

**Tib Kirwin**  
**Narrator**

**Lee Tempte**  
**KMRS**  
**Interviewer**

**1977**

**Interview done for the Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota KMRS Feature**



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

- LT: 00:00 This is *Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota: a Saturday, KMRS News Feature*. Today, we are talking with Tib Kirwin of Morris. Well, Tib, I know there are Kirwin families around this area. Was your family one of the first Kirwin families to move into the Morris area?
- TK: 00:18 There was one family that was here two years before we came.
- LT: 00:23 You came to Morris right around 1914. You were just a young whipper-snapper then.
- TK: 00:29 You are right.
- LT: 00:31 Morris, of course, was a lot different then. There were people moving around quite a bit then. There were people there moving in from other countries and other states and lots of people moving around.
- TK: 00:42 There was a lot of people moving in in boxcars.
- LT: 00:46 What do they call these boxcars? They had a special name for when people did move from one area to the next. I think they called them immigrant cars, or something like that?
- TK: 00:54 There were a lot of immigrant cars that came to Morris and also a lot of them that went through going to North Dakota and Montana. It just seemed like everybody was moving north.

- LT: 01:07 Why were there some people—I've talked to some people from other the other states that have moved up north. Land prices, did that have a factor?
- TK: 01:15 Well, I think the future was brighter to make a move because of the land and south of us, in Iowa, Southern Minnesota was a lot higher than it was here and you could possibly buy two or three acres for one. That was the inclination to move.
- LT: 01:33 When your family then moved to near Morris, where was your dad's farm located?
- TK: 01:40 Two miles north and a mile west; three miles from Morris.
- LT: 01:45 That was pretty handy. I know some people lived out in the country didn't get into town too much. Did that help living close to town?
- TK: 01:53 Well, it did because you were closer to school, and we went to the St. Mary's School in Morris. Drove a horse and buggy all through my career going to school was done with a horse and buggy.
- LT: 02:11 Did somebody drive you to school or did you drive your own horses? If you did, what did you do with the horses when you got to town?
- TK: 02:17 We drove our own horse, and we kept them in a private barn. At one time, we kept our horse for a couple or three years in Frank Hancock's barn and another one was Tom McKinney's barn and then into the livery stables, which was run by Herman Zahl.
- LT: 02:35 St. Mary's as we know it today and St. Mary's when you went to school were, in fact, in different buildings.
- TK: 02:42 When we started at St. Mary's, the school was held in the basement of the church, from one to the 8th grade.
- LT: 02:51 While you were going to school, they were constructing the new school?
- TK: 02:55 That is absolutely right.
- LT: 02:58 I suppose it made things—it was quite a change moving from the basement of the church to a brand new building.

- TK: 03:06 Yeah, it was a big change. I will have to bring this up too that the teachers had an awful time with us boys running back and forth on the beams up there. They thought we were all going to kill ourselves.
- LT: 03:23 Yeah. Anytime you got something new going on, you got to have a lot of sidewalk superintendents, even kids I suppose.
- TK: 03:28 That's right.
- LT: 03:29 Downtown Morris, of course, was a lot different than when you were growing up. As you mentioned about the livery barns and that type of thing; as we know them today, there is nothing like it. What did it used to be in some of those areas downtown?
- TK: 3:044 Well, back at the Citizens Bank, there was a livery barn and then Olson & Hemming—when they quit, then Olson & Hemming took over and put a garage in there, and that went on for years.
- LT: 03:57 So the same area then went from horses to cars in one easy step?
- TK: 04:02 Right now it's a parking lot.
- LT: 04:04 So we go from the beginning in full circle.
- TK: 04:07 That's right.
- LT: 04:08 Otter Tail building there, that used to be something a bit different?
- TK: 04:12 Yeah, that was run by Mr. Stewart. He had a light plant there. Then, as I remember, it went over to the Otter Tail Power.
- LT: 04:23 I'd say one of the newest buildings is what is known as the Met Lounge now; it used to be the municipal building. What did that used to be before that building was put up by the city?
- TK: 04:33 That used to be a livery barn too. I kept my horse there for several years.
- LT: 04:40 Main Street, of course, has changed considerably. There has been old buildings that have been torn down. I've heard

some stories that there used to be just saloons just next to each other all the way down for blocks and blocks. I don't think there were quite that many, but at some times there used to be quite a few.

