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LT: 00:00 —a KMRS Saturday news feature. We're talking now with Eugene Behl of Morris, a retired Minnesota Highway Department employee. Well, Gene, where were you born?

EB: 00:09 Olivet, South Dakota.

LT: 00:11 And that's located where? I don't believe I heard of that town.

EB: 00:14 It's about 30 miles from Yankton, South Dakota down next to the river there.

LT: 00:22 And when did you move to Morris?

EB: 00:24 Came here in 1912.

LT: 00:28 A pretty young man then?

EB: 00:31 Yes.

LT: 00:32 And you went to school then in Morris and through the Morris system?

EB: 00:35 I went through the Morris system, graduated in '25.

LT: 00:39 And about what year did you start with the Highway Department?

EB: 00:42 The spring of 1925.

LT: 00:45 Well, tell us a little bit about what the highways were back when you started with the highway department. I think today people maybe take them a little bit for granted.

EB: 00:54 Well, the roads were all gravel and everything was gravel. And Babcock started the state highway system.

LT: 01:05 Were the state highways much different from any other roads then?

EB: 01:09 Well, they were designated by St. Paul as to where they would be, and some later became county roads.

LT: 01:20 All the roads were basically about the same though.

EB: 01:23 Basically about the same.

LT: 01:25 Well, how did the highway department work? Were there certain—I know there's a maintenance office here in Morris and then Detroit Lakes and this type of thing, were there offices back then?

EB: 01:35 No, the main office was here in Morris when I started, and then the office was set up in Detroit Lakes, and then there was later ones that went up at the same time.

LT: 01:49 Were there people along in between the offices that worked with the highway department, however?

EB: 01:54 Yes.

LT: 01:55 And they had a certain area that they were responsible for?

EB: 01:58 That's right. They had so many miles of road each office did look after.

LT: 02:04 Well, now, what about these areas that didn't have any gravel? Was there enough around this area?

EB: 02:10 Well, there were some of them around here that didn't have any gravel at all. The summers was always spent by the rigger gravel crew, which I was a member of, and then they had men with wagons, and teams in a small blade take care of probably eight or ten miles. And then the gravel crew would take care of the graveling out during summer months.

LT: 02:40 What about speed limits? Did they have speed limits back then in '25?

EB: 02:44 No, there was no speed limits, the road took care of that itself.

LT: 02:48 What about road signs? I know that that's one of them is the speed limit, but there's lots of others that give directions of where to go, road information and that type of thing.

EB: 02:58 Well, there wasn't too much for road signs. The first road signs that I can remember were painted on a telephone pole, like the old Katy Trail that goes, and that's 28 going to Graceville that way.

LT: 03:16 Person had to know where they were going in other words.

EB: 03:18 Right.

LT: 03:19 What about blacktop roads? You mentioned gravel. When did they first come into being around this area?

EB: 03:26 Around Morris here, well, I would say about 1930, along in there.

LT: 03:40 And I suppose that made quite a difference in how fast a person could go on highway, too.

EB: 03:45 Right.

LT: 03:46 Well, now, did they make blacktop the same way that they make it now?

EB: 03:50 No. It was all gravel hauled out by the gravel crew, and then they would dry it, they would get a tree limb someplace along the road and tie it behind an old Fordson and dry the gravel out, then mix it with a power patrol.

LT: 04:11 So in other words, it's mixed right in place in other words.

EB: 04:14 Mixed right in place and then they'd prime it and lay it.

LT: 04:18 What type of equipment did you operate as you worked for the highway department?

EB: 04:23 Well, I operated I think pretty near everything but a shovel.

LT: 04:26 Everything but a shovel.

EB: 04:28 Everything.

LT: 04:29 What about in the wintertime, did you get involved in snowplowing?

EB: 04:32 Well, there wasn't too much snowplowing in. I did get involved in some of it in the early years I told you about.

LT: 04:42 What was your first plow that you remember, power type of equipment?

EB: 04:46 Well, the first power type of equipment was the power patrol that we got.

LT: 04:53 And what about in the wintertime for snow plowing?

EB: 04:57 Well, for snowplowing, they used to use that old power patrols and then they had few snow plows. The first one I told you was made out of wood with a steel plate on the bottom to keep the wood from wearing out.

LT: 05:13 Pretty different from the kind they have today.

EB: 05:18 Yes. It would only go one way and it was no rounding on it, it just pushed the snow away.

LT: 05:25 What about snow blowers, when did they come in, a lot later?

EB: 05:29 Quite a little later. They came in about 10, 12 years later. The first snow blower we had was a rotary widener. After the trucks would open it with a deep plow, we would widen the road out and that was the only widening we had.

LT: 05:49 Was that a pretty popular piece of equipment?

EB: 05:51 Yes, it was, and it was a busy one.

LT: 05:56 Well, now, of all the years that you worked for the highway department, what was the worst winter that you recall?

EB: 06:02 '68 and '69.

LT: 06:05 That was when we had just so much snow around West Central, Minnesota, almost a hundred inches, wasn't it that year?

EB: 06:10 That's right. And we had all the caterpillars in the country in here pushing it away and snow blowers. And they got a

couple in from Yellowstone and then lasted about three days and they were all broke to pieces. That was the hardest snow we had to remove.

- LT: 06:29 When did you retire from the highway department, Gene?
- EB: 06:32 October of '69.
- LT: 06:34 So in other words, you—the worst blizzard, that was your last year with the department?
- EB: 06:38 Yes, it was.
- LT: 06:40 What type of things have you been busy with now since retirement?
- EB: 06:44 Well, I've been selling [inaudible 06:45] products and working as a volunteer driver for senior citizens.
- LT: 06:51 So you've been keeping yourself pretty busy even though you're retired.
- EB: 06:54 Right. I enjoy it.
- LT: 06:56 Well, Gene, there's one question, too, I always ask the people at the end and that's, how old are you?
- EB: 07:01 Well, I'm 69 and short of 70.
- LT: 07:04 Just short of 70?
- EB: 07:06 Yeah.
- LT: 07:06 You've enjoyed living in the Morris area?
- EB: 07:08 Right. And I'm glad to see all the improvements made in the highway department equipment.
- LT: 07:14 We've been talked with Gene Behl of Morris, retired Minnesota Highway Department employee.