

INTERVIEW OF
PAUL MADRON
November 2, 2013

1 MR. BARR: This is Jim Barr. It's November 2nd,
2 2013. I'm south of Seneca, talking to Paul Madron, and --

3 MR. MADRON: Madron.

4 MR. BARR: Madron, I'm sorry.

5 MR. MADRON: It's okay.

6 MR. BARR: And you started to tell me where you
7 were born. We're sitting in his kitchen, looking out, and
8 he pointed to a place over the hill.

9 MR. MADRON: Just about a half a mile south of
10 here, that's where I was born, in 1928. The doctor didn't
11 get there for several hours. The roads were just sandhill
12 trails.

13 MR. BARR: Sure.

14 MR. MADRON: And there was a neighbor lady came
15 and assisted, and that's where I started and I got back
16 pretty close. My dad bought this ranch in 1949, I believe
17 it was. We moved here in 1949, then, away from a ranch down
18 on the Dismal. But I've been in the service. I served in
19 the 82nd Airborne, was in Germany in occupation for a while,
20 came home, married a lady I'd been going with for probably
21 four years from high school, and I lost her May the 11th.
22 We'd been married 65 years, six months, and 17 days I think.

23 Excuse me, Jim, do you want anything to drink? I
24 need -- I'm going to get me -- my little glass of juice.

25 MR. BARR: No, I'm fine. I'm fine. I had some

1 coffee there, I probably had too much.

2 MR. MADRON: No, I've -- from this place here, my
3 dad moved down on the river just about two miles west of
4 Thedford. We lived there until '39 and then we started
5 moving to a ranch he bought -- oh, it's about 13 miles east
6 of here and that's where I spent my life, most of it. So I
7 don't know how much story you want.

8 MR. BARR: Well, did you have any connection with
9 any of the special purpose districts that preceded the
10 natural resource district?

11 MR. MADRON: Oh, I served on a number of boards
12 and it was the ASCS committee then -- SCS committee. I
13 started stacking hay for the Edingor ranch (phonetic) when I
14 was 14 years old. I stacked for them two years and then
15 went to work on the railroad, thought I could make a little
16 more money. More money, it was more work, too. I finished
17 high school, in three years I finished, and then went into
18 the service because I knew I was going to be drafted
19 anyway --

20 MR. BARR: Yeah.

21 MR. MADRON: -- so I just as well get it over
22 with. Came home, married, and we moved to the Ward ranch
23 (phonetic). It's about probably 10 miles south of here,
24 about on the Dismal River, and we spent a couple of -- we
25 was there in 1949 during the blizzard.

1 MR. BARR: Oh, yes.

2 MR. MADRON: So, my dad, he used pack horse. Him
3 and another neighbor got to town a time or two and they'd
4 get supplies and then he'd bring them down to the ranch on
5 the pack horse. National Guard got in there about a month
6 later and I'd bought quite a lot of protein feed and it
7 stored in Thedford, they got it out of there none too soon.
8 Yep.

9 MR. BARR: Did you lose many cattle or --

10 MR. MADRON: One cow.

11 MR. BARR: That's pretty good.

12 MR. MADRON: She'd made a jump off of a ridge out
13 into a snow drift and it was probably -- that snow drift was
14 probably 20 feet deep. Those hills down there were really
15 high and rough. That's all we lost. Then we moved up here.
16 Dad had bought this place and we added to it as years went
17 along. I got -- I've got it leased out now.

