

## Interview with John N. Nagel (JN)

Conducted by Michael M. Miller (MM)

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Flasher, North Dakota

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**MM:** I'm Michael M. Miller, the Germans from Russia bibliographer at North Dakota State University in Fargo. It is December 28, 1993 and I am in the home of John Nagel in Flasher, ND. It is a real pleasure for me to come down to the Flasher area because I have many relatives here. I would like to have John Nagel introduce himself and tell us when he was born.

**JN:** I was born July 5th, 1905.

**MM:** Where were you born, John?

**JN:** I was born in the old country. I know where I was born but I just can't say it.

**MM:** Were you born in Bessarabia?

**JN:** I was born in the old country. When we went over here I was getting 5 years old.

**MM:** So, you were born over in the old country. Was the village named Krasna?

**JN:** I can't remember.

**MM:** That's ok. I'm looking in the book. You were born in Krasna, Bessarabia on July 8, 1905 and you were the son of August and Scholastica Volk Nagel and you came to the United States at the age of 5 years with your parents. Do you remember a little bit of life over there in Bessarabia? I know you were quite young then.

**JN:** Yah, I'll tell you. I ain't gonna lie, but I kind of heard it from peoples when I was 8 or 10 years old or so, how it was over there. What it was over there you see, the peoples was living just like they do here in town. You take Flasher now and Raleigh see, there was a bunch of them living here and the old ones too like them, they was living on each side. They had one cow, and the grazing pasture was probably a half mile out there and there was water. They had one man and in the morning he would start in the north end and come down. They had to bring their cow out in the road there and he drove them over there. And he was with them all day and then in the evening in time to milk, he come from the south in, and that way each one got his cow. Around Flasher and Raleigh there, that party was living the same way. When they harvested, they had some wooden machines there. When they threshed it out, they spread it on the ground. They took about 3 or 4 horses, that's about all they had, and they took them and got 'em tied together and standing there in the center and running around in a circle and tramp it out. And they got up with some sieves and shook it and the fine stuff they put in the barn. They used it. That's what they did. Sometimes, when they had something to sell, they had to take it quite a ways there. Something like..., we called it a sale.

**MM:** Took it to the market?

**JN:** Yah, took it to the market.

**MM:** Did your folks, when they came over here to...?

**JN:** They got over here in the fall I guess and they stayed through the winter over at Linton or Strasburg, with relatives over there. And then the next spring after it got warm, they went out here and then they got a quarter of land from the government the first year. There was a bachelor living about a mile and a half away and that's where we stayed until we had the house built. We built a house but most of them built their houses with the sod. We built a house that was about 20 feet long and about 14 or 16 feet wide.

**MM:** Was this house built with wood or sod?

**JN:** With wood.

**MM:** Oh, with wood?

**JN:** Yah, it was built with wood. Then some of them houses, there wasn't too many of them built with wood, they would fill up the walls with dirt. Like what we call it now, insulating.

**MM:** That kept it warm then?

**JN:** Yah. Then when I was 10 years old, that railroad went through. They built the railroad down there through Raleigh. I used to go up there. They were working with all horses then. They gave me candies sometimes when I came up. They had tents standing there. The railroad went through and I went there and I picked everything up that I found. Bones or some piece of iron and I took it home. And we had a lean built onto that house with sod and stones and there was no floor in there. It was just the dirt. On Sunday when they cleaned up, they always went on the hill and took sand, yellow sand and spread it over to keep it clean. Well, we had a door in front so we could go in this house too, you see. They used to make a lot of wine. Down in the old place there where we come from, they had about 50 barrels of wine laying through the year. They always was drinking wine they said and it was good wine in the old country. And then when he said to her, "You go down and get a pitcher full of wine", and she would say to him, "Why can't I bring you right away, 2 pitchers?" Over here they made wine too. Grapes was cheap. There was large boxes full for maybe a dollar. They would soak them in a 50 gallon barrel, wooden ones like they used to be, and the barn was right over there. The folks wasn't home. When they put that wine in, I had to clean my feet up to my knees and I had to go in there and tramp down the grapes.

