it's not always going to be the same thing". I says, "There's got to be a full agenda, what the agenda says to each of the board members so they know what they're going to do each meeting. We can't waste our time the way you've been wasting their time, you've gotten by with murder here for a long time."

01:36:18 I said, "Could you kindly tell us how much money we've got in the bank?" He didn't have that. "Well, Sam," I says, "there's a little bit of things I've picked up that you've got a sizable, little account over there. And yet, we don't have any money in the bank. We've got to borrow money from the bank. What's the deal?" He says, "Well, we've got about \$36,000 from there." I says, "You've got \$36,000? What you do is put that on interest." "If you do that, I quit." I says, "Goodbye, Sam." I said, "I always knew your heart was in the right place, but it wasn't in the board's place. So, I make the motion to accept Sam's," so we gradually got that squared away.

01:37:24 I started monkeying with that kind of stuff.

SV:

01:37:32 You were serving on these boards and stuff while you were still actively working in the business?

- GW: 01:37:37 Yeah. I really got active when I got loose, we still had the Webster plant, but I would still work on the boards there, the county commission for 16 years. Man alive, that, I never could be on a darn board..plus I got nose into it... take up so much time. Oh, they took up time. And I suppose I had a lot of money. It cost me a few thousand dollars every year to be county commissioner. But it was fun when I was able to do it, but man, I just couldn't do it anymore. Weasel deals, on the welfare deal, on the nursing home deal.
- SV: 01:38:33 Were there any specifically war mobilization boards that you were maneuvered into serving on, like rationing boards, or salvaging?
- GW: 01:38:43 No, I blocked those out. I had to block those out. In their primitive stages they needed a lot of help, but man, I needed all the help I could possibly get. I had no time. We put in such long days. We didn't have the time to do that. And the board, I convinced them there was no possible chance. Either I'd jeopardize the feeding programs that way or [inaudible 01:39:13] we had plenty of people that could do that. But I'd burn out the car. I put on a lot of miles on a car, I needed a new car, I'd go out there and I'd get a car, and tires, and gasoline for our trucks, everything.
- SV: 01:39:31 You worked through the local rationing boards?
- GW: 01:39:33 No problem. I just got a notification from the Army saying we needed it, and I got it. But we lived a life 100 percent for the Army. My God we were tied in. I don't think a lot of those Army boys had as hard a work as we had. God knows [inaudible 01:39:52]. I sometimes wonder how we ever did it, We'd be getting up, 5:30 in the morning, sometimes 1:00, 2:00 before we'd get through. We lived above the old main part of a closed building, with a slat roof, it would be 110, 115 degrees in that place and that was the place we were living. It was about '45, '46 we bought the big Howard house, and then we got a chance to get some rest, we were killing ourselves. But I didn't have time. I didn't have time to get that squared away. And we did, then, but it was rough going.
- 01:40:49 But it was a young man's game. If a man wasn't hungry, and damn hungry to get ahead, and willing to put an unusual amount of effort, he never had any problems. It still goes back to the thing I told you in the first place, you

have to be hungry, you have to have the idea in your mind, and you have to go at it at the right time. If those combinations aren't together, the best a man can't do nothing about it.

SV: 01:41:27 The circumstances of the war—

GW: 01:41:27 Everything has to be there. They're there for you to seek and find. It has to be that way. There's no possible chance for anybody to do those things unless every condition is put in place. You found them. If you were hungry enough you'd find them. You couldn't kid around though. I remember my first trip to Chicago, the war production board, when those things were open, I didn't know what to start with at all, but I went there, talked to enough people and got squared away. But I remember going down there, I made up my mind I'm going to stay here, find somebody to talk to, somebody to explain these things to me. Today, I wouldn't have enough wind.

01:42:33 Well, we're not gone yet. We could get into a rousing mess. I wonder, sometimes, if we won't have a vast changeover in our way of life in the next 25 years, because the elements are moving, now, whether their way of life is better than our, what we think of as a kosher way of life. That isn't exactly what the Jewish boys are saying is kosher. I don't know. I wouldn't want to live in a regimented country that they have over there, but they're doing massive things. Their end result is unbelievable. And what they have to do, we don't know what they have to do [inaudible 01:43:30] over there, and it was unbelievable, too. That's a captive brain, I think I would die [inaudible 01:43:35].

01:43:43 I can't visualize people, but they were backwards so long, some, a large percentage, are living better, but an awful lot of them will never get out [inaudible 01:44:00] I don't believe that that's the intent there, of the Western set-up, they want to keep them [inaudible 01:44:08]. But they're doing something. They're doing some massive work over there. Maybe, eventually, they might get it squared away and settle down a little bit. It'll take a lot of change in their top bunch. I can't quite see it. I hope we get to a better meeting of the minds. You ought to remember, we don't hire... the type of individuals, our politicians, I'd say if we took the top 100 corporations and picked the top 50 or 100 of them, their brains, it wouldn't take a very heavy layman

to pick a hell of a lot better fellows to run our government than we got today.

