

NRD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of William Umberger by  
Dayle Williamson and John Turnbull

May 27, 2014

1 PROCEEDINGS, May 27, 2014:

2 MR. UMBERGER: Russ Edeal from Loomis and Millard  
3 Johnson, Arnold Krohn from the Phelps County set it up. And  
4 then in 1972 there was an election and I was elected to the  
5 board for a two-year period.

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: Wasn't that '74 when the election  
7 was?

8 MR. UMBERGER: I think it was -- the first one was  
9 '72, wasn't it? It doesn't make any difference. I was --

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: The first election, whenever it  
11 happened.

12 MR. UMBERGER: That's right. It might have been  
13 '74. And, I was elected for two years and then at the end  
14 of the two years, I was re-elected again. But, at that  
15 time -- when we first started we hired a manager Gene  
16 Stoklasa and he was there about two years and then we hired  
17 another young man by the name of John Turnbull. He was  
18 there for, what, three years?

19 MR. TURNBULL: Just about three.

20 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. And then he left for the  
21 Upper Big Blue and I was kind of the interim manager for  
22 awhile and, finally, in 1978 they hired me as the manager.  
23 And I was the manager of the Natural Resources until 1995.  
24 I was there for 17 years.

25 We had a lot of problems. Varied from soil

1 erosion in Gosper County to a lot of drainage problems in  
2 Kearney County and northern part of Phelps County. The  
3 Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District was  
4 the main reason, I think, that the Natural Resources  
5 District was incorporated that way. All of the irrigation  
6 areas of the Central Nebraska Public Irrigation District  
7 failed within our boundaries. We had -- I like to think  
8 that I was the one that finally convinced the people at  
9 Central District that they were part of the problem with the  
10 drainage problems in the northern part of Phelps County and  
11 Kearney County.

12 MR. TURNBULL: Well, they sure resisted it while I  
13 was manager.

14 MR. UMBERGER: Yes.

15 MR. TURNBULL: Resisted taking responsibility.

16 MR. UMBERGER: Yes. They did when I was first  
17 manager. I worked quite closely with the irrigation  
18 division manager Don Schepler at Central District, and he  
19 was aware of the fact and finally convinced the board, I  
20 guess you would say, that they had some responsibilities and  
21 they accepted some of them. So, I don't know how it is now.  
22 It doesn't make any difference because I got out when I  
23 thought it was a good time for me to leave. I was getting  
24 close to 65 and I was having hearing problems, and some of  
25 the times I was afraid that I was going to foul up, not hear

1       correctly, and maybe make some sad mistakes. I had a very  
2       good secretary. And she was my hearing aid for the last two  
3       years or so that I was the manager. She saved my hide  
4       several times.

5               MR. WILLIAMSON: I might add in the interview here  
6       Bill Umberger and I were in the field artillery together and  
7       so that maybe started our bad hearing because we used to  
8       shoot those big canons and never even put -- have earplugs.  
9       The Army didn't furnish earplugs back in our day.

10              MR. UMBERGER: No.

11              MR. WILLIAMSON: And then I suppose you drove some  
12       big powerful tractors and all kinds of stuff.

13              MR. UMBERGER: Probably the thing that made me the  
14       most deaf was I had a radio on the -- right on the --

15              MR. WILLIAMSON: Fender, probably.

16              MR. UMBERGER: -- fender --

17              MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

18              MR. UMBERGER: -- of my John Deere tractor and it  
19       was a -- I didn't get into the John Deere tractors until  
20       they went to four cylinder, single.

21              MR. WILLIAMSON: Okay.

22              MR. UMBERGER: And, I could -- have to turn that  
23       up a long time before I can hear it over the roar of the  
24       tractor. And, it undoubtedly, along with what I had in the  
25       service, it made me even more deaf.

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, that's an interesting  
2 historical footnote for the future of people that will be  
3 listening to this a hundred years from now.

4 It reminded me of my cousin, Bill. He had a John  
5 Deere tractor. It was a -- I think a two cylinder then but  
6 it had it on the fender and I'd -- we could hear his music a  
7 half mile away, was in the field.

8 MR. TURNBULL: Oh, yeah.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: But he had to have it up that  
10 loud because of the noise of the tractor, but the music  
11 really carried.

12 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. Yeah.

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: So --

14 MR. UMBERGER: It carried best -- more than --  
15 further than the sounds of the tractor.

16 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. My dad never would buy a  
17 radio so I just --

18 MR. UMBERGER: Well, you were probably fortunate  
19 then. But I did -- you were right -- I didn't do a lot of  
20 artillery shooting in the -- or sound in the service, but  
21 you were right, you never had an earplug of any type.