**MM:** Oh, and you were just a kid then too, huh?

**JN:** Yah, yah. The homemade door was wider than a common door and the wine was standing here but the door was open. I went in the barn and there was three calves in there, yearlings, and they were in there. It was summer and it was hot. I shut the door and I told the girls to come out. So they come out and I says, "Now I wanna ride one of them and you hold the door shut and when I holler, then let it go and open the door" And then I got the ropes, I don't know how many ropes I put on that critter and I got on him. Tied it around his belly and I said, "Open it up." And they opened the door and that thing went out from the barn over there and past here and turned around and went right in the kitchen here. It was a

good thing that the door was open then or I would have hit that wine and tipped that barrel. We was about 2 blocks or so it went down deep to the creek, there it was. When he went down to the creek with me, he stumbled. He got tangled up with his feet in them ropes and I fell down and he went on.

**MM:** When you came over to this country when you were 5 years old, did your parents have any other children at that time?

**JN:** Yes, I was the youngest one. Let's see, there was Margaret, Gerdie, Tillie, Raphena and I had a brother and another sister. Raphena was the oldest one. I guess she was 14. And then a fellow came up from Lemmon, SD and I can't remember much from there and hired her for in the house. She never worked in the field or anything with the horses. He was going someplace and he put her on the disk harrow with 4 horses. They said even a stud horse was hooked up. He was going someplace and the train come along and the horses got scared and they run away with her. You see, with a disk if the horses runs a little fast, the disk will go like this. She got thrown in front of the disk and the disk went over her. She lived then for 10 days and then she died. She was the first one buried in the cemetery down by St Gertrudes.

**MM:** Your sister Raphena, huh?

**JN:** Yes, she was the first person buried there.

**MM:** She was only 14 then?

**JN:** Yah, something like that.

**MM:** Do you ever remember when you came over? The ship ride?

**JN:** No, I don't.

**MM:** Did they ever talk about that ship ride? How it was?

**JN:** Well, they said if somebody died in there, they would put them in a box or a plastic sack or something. They had to drop them off the ship or else the big fish would come right up to the boat. When there was so much wind, they had heavy weights and they had to put the weights on each corner. If there was too many waves, they couldn't do it. Dad didn't have very good eyes and that's why he was 4 weeks on the ocean. I don't know, but I can't remember after we got older how we got out there. There was some guy told me that the papers are laying in the courthouse, but I don't believe that. I got one boy, he's teaching about 25 years already now. I think it's more than that, I guess it's about the end of 30 years. And he said he talked to someone. He said, "Them papers what we got over there, they are laying, they buried them someplace". He was going to find out, him and another fellow, but I don't think they did.

**MM:** When the ship came over to America, it landed in New York?

**JN:** Yah.

**MM:** Then you came with the train?

**JN:** Yes, I think that's what we did.

**MM:** Did they ever talk about the train ride?

**JN:** No.

- MM:** When you came over, you came over first to Emmons County. How did you get from Emmons County over here to the Raleigh area?
- JN:** My dad had friends here. That's where we stayed and he bought some horses there. He bought 2 horses there. They said they did a lot of hunting. Jackrabbits. There was a lot of jackrabbits around there.
- MM:** Of course, they would use that for food.
- JN:** Yah. It was good then, but now I don't think peoples eat 'em no more.
- MM:** When you came over here, did you go to school?
- JN:** We didn't get school for 2 years after that. We lost 2 years of school. We should have been in school already 2 years. Some farmers that lived along there, west of Raleigh about 5 miles from where we lived got together, they got a school there. Later on, when I went to school, I had to stay home so much. My brother Wally got a job and was working and I didn't get much school. Lost 2 years and then [when] I had a little corn to pick, I had to stay home in the fall. Didn't get started until about a month [after] and in the spring I was home. In the winter every once in awhile, I had to stay home. So, I didn't get no school.
- MM:** When you were at home, did you speak only German?
- JN:** Yes, we would speak German. Then when I had kids to go to school, there was no school down there. They had school buses. Well, they wanted me to bring my kids in the morning, a half a mile north and then I would pick them up there in the evening. Well, I said, "No, how can I do that?" What if I am late or early, I'll stand there. So, I sent them here to Flasher. Later on, they had school there. When the oldest one was through and then the last ones, they still went one year down at the farm school. Otherwise, they went through Flasher. The oldest boy is down on the farm and the daughter is the next age and they went through high school, all of them. Larry was the youngest one. He went to school here too. I told him that I would get him an accordion and he should learn to play that accordion because I like music. So, I bought one. I sent for one, not a high-priced one. I think it's still down there. He never used it. He said, "Dad, I can't. I've got so much to do at school." Then he tried to play football and he hurt his ankle so that was end of the football. He went right along in school and he was boarding 13 years. The first one started, like Eddy, he was the oldest one, down here and when he was getting through the other one started and then the other one, the daughter. And there was a lady at the end of the town, she just died here about a month ago, she was 96 years old. That's where they was boarding.
- Of course, when they started boarding there, her husband was living there. And my father-in-law was living over there in town already, and then they boarded them over there one year. And then the next year, we got up here on Sunday and had the boy along and they said, "We can't take him." I said, "Why?" Well, the other ones, if you take him, why we can bring our's up there too. Well, we paid him, and they had school there close. So I went out over that way where the farmers was living and I stopped at one place and a fellow and lady was sitting out on the porch and I got off and I said, "I'm looking for something around here and I'm going to see if I can find it." He asked, "What are you looking for?" [I said], "I've got a boy here in the car and he went last year to school here and his folk's lives over there, his grandpa and now they won't take him no more because the others down there, they hate it and they got school there." He said, "Go over to that lady over there in the corner, she used to take them and come back." So, I went over and asked the lady and she said, "No, I don't take anymore."