18 MR. BARR: Uh-huh.

19 MR. MADRON: Good family. Good family. It's a
20 wonder he hasn't been in here to check on me.

21 MR. BARR: Well, maybe he'll be here shortly.

22 MR. MADRON: He probably will because I've had a
23 little time with this.

24 MR. BARR: That's what it sounds like.

25 MR. MADRON: Yeah.

1 MR. BARR: When were you involved with the natural
2 resource district?

3 MR. MADRON: 1972. I applied for the -- well,
4 backing up a little bit, in 1972 we had a terrible prairie
5 fire and I was running cattle for myself, my dad, and my
6 father-in-law. And I was operating two ranches, his -- it's
7 just six miles south of Thedford, and then I was operating
8 this one. We'd winter one place and summer another, and
9 defer, you know, back and forth. And that fire, we lost 150
10 head of cattle. I had quite a little money (indiscernible)
11 bank and it put me in a pretty tight place, had to find
12 something to do, so I applied for the position when it come
13 up. There were several people who encouraged me to do it.
14 They knew I'd always been interested in conservation and
15 good management. And I didn't have any idea I'd be
16 accepted. There were two or three other applications. They
17 had paper they could hang on the wall, I didn't have
18 anything, but I did have experience and I knew a lot of
19 Board of Directors and they knew where I come from was local
20 so they give me a try. And I was there -- I figured I'd be
21 there five years, or maybe seven, to get everything squared
22 away with the bank and everything. My wife and I got it
23 down in five years, and I was wanting to get back to ranch.
24 I had a son-in-law that was helping out and he was from the
25 city and he was no rancher, but I helped when I could on

1 weekends and we kept it a going. My son was in college, two
2 girls had graduated from college. He was in college in
3 Chadron for -- he'd finished there one year and then he went
4 to Wyoming for vet tech school. He graduated from there and
5 then he went to work for a veterinary and he worked for a
6 veterinary about six months and he called me one night
7 pretty late and he said, "Dad, I'm just getting all the
8 dirty jobs." He said, "Can I come back to the ranch?"
9 Well, I told him, I said -- he knew what it was like, he
10 lived here. "Well," he said, "I'd be my own boss." So he
11 did, he came back, managed the ranch until he was, what,
12 30 -- he was over 30 years old. And then a nurse from
13 Kansas City, there was a couple of them came up and tried
14 out at the hospital and so they wanted to ride horses, so
15 one of the hospital board members was acquainted with Roarke
16 (phonetic) and so he said, "Well, I know where there's some
17 horses." He didn't tell them there was a young man, too.
18 But he was going to have some fun, I think, and so they
19 brought them out here several times. Well, this -- one of
20 them took -- well, they both did. They took a liking to
21 Roarke and there was a little competition for a while, but
22 pretty soon this red-headed one -- her dad was -- he had
23 kind of a farm back there in Olathe -- around Olathe, and so
24 she was an outdoor girl. So they married after a couple of
25 years. They built this house. Good for a family. They

1 were -- let's see, I've been retired -- I retired in '92.
2 They had been -- they had two children, Janae (phonetic) and
3 Randall (phonetic), and they were -- they took some time
4 off. She was a home health nurse and she was run to death,
5 and she worked at the hospital in Broken Bow quite a little.

6 Anyway, they decided they'd go down and visit her
7 folks. She didn't even like to go home very much,
8 she -- this was her country here. They went down there and
9 they -- I was -- of course, I was out here at the ranch
10 taking care of things and they were -- they went on down to
11 Silver Dollar City and what's that other place, Branson, had
12 a little vacation. The kids enjoyed it. They visited some
13 friends in Springfield and headed home, and we're not sure
14 what happened, but hit an 18-wheeler and it killed them all.
15 So that kind of changed my wife and my plans. We -- I knew
16 I couldn't see this ranch go down the drain, Jim, because
17 it'd been 50 years putting it together. So I moved out here
18 and -- we were living in town. She'd come out in the
19 daytime but she wouldn't stay overnight. And after about
20 three years, she got to staying overnight and it wasn't long
21 until I couldn't get her to leave here. She just -- this
22 was home. So we sold that place in town, moved out here.
23 It's been quite a life.

24 But back to the NRD, it was something I really
25 enjoyed. I really did enjoy my work. I enjoyed working

1 with the Board of Directors and all the people. I learned a
2 lot, Jim. I got an education. Maybe they learned some
3 things, too, I don't know. I hope they did. But if I could
4 contribute a little, I would, but I saw a lot of different
5 operations; ranch, farm, pivots coming in, which I really
6 didn't like because when we bought this -- dad bought this
7 ranch, there was a lot of old farm ground on it from back in
8 the 30s even. We had to do a lot of work to get that back
9 into grass. So when I saw the pivots coming in I thought,
10 "Oh," but the technology they had and kept them
11 (indiscernible). So it was something I had to accept and it
12 was manageable. Some people done a lot better job than
13 others.