22 MR. WILLIAMSON: Nope.

23 MR. UMBERGER: If you couldn't get your fingers in  
24 your ears when it went off, it was bad.

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, that's a good historical

1 note.

2 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: Boy, later on in the service we  
4 took better care of ourselves, but in those early days we  
5 sure didn't. Well that's a great background.

6 MR. UMBERGER: We -- there were four of us out of  
7 that deal that went into the observation battalion.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Okay.

9 MR. UMBERGER: And, we went to Germany. I spent  
10 my service in Germany rather than Korea. That basic  
11 observation course that we took in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and  
12 everyone from A to F went to Korea and everybody from G to Z  
13 went some place else.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. I was in your class.  
15 There were about nine of us left and we worried a lot where  
16 we were going because a lot of them went to Korea. And we  
17 wanted to go to Germany. And nine of us went to Fort  
18 Rucker, Alabama.

19 MR. TURNBULL: Good old Fort Rucker.

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: It was Camp Rucker then. John's  
21 an aviator. He's been at Fort Rucker.

22 MR. TURNBULL: Oh, yes.

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: Lots.

24 MR. UMBERGER: We were in Karlsberg, Germany.

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yep.

1           MR. UMBERGER: In a nice casern or camp. There  
2 was a German labor battalion there at the same camp. And if  
3 we didn't -- couldn't find anything or we didn't get  
4 anything requisitioned for us -- if you had contacts with  
5 that German labor, you could get anything you wanted. They  
6 had it.

7           MR. WILLIAMSON: Yep. Well that was good, right  
8 at the end of the Korean War. Well, Bill, you mentioned  
9 that Gosper County and Kearney County -- we had some people  
10 that weren't very happy with the NRDs. How were you in -- I  
11 mean, when the law was being passed, how were you in Gosper  
12 County?

13           MR. UMBERGER: Gosper County was fine. Phelps  
14 County was fine. But it took a long time for the people in  
15 Kearney County to accept the fact that they had a natural  
16 resources district. The old board members there were just  
17 not willing to accept the fact that they had to give up  
18 their Gosper, or their Kearney County Conservation District.  
19 And one of the -- what am I trying to say -- I am trying to  
20 say that --

21           MR. WILLIAMSON: Your probably going to talk about  
22 Bill Bank.

23           MR. UMBERGER: -- soil conservation. The soil  
24 conservation -- or conservationist there was not convinced  
25 that the natural resources district was the way to go and

1           you probably remember that too.

2                   MR. TURNBULL: I remember being some friction with  
3           Kearney County.

4                   MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

5                   MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

6                   MR. UMBERGER: And we finally won them over. I  
7           spent a lot of time down there and we had some of the old  
8           board members, I worked with them on conservation, reuse  
9           pits, and that kind of stuff. And, we got what -- it was  
10          limited, but we got some conservation funds that we helped  
11          them with.

12                   MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, that was good. You worked  
13          with them.

14                   Well, tell us after you -- you were on the board  
15          for a while and then you became manager. Tell us some of  
16          your old good things that happened, things that you are  
17          proud about that happened in the district during the time  
18          you were manager.

19                   MR. UMBERGER: Well, I think probably the best  
20          thing was my work with the Central District. They didn't  
21          like the NRD. Many of their directors didn't think that  
22          they needed to have funds for taxes for the NRD. They  
23          thought the Central District or Tri-County could handle it  
24          all. And I'd like to think that I had some -- I'd like to  
25          think that I had some influence getting them to accept us.



1 We had a couple of project improvement areas that worked  
2 with the seepage, excess water in Kearney County. And we  
3 had -- eventually we had a couple of very good young board  
4 members from Kearney County and that helped a lot.

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: Brought in some new blood, huh?

6 MR. UMBERGER: Yes. And, I follow them. They  
7 have a news excerpt in *The Elwood Bulletin* every month about  
8 the NRD and I follow them and those guys are still on the  
9 board. And, I think they have given the new NRD manager  
10 quite a bit of help.

11 MR. TURNBULL: Is that Nelson, one of them?

12 MR. UMBERGER: Hm?

13 MR. TURNBULL: Nelson, is one of them?

14 MR. UMBERGER: Nickel.

15 MR. TURNBULL: Nickel. Okay.

16 MR. UMBERGER: There was a Nickel.

17 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

18 MR. UMBERGER: He's down on the valley.

19 MR. TURNBULL: A feed yard by that name in there,  
20 wasn't there?

21 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. But this is a --

22 MR. WILLIAMSON: N-i-c-k-e-l or --

23 MR. TURNBULL: I think so.

24 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. One of them is --

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: I may need the spelling for the

1 transcription.