So, I went back and I stopped and I got out of the car and over to him and he said, "What did she say?" I told him that she don't take anymore. Well, he said, "Call him down from the car." He come down and he says, "You just take your cap off and hang it here and stay with me. You can stay with us." So, I brought him up on Friday, he stayed there then. Then I took him on Friday evening before it was dark. I asked, "How is the boy doing?" He said, "You know, he is a nice boy." They were building a garage on the house, he comes home from school and he goes in and changes clothes and he comes out and says, "What can I do? I want to help you." He died that winter, he had heart trouble. And before he died, he was in bed already and the kid got up and went to the front of the bed and he told his wife as long as Eddie wants to go to school here, I want you to keep him and take care of him and she did.

**MM:** Going back to the farm John, you mentioned you like music. Did your folks have some music at the farm?

**JN:** Yah, they had organ. Years ago, they used to drive along and sell them. But nobody played, no. And they used to drive around years ago with those singer machines. I still got the machine here. They don't use them no more. Some guys used to come around and they had about 3 on a buggy, driving around the country selling them. That was years ago.

**MM:** With those big phonograph records?

**JN:** Huh?

**MM:** The old records?

**JN:** The machine?

**MM:** Yes.

**JN:** It is still in running order. The boy comes down, he was teaching for 17 years in Dunseith and there was 10 teachers there and then they wanted it so bad for dates. Finally, he came back to teach here. He went down to Valley City for 1 or 2 years to teach down there and I don't know how many hundreds he said there was. There was some young guys that teached the year before in the school there and he asked them questions sometimes and they didn't know it. But he figured if I can't go out and teach high school, I am going to go to school until I can. And when he asked them first, "What are you teaching?" Well, they said, "The second and third grade." Now he's going to school again so he can teach higher [grades]. And then they turned him loose in February and he went out to a school there, and he said he wasn't more than talking with the teacher, the kids was going over seats and tearing 'er up and he said, "If I ever teach, they are going to do it just once and that's all."

**MM:** Give them some discipline, huh?

**JN:** Yah. Then they want him. Well, I got so many [expletive] letters there from, you don't believe it. They wanted him for a traveling agent on that and on that and I said, "I don't want you to go for a travel agent, too much on the road." They wanted him down in Wyoming and so he went down for one month. He promised them and it was getting towards spring. He was down there one month and then he came back, he didn't even come home. He went way up north there and finished up school for them. And then he went over to Dunseith. Well, he didn't get in with them, the school board and then he left. And

they asked where he was going and he said, "I am going farther east" because he had that lined up already. "Well, I might stop over there for a cup of coffee," he says. And when he got over there and he got in for lunch, a man come over and he says, "Would you be Larry Nagel?" He said, "Yah." He says, "I got a phone call from Dunseith and they gave me the number and you are supposed to call back, they want to talk to you." So, he called them back and they told him to come back. So he went back and they hired him and he was 17 years there. There was 10 teachers in there and he was the only one that was left yet, the others all gone already. They checked the records then. Since that school's been standing there, he's showed the best record.