14 But back to the Board, I would say probably I had
15 one of the best boards to work with that there was in the
16 state. The people in this country, Jim, you know, were a
17 little different, I guess. Everybody's a little different.
18 But we worked together and they put up with me, helped me,
19 and when I'd think about retiring or coming back to the
20 ranch, well, they'd maybe increase the pay a little bit.
21 Wasn't anything big but it was income, you know, guaranteed.

22 MR. BARR: What sort of projects did you get
23 involved with, or programs?

24 MR. MADRON: I think probably the main one at that
25 time was tree planting. And then we got into -- the Board

1 bought some drills from -- grass drills and we got in to
2 reseeding some of these old fields, and an interseeder. We
3 had probably the first interseeder, I didn't like them
4 because they -- you know what they do, the plow a small
5 furrow. But I've looked at areas that I reseeded -- that's
6 one thing I did, Jim. I wouldn't ask my help to try to do
7 something that I couldn't do or wouldn't do myself. It just
8 wasn't my way of doing things so a lot of the time I like
9 being out and I like to work. That office was bad news for
10 me, but it was all right.

11 Anyway, I observed some of the areas I reseeded
12 and I see that blue -- big blue (indiscernible) and switch
13 grass, prairie sand reed, up there just over some of those
14 pivots right down south between here and Stapleton. And
15 lots of trees I see. I didn't ever dream I'd be cutting
16 cedar trees down. We had -- two years ago I had done this
17 west section and cut down, oh, I don't know how many cedars.
18 It was just getting too thick. But we -- I think the Board
19 probably allowed me to do a few things that maybe were a
20 little questionable to other districts, but our district was
21 different all together than a lot of these, except maybe
22 parts of Middle Niobrara, (indiscernible), Twin Platte.
23 Kent and I, we had a little -- some differences because
24 there was an interseeding of a big acreage up in the
25 northwest part of his district. Well, they didn't have an

1 interseeder and they wanted to lease ours. Well, the Board
2 said, "No, we won't lease our interseeder out, but we would
3 send a man" -- send me and a tractor up there to do it.
4 Well, Kent -- he wasn't too much in favor of that but
5 finally I guess his Board approved it. I went up there and
6 I interseeded, I don't know, maybe half a section for them.
7 It was quite a job because it was out in the middle of
8 nowhere. I don't know how many miles we were from
9 McConaughy but my father-in-law, he let my wife and I have
10 his trailer, motorhome or whatever -- no, it wasn't a
11 motorhome but camper trailer and they tripped to Arizona.
12 He pulled it up there for us and she stayed up there and
13 enjoyed the lake. I'd come in every couple of days and get
14 supplies and go back out. I didn't have an 8:00 to 5:00
15 job, that wasn't my lifestyle, Jim. I wasn't built that
16 way. I'd get back to the office maybe late in the evening
17 sometime. I'd go home, eat supper, and go down to the
18 office, catch up on what the secretary had for me to do and
19 be ready to make the phone calls the next morning before I
20 took off.

21 MR. BARR: Did you have any water-related programs
22 or projects?

23 MR. MADRON: We -- well, we got into water
24 testing. Nothing -- you mean like --

25 MR. BARR: Oh, I don't know, dams or flood

1 controls or anything like that --

2 MR. MADRON: Oh, no, we didn't have that.

3 MR. BARR: It was just a general question, I
4 didn't know if --

5 MR. MADRON: Erosion control structures or
6 something, no. No livestock ponds or anything like that.
7 All this area was generally windmills. Then the pipelines
8 started coming in. I'm not much on pipelines, Jim, but
9 they -- I think probably in some areas they're really
10 necessary.