2 MR. UMBERGER: One of them has a feed yard. I  
3 don't know what his name is, but David Nickel is the one  
4 that I'm thinking about. And he farms quite a bit on the  
5 valley just across the river from Kearney is where it is.  
6 And, right in that Fort Kearney area. And he's pretty  
7 progressive. And he helped. And since I've left, they've  
8 increased their budget a lot. And they've had -- of course,  
9 they have more problems than they had when I was there. I  
10 don't begrudge them. And I still pay taxes in Gosper County  
11 and I don't begrudge them that they need it.

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

13 MR. UMBERGER: There's no doubt about it.

14 MR. TURNBULL: When I first started at Holdrege,  
15 Frank Dragoun was on the board. Frank was a -- what was he,  
16 assistant manager at Tri-County at the time?

17 MR. UMBERGER: He was a manager, yeah.

18 MR. TURNBULL: And became manager after Durameier  
19 (phonetic) passed on.

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

21 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

22 MR. TURNBULL: Is that right?

23 MR. UMBERGER: That is right.

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: Right.

25 MR. UMBERGER: He was there 10 years. I don't

1 know, maybe that. They fired him, you know, because -- I  
2 don't know what all was behind it. But, he was fired. Don  
3 Krause (phonetic) then.

4 MR. TURNBULL: Uh-huh.

5 MR. UMBERGER: And I think he's still there.

6 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah. Don is still there.

7 MR. WILLIAMSON: He's still the manager, right.

8 MR. TURNBULL: Yep.

9 MR. UMBERGER: Yep. He was a forward-looking man  
10 too, manager. I think that was part of the reason that we  
11 got more cooperation between the two, the NRD and the  
12 Central District, because of that. That and Don Schepler.

13 MR. TURNBULL: Yep. The first time I met Don was  
14 the night that you guys interviewed me for the job. There  
15 were three of us sitting out in the waiting room while your  
16 exec committee did the interviews, and Don Schepler and I  
17 were two of those folks.

18 MR. WILLIAMSON: Was that right?

19 MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well that's an interesting --

21 MR. TURNBULL: But I met him before --

22 MR. WILLIAMSON: That's a good history thing.

23 MR. TURNBULL: -- that was before I was even hired  
24 in the NRD system.

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, that's interesting, John.

1           That's a good historical fact.

2                   MR. TURNBULL:   Yeah.

3                   MR. UMBERGER:   I didn't realize that either.

4                   MR. TURNBULL:   Yep.

5                   MR. WILLIAMSON:  Well that's why we do these  
6 history things.

7                   MR. TURNBULL:   Yep.

8                   MR. UMBERGER:   Yeah.

9                   MR. WILLIAMSON:  I mean, this is very significant.

10                  MR. TURNBULL:   Lots of connections that you  
11 uncover in these things.

12                  MR. UMBERGER:   Yeah.

13                  MR. WILLIAMSON:  Well, Bill, you already mentioned  
14 your latter years there, but some of the things that were  
15 really -- well, maybe one thing -- I am sure you didn't have  
16 hardly anything that was difficult for you, but tell us  
17 about one difficulty that you may think of.  And, if you  
18 don't have any, don't tell us.

19                  MR. UMBERGER:   Well, I had difficulty getting  
20 people to realize that they had to do something about their  
21 seepage that they had.  And, I guess that's really the only  
22 really problem I had, except sometimes I had to work with  
23 the other governmental agencies and that was difficult.  I  
24 got along pretty good with Department of Environmental  
25 Quality.  I got along quite well with the engineers and the

1 Game and Parks. But the EPA was something different.

2 MR. TURNBULL: I don't think anything has changed.

3 MR. UMBERGER: I, well, I remember the EPA put  
4 those maps out, you know, and they had you -- you had a --

5 MR. TURNBULL: Was this on the wetlands?

6 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

7 MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

8 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: 1985, huh?

10 MR. UMBERGER: They had you with a wetland, and it  
11 turned out to be a pile of asphalt. Do you remember that?

12 MR. TURNBULL: Yes. I'd forgotten all about that.

13 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: This is a good historical -- but  
15 was that EPA or didn't USDA do a lot of that wetland  
16 identification?