**MM:** Let's go back to the farm, John. How was the farming in those days?

**JN:** Since when I have farmed for myself?

**MM:** No, when you were a kid growing up.

**JN:** Well, I farmed for my dad. I was about 16 years old I guess. It was my dad's. I ain't gonna lie, but I was working and I had to take care..., that's why I didn't get no school in the wintertime. We worked with horses, 4 horses and a Sulky plow. Just one bottom, see. That's what we worked with, horses. And had a little fence there and that was the first years with probably one wire around for the..., maybe there wasn't more than 40 acres or so for the cattle. And then they had some land leased in the area and we got in on the forty bushel, see? I worked for my dad until just before I was 24. I got married. I worked for him that long.

**MM:** You stayed on the farm until you were 24?

**JN:** I got married in July. In the fall, I leased a farm from the banker. I farmed there by Brisbaine for 6 or 7 years, but with the pasture I had, I had to go so far with my horses. Half a mile from the house. There was a road. Then I got a farm down south and that was just in the dry years in the 1930's there. It was in 1929 when I got married. I moved down there and I had a truck hired from there, and I had hay quite a bit and they hauled everything down and I moved down there. In the spring or a little later, I was plowing for cane and it got cloudy and so I went home and I thought it wasn't that late. It got so cloudy and dark and I put the horses in the barn and I pulled the harness off and I thought it was gonna rain. So, I thought I would leave them stand until the rain is over. And I had a 150 pound sack of cane laying in the stall in the barn and one stall was narrow and I had an old table standing there and the roof wasn't so good, I shingled it later on. I took that sack on my back and took it in the front panel of the house that was built on. Well, my sister was older than I was, and she was staying with us there and we ate. And I was sitting by the window and I fell asleep and my wife said, "John, look out there, it's lightning... [Break in tape]

**MM:** We were talking to John about back on the farm. And you mentioned you had gotten hurt?

**JN:** Yah, I got hurt. Shall I say that?

**MM:** Were you a young person at that time?

**JN:** The second year that I was married, I had 2 sows and they was in the horse barn. I was out there in the morning and there was so many rats in those years and they killed the little pigs. Well, the next one came in and my brother-in-law, he was about 8 or so, just before it got dark I went out. And I had a header box tipped to the haystack with the big high side and the low side down and there was the sow

laying in there and had the young ones. Well, I thought it was a nice place. I thought if it would rain and there was a good floor in it and the water would run off. So before it got dark, I told my wife I am going to take those pigs away from the sow overnight. So, I took the washtub out there and I had to lean down a little bit and I kept grabbing the pigs, putting in there and the sow was laying there and the pigs were just on this side. He was standing on this side and he started talking and I said, "Keep quiet," and he said, "What?" And that pig jumped up and I swung around fast and I twisted my knee. I went in the house. It hurt like a son-of-a-gun and went to bed. In the morning, I went to Dr. Shorterage. He was a real old doctor and he looked at it and he said, "a piece of bone split off and got between your joints so I have to give you an operation. I have a good nurse here and she can take care of you." Well, I didn't do that. So, I went over by the river, there was a little bit of a doctor there from the old country, there was 2 doctors there and I went to the second doctor here in Parshall. I went to Bismarck to the clinic 2 or 3 times. Do you know what they told me? Well, I was going on crutches all summer 'till next year and I had about 12 doctors looking over me and they told me to go home and take a little salt sack, they used to be 5 or 10 pounds, and put some oats in there and put in the oven and warm it and change it off and sit on the chair and put a pillow underneath and keep that warm all you can and don't put no weight on it. So in the fall my neighbor there, he was a Swede, he brought an old fellow over and I had seen that man once before around and he said, "If you give him the snuff and his board, he can do the chores for you." So, he stayed with me. I didn't go out at all. Well, I had 7 cows then and 2 horses in the barn too, I guess. I didn't put no weight on it until February, for about 3 months and then I got up one morning and I put a little weight on it and I knew it was getting better. By spring, I was able to work. I couldn't run or anything like that. I had it wrapped for 5 years. I still got that wrapping. First I had it wrapped like the soldiers do you know, and then they gave me a sock to put on and I used that for five years on there.