11 MR. BARR: Was it hard to get a cover back on
12 where they might have put a pipeline?

13 MR. MADRON: Not if it was managed. It had to be
14 deferred pretty regular until that got healed up or the
15 cattle would tramp down a lot of those pipelines. Or, if
16 they weren't laid out properly, say going up a steep slope,
17 if they happen to get a hard rain then it'd wash them out
18 kind of bad. There was -- not bad, but there was quite a
19 few incidents where that would happen, that's probably why I
20 didn't care for them. But I've got pipelines on this
21 ranch --

22 MR. BARR: Oh, sure.

23 MR. MADRON: -- and there's going to be more
24 because my -- the tenant here, he's really a good manager
25 and he wants -- he's probably into intensive grazing more.

1 He only grazes pasture so many days or a couple of weeks and
2 then he moves cattle. It's more work but in the last three
3 years I can see quite an improvement, Jim, because I was
4 running -- taking cattle in, you know, and when I'd turn
5 them in, I about had to put them in one area for pretty near
6 the summer, you know, or the winter, whatever. And that
7 wasn't what I was liking, but that's what I had to do. And
8 now he's got a system set up here where he's doing a real
9 good job. Real good.

10 MR. BARR: Did you have any projects with any of
11 the towns around?

12 MR. MADRON: No, we didn't. Sometimes we'd
13 furnish them some trees, but as far as any town projects --

14 MR. BARR: Recreation or anything like that?

15 MR. MADRON: I just can't recall right now.

16 MR. BARR: That's fine. I see you've got some
17 golf courses up here now that came in.

18 MR. MADRON: Oh, yeah, my brother-in-law had a
19 golf course down here on that meadow just west of town for a
20 lot of years. I've got golf clubs but I've got other things
21 I'd rather do --

22 MR. BARR: Yeah.

23 MR. MADRON: -- like something like that.

24 MR. BARR: Oh, yeah, pretty good size to him. How
25 many points on him? Well, let's see --

1 MR. MADRON: Well, the outfitter, he said he could
2 be a seven -- six-by-seven. I'd just call him a nice
3 six-by-six. He said he was nine -- over nine years old.

4 MR. BARR: Is that right?

5 MR. MADRON: I think probably --

6 MR. BARR: Get him around here or --

7 MR. MADRON: Up on the Utah border.

8 MR. BARR: Oh, okay.

9 MR. MADRON: Rangely, Colorado.

10 MR. BARR: Well, I was just going to see if there
11 was anything in general you'd like to comment about on how
12 you think the natural resource district programs worked over
13 the years and particularly in this area.

14 MR. MADRON: You want me to be straight?

15 MR. BARR: Yeah.

16 MR. MADRON: Okay. I think they are doing a good
17 job, Jim, generally. Now, this Jack -- Jack worked for me,
18 Jack Brummet (phonetic) on the recycling down there. Jack,
19 he worked for me. I had a lot of good help, Jim. I really
20 had. Anyway, Jack's into that. On the start, I was kind of
21 questioning that a little bit, but it has really turned out
22 to be a good item, I think. It's -- I don't know whether
23 all the NRDs -- of course, in the bigger places they have
24 their own recycling systems, but for this area I think the
25 NRDs are doing a good job on that. And with our water

1 programs and testing, that's going good. I get their
2 monthly report. And tree planting is still going, seeding.
3 Getting back to the seeding, I helped seed that -- some of
4 those areas up on that Mullen golf course. Have you ever
5 been up there?

6 MR. BARR: Yes, I was up there once or twice.

7 MR. MADRON: Are you a golfer, Jim?

8 MR. BARR: I am a bad golfer. Once or twice a
9 year I get out and that's about it.

10 MR. MADRON: Well, the reason I got a set of golf
11 clubs, I guess, was because, well, my brother-in-law wanted
12 to golf and then my son, he kind of got into golfing. Of
13 course, he was more -- he was built. He was tall, slim.
14 Anyway, I did, but I thought, "I'd rather do something than
15 chase one of them little white balls."

16 MR. BARR: Exactly.

17 MR. MADRON: I've done some fishing. I've done a
18 lot of fishing. I like to fish, hunt. I shot that bull out
19 22 days before my 84th birthday.