01:45:11 I always say there's somebody that went broke in business, or got canned from the large corporations go work for the government. There's...it's hard to work for the government, but you have to remember it's hard to work for a large corporation, too. That's a dog eat dog deal, too. But we really don't have talent in the government. Your life is so... you have more privacy in large corporations, than you have working for the government, the larger boys. And sometimes, that doesn't look too right, either.

SV: 01:46:06 Those are all the questions that I had about your business. We've gone almost two hours this morning.

GW: 01:46:21 You couldn't get me to talk. My throat is raw as can be. Let's finish this up. What did you have in mind there for the last bit?

SV: 01:46:34 Well, I really think that we've covered a great deal of stuff. Some of the questions on the thing that I gave you there might not have been covered here, but in this case—

GW: 01:46:56 What you should do is pick out of the conversation— actually, that's what you had with me, nothing but a conversation, is pick out something pertaining to that era... the possibilities of a small individual able to adapt himself to the trend, and to see it, and advance. It was a combination of things that I really wanted to do. It happened at the right time. Because it can't be done today. I don't think it could be roughshod through. Most of the people I was able to bamboozle to get money and whatnot, they're under closer check now than they were, then. And the amount of money you would need now would be 10 times as much as it was then.

01:48:02 I remember when the Army wanted a glazed tile plant. Well, I said "Wait awhile". I'll produce you merchandise, I told [inaudible 01:48:16] they'll never know if it was glazed tile or anything." He goes, "When I'm through, I'm through. I don't care what happens after." I gave away the plant for \$15,000, and then the government didn't charge you interest, I'd end up with about \$6,000 or \$7,000. I wanted to totally be away from [inaudible 01:48:47]. I didn't want any part of it. And it was just by a very thin

line that I didn't put in a big plant out at the lake, out there [inaudible 01:49:03] doesn't seem feasible right now.

01:49:10 All these shallow lakes have a terrific amount of carp. A lot of Jewish in the United States, Canada, whatnot. They use an awful lot of these carp as food, and no problem, I talked to two boys, as far as...get the old Rabbi out here so the food was blessed, there was no trouble at all, the Canadian [inaudible 01:49:38]. I nearly tied up a lot of money that deal... But my wife, she bucked at it. "Oh, man." She says, "what do you want to do it for? You'll never live to be 50." But there's still so many chances to make money out here, yet. It won't be easy. Not with this fellow, not unless Congress is going to stand up. A lot of us have a fever of no less than 103 right now. My temperature is just hot.

01:50:26 But what you should pick out of there is the trend that started in a dead stock, wait and see the different things that could happen, you were able to fumble through by brute force to make a go. The time was right. To do it today would be impossible. I don't think there's no possible chance. In the first place, to raise capital like that, you'd have to sell stock, and that'd be hard to deal. Nobody could operate without any money like we did. It was just a fast shuffle.

01:51:22 Today, I would say, if I was making an evaluation of our operation when we start, I would have to say it was the closest thing to a 100 percent con operation. That man, he'd either have to be a messiah or something to start something like that and think he could possibly make it come through. Conditions were right. It was a whole different thing. I knew it was right. A lot of people are working a job they aren't sold on. But to do those things, you've got to believe in it, 100 percent. You've got to be damn hungry. You've got to be willing to work those unbelievable 40-hour days. My god, I never thought of those 40-hour days. You gotta let your wife work along with you on those, but pretty soon, they get tired and would like to have a little rest, go someplace.

01:52:21 For about three or four years, I never even have a lot of time. I would seal the deals, and do all the pickups. Then we got so spread out I had hundreds of miles to go. You put 100,000 miles on a car easy. I had to do that after work. I'd go more miles 100 miles an hour in the dark...oh we got tired. Get home 3:00, 4:00 in the morning [inaudible

01:53:02] and the last about six, seven years, since Cutty Packing Company went global in '48, I closed in the spring of '58. I hired about five men from Cutty's best men, and two of their best managers. So, we all worked together around there, so I just took the fellows that worked together, stole those from Cutty and brought them here. So, then we were in shape to work the east floors there. The whole Vietnam set-up, Jeepers, man, we were able to—we gemmed that brokerage set-ups. That's actually what it was, we were just a high-class broker, where we controlled the merchandise, for, we knew what we had, we weren't buying a cat in a bag because we had total control.

01:54:21 [inaudible 01:54:21] was handled that way. A lot of stuff never hit our plant. Probably never knew I was [inaudible 01:54:26] Most of the banking was done through the Chicago Bank. We did business, all the time, going through the Harris Trust. When the silver market hit here, when I needed people worth \$1 million, I used up... we never received \$100,000, but we never got any big money. But I sold two carloads of silver, or 2 contracts of silver on a \$62 dollar basis. You can imagine they were only paying \$20 but it came in from all over, they paid the same price as they did Minneapolis. It was nerve-wracking. But you take...it don't take no time before you've used up an enormous amount of money. Where do you get the money to pay for this? It was crazy. But luckily, it didn't last too long, because I'd got so much stuff that's I haven't even got near. Stuff I knew and way so much more [inaudible 01:55:58] .silver. A lot of gem merchandise came through, I can't imagine people, what they're thinking about.