Well, I got all right. But still I was limping a little and now since I am in Flasher here, that is about 4 or 5 years ago, it started bothering me. My knee it gives, but it's back. Well, I went to the doctor because a lot of them put a new cap in and they checked me and I didn't take the first doctor. There was 3 doctors and then I had to wait a whole month. We called and made an appointment and the third one is supposed to be the best doctor always. They took the x-ray and everything and hanged it on the wall and told my bone is wearing down. They said they didn't want to touch it. The shape you are in we don't want to touch it. All we can do is give you the tablets and take one with every meal. Now this one is getting the same thing.

**MM:** Well, your knees aren't very good yet, but you are sure sharp for your age. Your mind is real good yet. Do you remember lot's of things about the olden days?

**JN:** Oh, yah. I sit here and think of a lot of good stories. Some of the guys that are younger than me see me yet when I get to Mandan. That was 20 miles south of where I lived, they know me. They said, "You look tough." I did work hard. I put a lot of nights in.

**MM:** How many brothers and sisters were in your family?

**JN:** Let's see, Raphena, Margaret and Gerdie and Roxena and Grace. My wife's name was Grace, but a lot of them with that name they would call them Theresia. Mike Miller down there before you get to the church on this side of the road, the last farm, that's my sister. Mike Miller, that's Isidore's brother. So, I had 5 sisters and 1 brother. I think 1 brother and 2 twins died in the old country before they come over here.

- MM:** Did your folks ever learn English?
- JN:** They did but I didn't catch it much. Yah, you asked me there about talking. When the kids went to school for a year or 2, they didn't talk no more German. Then my wife would ask them a few times but she didn't care for talking that way.
- MM:** Did your folks ever get a German newspaper at home?
- JN:** Yes. *Der Staatsanzeiger* is what they called it.
- MM:** Did you read it too?
- JN:** No. I could just barely write my name in that language. They had books there, we would write a little bit. Sometimes the priest, always after the Mass, was over questioning us. That's what we learned. Otherwise in writing, no.
- MM:** Was the church always important in your home?
- JN:** We were 6 miles from where we belong, but there was another church this way. Well, I don't think we had church every Sunday and sometimes we went to the other one. It was a little bit farther than the other one but we went over there.
- MM:** We just celebrated Christmas. What was Christmas like?
- JN:** Christmas we had 4 days years ago. It was hard for the saddle horse on Christmas. Sometimes we hit Christmas we'll say, on Thursday. Well, there was 2 days Christmas and then there was St. John. Namesday. My namesday was yesterday. Then they had that for a holiday and then it was Sunday. We lived a little further away than the other peoples, so we had to do a lot of horseback riding and that was a little hard on the horses.
- MM:** Did they have a Santa Claus at Christmas time?
- JN:** Yah, they did some. But they tied on cookies and that stuff what they bought on the Christmas tree.
- MM:** Where did they get the Christmas tree?
- JN:** I don't know where they got it. Maybe somewhere in the creek, because down on the farm I got trees there. There are some Christmas trees sitting right in there.
- MM:** How did they celebrate New Year's?
- JN:** Maybe they was drinking, them old timers was drinking. A lot of them, when they came out here those first years, yah, they had to have a drink. Now, I wouldn't care for no whiskey drinking in the morning. They had to have a drink before they would eat. I drink pop. I never was no drinker. But when I was young and we was with these people on a Saturday night to town, they kept open until about 11 or 12 o'clock. Then when we needed repairs or something, that we could get it. And sometimes I would go in the bar and talked a little while and there was always a lot of peoples in there.
- MM:** Were there a lot of dances too?



**JN:** We had quite a few dances. There was just a bunch of us together there and we had quite a few in the summer in a barn upstairs or if a farm had a granary, on the floor. That was on Sunday afternoon. We paid about 20 cents or 25 cents and some paid nothing for the player, see.

**MM:** Who would play?

**JN:** Joe Turnes. He was just our age.

**MM:** Accordion player?

**JN:** Yah. And then one finally went up with the [cannot understand].

**MM:** Did Lawrence Welk ever come over here and play?

**JN:** No, no. When I got married, I had Mike Dosch.

**End of side 1 -----missing words----- Side 2**

**JN:** In Strasburg or Linton, what's they're name? There's so many names over there. I was over there when my wife was still living. They wanted us to come over and so we went over there and got over there in the evening. You know them peoples? That John Volk?