20 MR. BARR: Is that right?

21 MR. MADRON: I've been 21 years applying for that
22 area because they only let a few out-of-staters enter. It
23 is probably designated as a trophy unit and they don't let a
24 lot of people in there, but I got a good outfitter and I got
25 (indiscernible) in good shape.

1 And anyway, getting back to the recycling, I think
2 it's -- Jack's doing a great job with that down there at the
3 NRD and I haven't -- I hate to say it, but I think I've only
4 been to one or two -- not to the regular board meetings
5 maybe, maybe one, and I've attended some of their seminar
6 sessions. And their water testing and -- I think they've
7 done more with the rivers, maybe, I'm not sure just what
8 all, but keeping check on the rivers.

9 MR. BARR: Before I forget it, would you mind if I
10 took a picture? We've been trying to take a picture of
11 everybody that's doing these so if that's okay, if I could
12 get one? Sorry to bother, but I keep forgetting to do that
13 once in a while.

14 MR. MADRON: I'm not camera man. Well, we better
15 finish this.

16 MR. BARR: Yeah. Do you have anything else that
17 you want to bring up because --

18 MR. MADRON: Well, is there something else that
19 you're --

20 MR. BARR: Well, do you remember any particular
21 individuals that you think were particularly helpful in the
22 NRDs, either in this district or statewide, that you would
23 like to mention, that were particularly --

24 MR. MADRON: Oh, man, a lot of them. Gail Starr
25 (phonetic). What was -- you met with him.

1 MR. BARR: Dale.

2 MR. MADRON: Dale. And then the attorney, I can't
3 remember --

4 MR. BARR: Jim Cook (phonetic) or --

5 MR. MADRON: Jim Cook. Is he still down there?

6 MR. BARR: Oh, yeah, yeah. He's been to one or
7 two of the meetings.

8 MR. MADRON: Oh, man. When I get down there I
9 ought to --

10 MR. BARR: Yeah, you ought to get ahold of him.

11 MR. MADRON: -- see him. Hazel --

12 MR. BARR: Jenkins, yeah.

13 MR. MADRON: -- Jenkins.

14 MR. BARR: She wrote kind of a history of the
15 NRDs.

16 MR. MADRON: Hazel did?

17 MR. BARR: Yeah, kind of a book type thing.

18 MR. MADRON: I always visited her when I went up
19 to the offices when I would get down to Lincoln. That was
20 not one of my favorite places to go but --

21 MR. BARR: Did you have any of your board members
22 serve on the (indiscernible) Water Commission or the Natural
23 Resource Commission? Jim Cook, from up north, was on for a
24 while, I remember, but he was in the Niobrara I think.

25 MR. MADRON: Yeah.

1 MR. BARR: I don't know who --

2 MR. MADRON: Oh, yeah, I had -- well, way back I
3 had Robert McPheron (phonetic) and then, after he died,
4 Marion (phonetic) took his place, Marion McPheron. Then
5 Dick Phipps (phonetic). You know, Jim, they're all gone.

6 MR. BARR: Yeah. Well, this has been something
7 we've run into on this project.

8 MR. MADRON: And I forget who was after Dick.
9 Dick and I, we'd have a ball together. Dick was a -- he was
10 a character but he was a good guy, serious. I can't
11 remember, but like I say, Judy Ridenhour (phonetic), I
12 think, is still on the board. She maybe close to the last
13 original -- I've got a lot of records in there, Jim, in the
14 file but Judy has really been a good board member. Then
15 Clarence Valenka (phonetic) from down south, him and Judy.
16 Well, Judy wrote for the North Platte Telegraph for a lot of
17 years, so we got some coverage there that was real good.
18 Oh, I'll tell ya, we had one from -- Marihue, Curt Marihue
19 (phonetic), that was one of -- Curt was -- I think his boy
20 then served in his place for a while. But Curt and I spent
21 a lot of -- he was from the west end up around, oh, let's
22 see, south of Hyannis or Whitman, up in that area.

23 MR. BARR: Okay. Well, I don't want to take too
24 much time, but if you have anything else you'd like to
25 mention I'd be glad, otherwise I'll just thank you for doing