17 MR. UMBERGER: Well.

18 MR. TURNBULL: Well, the EPA did the original  
19 mapping.

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: Original mapping, okay.

21 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

22 MR. TURNBULL: I think so, yeah.

23 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

24 MR. TURNBULL: They just did a -- like a photo  
25 reconnaissance thing.

1 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

2 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

3 MR. TURNBULL: And their interpretation was not  
4 very good at all.

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: No.

6 MR. TURNBULL: And so they saw this dark spot of  
7 this asphalt and assumed it was a wetland.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

9 MR. TURNBULL: No.

10 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. I remember that. And there  
11 were places in our NRD that the same way, that they weren't  
12 wetlands. But, I had trouble -- difficulty. I had one  
13 experience that -- I guess that maybe made me retire. There  
14 was a man that had a center-pivot and there was about one  
15 acre that was a wetland, and his pivot went through it and,  
16 of course, it drowned it out every year. He came to me and  
17 he wanted to fill it. He was willing to take all of the  
18 dark soil out of it, fill the inner -- the thing with soil  
19 out of the corner of the thing --

20 MR. WILLIAMSON: Pivot, huh?

21 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. Make an equivalent one  
22 there, and fill that in so his pivot would go around and he  
23 could grow something there. And, he was willing to bring  
24 the dirt from on a different corner, clear across the  
25 quarter section to fill it in right. And, I worked with

1 him. I thought maybe it was probably a good deal. Then we  
2 had go from the Game and Parks Commission, the Department of  
3 -- DEQ. The engineers, everybody was agreeable with it, but  
4 the EPA. And, I didn't see that it had anything to do with  
5 the EPA in the first place, but they wouldn't go along with  
6 it. And, of course, when they wouldn't go along with it,  
7 well then the Department of Engineers wouldn't go along with  
8 it. So, we couldn't do it.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, those were some tough days  
10 as we worked through the 1985 time with the wetlands --

11 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- and designating wetlands and  
13 so on and so, yeah.

14 MR. UMBERGER: I think that that's probably one of  
15 the, well, one of the reasons that I quit. It was getting  
16 so that you had to argue with those people all the time and  
17 my hearing was going. I had plenty to do at home, so I  
18 retired.

19 MR. WILLIAMSON: But, you never did look back and  
20 hope there was still a Gosper County Soil and Water  
21 District, did you?

22 MR. UMBERGER: No, no, the natural resources  
23 districts were the way to go. I was convinced of that  
24 before they ever got formed. I think Russ Edeal was the  
25 same way. There were several of the people in Phelps

1 County. Arnold Krohn was one of the them, Millard Johnson.  
2 There was another Johnson. It doesn't make any difference.

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: A lot of Johnsons.

4 MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

5 MR. UMBERGER: He was on the Central District  
6 Board, that other Johnson.

7 MR. TURNBULL: Laverne (phonetic), maybe?

8 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah, Laverne.

9 MR. TURNBULL: Is that right?

10 MR. UMBERGER: Yes.

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: Laverne Johnson, okay.

12 MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

13 MR. UMBERGER: And, they were convinced the NRD  
14 should be there. We had a hard time convincing them they  
15 should spend more for personnel, but they finally accepted  
16 that, and I think that that was when they hired John  
17 Thorburn. I think the people realized that they had to have  
18 more people to do the job that needed to be done.

19 But then, things changed about the middle of the  
20 90s. Everything got a lot more complicated.

21 MR. TURNBULL: Oh, it's way more complicated now  
22 then it was then.

23 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. I'm sure.

24 MR. TURNBULL: One of my younger staff asked me  
25 the other day about, you know, what did I think somebody



1       needed to have as a background to become a manager these  
2       days. And I just simply said, "Well with my background I  
3       had at the time I was hired, I'd never be considered today."  
4       It's just super complicated. You need to come in in one of  
5       those positions with a lot of administrative and management  
6       experience, where in those early days we really didn't have  
7       that.

8               MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. Well, when I was manager, I  
9       did a lot of the things that other managers wouldn't  
10      consider doing. They'd have an assistant to do that. I  
11      was, for several years, I monitored all the wells in the  
12      three-county area. And, I enjoyed being out of the office  
13      doing that. And, it was -- I had a lot of contact with  
14      farmers by doing it that way. And, I think that's --  
15      Kearney County, we had a lot of wells down there. And, I  
16      think the fact that we had that and I was down there in the  
17      present, it worked out pretty good.