- TK: 05:00 Well, to my recollection, there was seven or eight saloons in town when we came to Morris.
- LT: 05:09 Okay. When you got through school, did you know what you wanted to do, or did you just want to go out and get a job? What did you decide you wanted to do?
- TK: 05:18 Well, when I got through school, I went to Detroit, Michigan, and worked for the American Express company for about six months. But after six months, I came back to Morris, and no city life for me. I started farming then.
- LT: 05:34 Your first farm, where was that located? Was that located near the home place?
- TK: 05:41 I farmed out on my own out east of Morris, about four miles. That's where we started farming.
- LT: 05:50 Some of the first years when you started farming, were the crops or livestock much different than some of the farmers are doing today?
- TK: 05:56 The second year I farmed, we had a very, very poor crop. We was almost like the '29 and the '30s.
- LT: 06:07 So that makes it especially difficult if it's your first year farming if it's a bad one.
- TK: 06:12 That's right. I'll never forget the first check I got. I put it in the bank and a few days after that, the bank went broke.
- LT: 06:22 That's a depressing thought. It's easy to laugh about now but I get you at the time it wasn't too funny.
- TK: 06:28 That's for sure.
- LT: 06:30 In addition to farming, as time permitted, or there was a demand for money, you got involved with lots of other things too as you were farming.
- TK: 06:42 When I moved here on the present farm, I tended bar at the Merchant's Hotel for five years, plus the farming and dairying. Then I quit for about a year-and-a-half and then I

went to work for Esser & Vernick, and I worked for them for about a year-and-a-half, and then I quit.

- LT: 07:06 You mentioned that you had bartended for a number of years. I think in this town right now, we've got some pretty nice places, some bars and some clubs that are actually pretty nice and pretty plush. In years past, was that a little bit different?
- TK: 07:22 Yeah, we had the regular old bars, I suppose, although we had rooms where you could sit down at a table or a booth and have some refreshments there.
- LT: 07:37 There used to be what you call stand-up bar, working men's bar and this type of thing. Was there ever a bar where couples could go out and have a drink, or were there different bars for different people?
- TK: 07:48 Oh, yeah. The two bars that I worked in, they both had a place where you and your wife could go in and sit down with another couple and enjoy your drink.
- LT: 07:58 Kind of a bar part then, then kind of a lounge part beside it?
- TK: 08:00 Kind of a lounge, that's right.
- LT: 08:02 What year did you buy the last farm that you are on?
- TK: 08:07 I think it was in 1942 I bought this.
- LT: 08:11 What kind of an operation was that mostly?
- TK: 08:13 Well, it was dairying and general farming.
- LT: 08:18 We talked a little bit about living close to town. It used to be that you had to go to town but actually the town came to you, as the town grew and moved out a little bit.
- TK: 08:32 I felt very fortunate when I bought this place because we had seven children, and my ambition was to give them all a high school education, at that time. But some of them were lucky enough to go a little further as time progressed.
- LT: 08:46 It was handy, and they got to go to school.
- TK: 08:48 That's right.

LT: 08:50 As things turned out, this farm is really not a farm anymore.

TK: 08:55 No. They used to call me the Park Avenue farmer, but not anymore. I'm retired now.

LT: 09:02 Which gives you a little bit time more for doing some of the other things that you enjoy, like what?

TK: 09:07 Well, I like to travel and fish; go downtown and meet all my old friends, and then talk about the past.

LT: 09:16 What about fishing, do you fish around here, or do you go up north, or Canada, or where?

TK: 09:22 I've done a lot of fishing in Minnesota and considerable fishing in Canada.

LT: 09:29 What's the biggest fish you ever caught?

TK: 09:33 I caught a nine-pound walleye and a 16-pound northern. That's the extent of my big fishing.

LT: 09:39 Traveling, you go down south sometimes?

TK: 09:41 Yeah, we've been spending a few winters now in Phoenix. I have a daughter living down there. I always enjoy it, but I always enjoy coming back to Minnesota.

LT: 09:51 Morris is your favorite place then?

TK: 09:53 I always tell them down there that Minnesota is God's country.

LT: 09:58 Tib, you know how I end these interviews, and there is no reason why I should change now. How old are you, Tib?

TK: 10:05 I'll be 75 the 18th of August.

LT: 10:08 Thank you very much. We've been talking with Tib Kirwin, on *Reminiscing in West Central Minnesota: a Saturday KMRS News Feature*.