**MM:** Uh huh.

**JN:** Heavy fellow. Yah, there's where we went. Well, we had supper and then he say's, "We have a dance tonight in the courthouse and if you don't care we will go in." My wife said, "Well, John's got some relation here but he don't know them." Well, he says, "We'll go in, and I'll introduce you to some of them." So, we went in. And we got out of the car, he took his car, and the ladies walked that way and he started this way, so I followed him and I says, "Where are we going?" He says, "To get a bootle." You got to go over and get a bootle. You know what a bootle is?

**MM:** What's a bootle?

**JN:** A bootle? It's a bottle. "Yah, a bootle," he said. And he bought a quart of whiskey. Well, I said, "What are we going to do with it?" He said, "Take it over there and drink it." Well, he bought it so I thought I'll have to buy something too, so I bought a six-pack of beer. We got over in there and I think it was in the basement, they had tables standing, one on the other, all the way through and bottles standing all over. There was dancing. So finally brought [over] one Nagel, talked with him, put the cork in. He left me, then he come back again after the dance and he says you come over tomorrow, I live right inside the corner there from the church over and I'll explain it to you how we are related. Then he brought another Nagel, another Nagel, another Nagel. Nothing. The next day, I went over. I was there a little bit and he says, "John, I can't tell you nothing. I says, "Why?" He says, "I don't know." Well, I said, "I can remember when I was about 14 years old, there was a fellow from over here, he was my brother's age and he was a Vernon [?] Nagel and he was my cousin." I remember that, and later on when he got married, he had 3 kids already and he went around the corner with a Model T, and turned it over and he got killed. Oh, he said, "That was my brother." He said, "Then we are cousins too." He was 78 years old already. And they didn't drink no beer that night, all dranked whiskey. About 5 years ago, maybe not that long. I can't remember the name, Stanis in town here, their girl got married to a Nagel over from Strasburg or Linton. Well, I was invited. They had the wedding in the church and they had the wedding up in the KC hall and so I went up too. After supper, I was standing there talking with a Nagel and I asked him, try to see if

he's relation to me. So his wife came along and she says, "John, should we take a picture of the Nagels?" I says, "Yah, but I'm afraid you ain't gonna get em all on one picture." I counted them on the bulletin that I got and there's 32 with me. I had never seen anything like that.

- MM:** When you think back John, to those early years when you were a kid 5 years old, back over there by Strasburg and then you were on the farm until you were 24, what comes to your mind when you think back to those early years?
- JN:** Well, years ago farming there then, they don't believe it no more. Those young guys, they don't believe it. When I moved down there from Brisbane and then I, well that is getting in the years where peoples was getting tractors, I bought a tractor when I worked with horses and I bought a saddle horse for the boy. And ma, she sent him up to get the milk cows up on the hill there and he went up and got the milk cows. He come back and was in the front of the house and hollered, "Ma, come on, Gross is seeding with the drill already and he got 4 horses and one horse beside the other ones." Well, I told him how we worked it years before.
- MM:** So, you remember the time when your folk's homesteaded the land and broke the sod?
- JN:** Yah. Not right away at 5 years old, but later on. But I broke myself some [sod].
- MM:** You broke your own sod?
- JN:** Yah, with the Sulky plow and 4 horses. That was slow work and digging rocks.
- MM:** A lot of rocks?
- JN:** Yah. A lot of rocks.
- MM:** And your ma was a pretty good cook with all those children to feed?
- JN:** Yes, yah.
- MM:** Did they do a lot of butchering too?
- JN:** Yes, they butchered pigs. They put it in a wooden barrel and put salt on every sheet and set it out so it would freeze. But then they took a rod or something so they could break the top piece off. They would can some meat too, in jars.
- MM:** Do you remember the first time you had a radio?
- JN:** Yes, I still have one and it is still in running order. I can remember yet when that Dosch was playing on it.
- MM:** You would have to play it with batteries?
- JN:** Wait a minute! I had one with batteries. The first 2 or 3 years when I was married, this bank sold out and I bought one with batteries. I don't know when the T.V.'s came out.
- MM:** The T.V. came out in the early fifties.
- JN:** In 50?
- MM:** The 1950's. Maybe later on, you got T.V. You didn't get electricity on the farm until the 40's, right?