01:56:07 I did thousands and thousands of dollars' worth of stuff I hadn't been able to get near. Proof coins, old gems, old foreign coins...man they were high priced and in beautiful shape, family's had them for years, and all of a sudden you got them for \$20. They never could get anything for them, they never tried.

SV: 01:56:34 I think we've got a best account that can be put together in just a couple hours of a boom business, here. Thank you very much for it.

GW: 01:56:45 If you look at the map today of Traverse County, and the map that you had years back, and see where those sections that have farm places on them, and the whole system, how it's been changed, you more or less bypass those areas, but

there are people living on it. It's almost unbelievable. When I went out and see those farm places and go right into those houses, most people never had...to me, it was so easy for me to get into a house, regardless of whether that house is cleaned up, whether she was carrying, whether she had a dirty apron on, whether her hair was all messed up, or sweating, I was able to make that woman just feel like I was a common person. I just tell her, just keep on working, let's see if we can talk it over. And maybe I'd start help her, peel some apples, or stuff, just to be—I got so much information out of it.

01:57:56 You can see how they felt like you [inaudible 01:58:00] and you go through that. I remember one section I went through, 21 people, kids on a section of land, four different farms. There wasn't a possible chance for a program in that period of time to continually work on that. You'd go out there and see four skinny horses, an old sulky plow and an old [inaudible 01:58:28]. It was unbelievable. You just wonder how the heck they take care of those six kids. Those families were large. Man alive. A lot of kids go to school, the little old schoolhouses, they're all gone. That was the old way of life. Boy, that had to change. I don't think we would have made the switchover, either, if the war hadn't come on, do you?

SV: 01:59:06 No. Well—

GW: 01:59:07 I don't think you could induce those kids to leave their farm. Come in and work. A lot of them were too timid, they were a little bit of an unknown quantity between the farm kids and the city kids [inaudible 01:59:26] the boys and girls, [inaudible 01:59:28] in fact, we catered to the farm kids. Because they're rugged. They'd get in there and be a 40-hour week, and we'd get maybe 60, 70 hours out of those kids, they were happy to get that over-time. A lot of the city kids didn't, they wanted to go to the movies or something. I don't know, I gave you kind of a rough, rough idea of this. But I'm sure on that, you'll get an idea of what actually happened. This isn't the only place. There are a lot of other places, the same thing. My God, you ought to see the way those eggs were processed the first time.

02:00:27 That was just junk. Bad food, the worst stuff. They could feed it to the boys. It wasn't very long before they told them what they thought [inaudible 02:00:34], dried eggs. And that was cleaned out. Now you think of dried food

[inaudible 02:00:39] after fumbling with the dried food to start with. It's a nice product, now, it's healthy, it's clean, and inspections are tough. They still have a little trouble with milk once in a while, I see, but you're always going to have the human element to work with that's going to try and shortcut the rest of the public. But inspections are getting tougher.

02:01:11 We shipped some awful good eggs over there. You go over there, to Japan and the boys see our old name plates on there, the egg cases and this, [inaudible 02:01:23] we've got hundreds of letters back from Japan, unbelievable. Those islands, a letter would come off there, from boys from over here from neighboring towns, their parents and their family worked for our plant. We had people here working from all over. It was quite a thrill. The only thing they would holler about was, they accused me of putting up the dried eggs, we had nothing to do with it. Ours were all whole egg shells, whole-shelled eggs. We got a lot of compliments on them. one thing that was kinda nice. But we did put up a good pack. That's the last thing you want, to lose contracts. All the packers would [inaudible 02:02:20] but they had a lot of weight behind them. Old Major Christensen, "Powers we can get better stuff out of you than we can get from those packers." I never would have got that big, did I talk about that Spanish deal. I was thinking about building at some ports over in Spain. It was after things were squared away, Europe was all squared away Uncle Sam started to put up a big investment over in Spain, some big docks, and make that more of a [inaudible 02:03:01].

SV: 02:03:10 Oh, yeah, I knew the history. I just wasn't sure you'd told me the story before or not.

GW: 02:03:15 Oh, yeah. We put in billions of dollars over in Spain. I got a tip off from [inaudible 02:03:16] that there was going to be a big contract. We'll be letting the powers that be of the industry will make it big enough that so that the small operators couldn't handle it. The same day or so, I got a call from the brokers saying how many cars do I have? I said, "What are you talking about? I can give you as many cars as you want, you just tell me what." "Well, can you handle 100, 150 cars and ship them?" "Yeah, I can handle 150 cars, but I've got to have top seed there, if you want 150 cars, you got to get them off the market line and be sure they're are good cars." He says, "Well, there's a big

contract coming up, I don't dare say nothing about it, but if you want that contract, I think we can work it." You see, when he said we, I knew that it was a lot of money then, because it wasn't just him, there were more brokers involved. So, he says, "Well, [inaudible 02:04:43] just be damn sure there's enough for me to buy, and a little bit for me off the top—