**JN:** No, we didn't get the electricity in 40.

**MM:** Was it later than that?

**JN:** Gosh, I can't remember.

**MM:** Electricity came in the late 40's and early fifties in your area. Before that, you used the kerosene lamp, right?

**JN:** We had one but it didn't work. Sometimes they would burn them up right away when you would light them so we had the lamp with the chimney with kerosene. Yah, and a lantern. But when they put it [electricity] out in the country, we got it right away.

**MM:** We are going to close our conversation today. It is December 28th, 1993 and I am Michael Miller from the University in Fargo and it was a real pleasure John, to visit with you. You had a lot of memories and we could visit all afternoon here if we had the chance. It takes time to remember some of those things. It was a real privilege to hear about your early days and about your own later life. Anything else you would like to add?

**JN:** Well, when I was 15 -16 years old my brother was always working out, I think every year for a number of years. The well, we didn't have a well in the yard. Then down in the creek there, I dugged the well. Then finally in the summer, it was too far to go down with 2 pails so we had a stone boat made and put a clean wooden barrel on there and pulled it down with the horse and fill it up and put a clean blanket over so it wouldn't slop all out and pull it up by the kitchen there in the shade. And then, we had a pasture over there and I would dig the well every year. By the next year the darn thing would be caved in. Didn't put no box and no casing and there's a dam too when it was raining and we had water there for the horses. I went once and thought I am going to take a bath. I got into the water but I walked in pretty slow and I was going to see how far I can walk in and I tried to swim, but nothing doing, it didn't work. I'll tell you, I made a little step more and my feet were getting loose. I tell you, I swunged around. If I would have taken another step, I would have drowned. That was before.

Afterwards when I was up there, I had a neighbor. I was living on this side of the road and he was on the other side of the road, about 2 blocks. I just had 6 horses out in front of the barn and was going out to do some disking in the fall and he came over and said, "John, let's go fishing out to the reservoir." That was down by Raleigh. I knew that reservoir since when I was grown up, it wasn't so far from our land there. So I said, "Yah." He was a guy that swam pretty good, so we turned the horses loose and we went out there and we got on this side and it was about 10 o'clock or so and hot and we didn't have no water there and I said, "Frank, let's go home." The fish didn't bite and they didn't bite. So we walked about a half a mile around the dam and we got over on the other end and there was a farm. The owner had a boat there tied on a post in the water and had a mailbox stand and whoever was going to use that boat was supposed to put a quarter in. We put a quarter in and we got in that boat and we got half ways into the dam and he was standing there fishing. Finally he got 5 sardines and 1 bullhead, so he said, "John, let's get out of here, it looks like a big wind coming up." We didn't get more than out of there and got in the car and started out, there was a big wind. And I said, "What in the heck would have happened now if we would have been out there? That would have tipped that boat and I would have drowned and you would have swam out." So I didn't go fishing no more.

**MM:** Lots of memories, huh?

- JN:** Yah. There was some guys in here, they always went fishing, fishing, fishing. I asked them if they were in the boat? " No, they said, they wouldn't go in the boats."
- MM:** We are going to finish now, but before I close off I want to wish you a Happy New Year! 1994 will soon be here. In 1994, you will be how old, John?
- JN:** I will be 89 years old in July.
- MM:** You are sure sharp. You are getting around pretty good for that age.
- JN:** Well, I say if I can't drive a car, I am stuck. When I go to Mandan, sometimes there are young peoples from the south there where I used to be. I had my car standing outside of the store and I walked in and there was a young lady standing there and she said, "Hello, Uncle John." I said, "Hello. Well, I am the uncle." And I asked, "Who are you?" She said, "I'm Bert Wilkers wife." She asked me, "Who's with you here?" I said, "With me?" I can handle that car yet myself to come down here.
- MM:** So you drive to Mandan yet, then?
- JN:** You betcha!
- MM:** Wonderful!
- JN:** I drive in often to do my business. Not very long ago, Rose came in here and a lady asked me, "Do you still drive a car?" And Rose said, "I'll say he does. He drives to Mandan all the time and not long ago he went up to Bismarck."
- MM:** Thanks so much for our visit, John.