18             Another one that I want to talk about in Kearney  
19      County was Del Kopf. He was a --

20             MR. WILLIAMSON: K-o-p-f?

21             MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

22             MR. UMBERGER: K-o-p-f, yeah. He was a --

23             MR. TURNBULL: He was Harold's brother. Harold  
24      was on the Central Platte Board, right?

25             MR. WILLIAMSON: Del, it was Del Kopf, huh?

1 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

2 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: I was getting it for the  
4 transcriber. D-e-l Kopf, K-o-p-f.

5 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. Uh-huh.

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. I remember him.

7 MR. UMBERGER: He was married to a -- who was that  
8 guy from down there that was on the Board of Regents?

9 MR. TURNBULL: Rob Rahn (phonetic), is that right?

10 MR. UMBERGER: Who?

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: Rob Rahn was on the --

12 MR. UMBERGER: Yes.

13 MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- Board of Regents.

15 MR. UMBERGER: Rob Rahn.

16 MR. TURNBULL: Yes. He was from -- he lived south  
17 of Minden, right? I think.

18 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. Norman I think was actually  
19 their address.

20 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

21 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. And, Del Kopf was a  
22 brother-in-law to him.

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: To Rob Rahn, sure.

24 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: Sure, Okay. You're bringing back

1 a lot of good memories here.

2 MR. UMBERGER: Yes. And we -- yeah, if I can  
3 remember the names, it would be better wouldn't it?

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, we'll have to sort those  
5 out in this interview, but we'll get back with you and the  
6 three of us will try to get them spelled right and remember  
7 them.

8 MR. UMBERGER: We had a project one time. They  
9 were trying to put a big reservoir on the Little Blue River.  
10 It would have been just south of our border, but almost all  
11 of the area for that was in the Tri-Basin NRD. And, I did a  
12 lot of work down there for a couple of years helping them.  
13 Well, it fell through. We studied the possibility of having  
14 a recharge system in the Sand Creek area in our NRD.

15 MR. TURNBULL: Was that near Upland? Is that  
16 right?

17 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah, that other was near Upland --

18 MR. TURNBULL: Okay.

19 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. But this one we're talking  
20 about was, well, just north of Highway 6. Remember where  
21 the beef plant was?

22 MR. TURNBULL: Yes.

23 MR. UMBERGER: Okay. It was just across the road  
24 to the north of that on Sand Creek.

25 MR. TURNBULL: Okay.

1                   MR. UMBERGER: And, we hired somebody, an  
2 engineer, to look into the feasibility of it and it didn't  
3 fly. Now, they're studying it again.

4                   MR. WILLIAMSON: That's the way it goes. And your  
5 description here, it's, you know, that's sort of what  
6 happened because Tri-County was the only NRD that wasn't on  
7 a true hydrologic basin.

8                   MR. UMBERGER: Yes.

9                   MR. WILLIAMSON: Of course, the others are -- have  
10 to be chopped off. You couldn't have a NRD from one end of  
11 the state to the other on the Platte so --

12                  MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

13                  MR. WILLIAMSON: -- there are some cuts in them,  
14 but the outside boundaries on nearly all NRDs are pretty  
15 much on the hydrologic lines.

16                  MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. And, I always thought that  
17 maybe they put everything else in the state along hydrologic  
18 lines and they ended up with three counties that didn't fit  
19 into anything so they made that the Tri-Basin.

20                  MR. WILLIAMSON: It wasn't quite that way.  
21 Actually, we had it along hydrologic lines and a heavy  
22 objection from Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation  
23 District and --

24                  MR. UMBERGER: Yes.

25                  MR. TURNBULL: There's a surprise.

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- through the governor and  
2 everybody. I remember the day well when they backed down.

3 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah, they tried to control us.  
4 There's no doubt about it, but we finally persevered, John  
5 and myself. I think Gene Stoklasa left because of that,  
6 some of them. And we finally, I think we finally brought  
7 them around.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

9 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, I think it's working good.

11 MR. TURNBULL: Well, Gene when he quit there at  
12 the NRD, he opened up a retail plant nursery in Holdrege for  
13 a --

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: I remember that.

15 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

16 MR. TURNBULL: -- couple years. And, then Ron  
17 Bishop hired him at Central Platte.

18 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

19 MR. TURNBULL: And he worked over there until,  
20 what, about two or three years ago, Gene finally retired.

21 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, retired from the Central  
22 Platte, so.

23 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah, I remember I used to go over  
24 there and see him.

25 MR. WILLIAMSON: Actually, Gene worked for the

1 Commission before he went.

2 MR. TURNBULL: Did he?

3 MR. WILLIAMSON: And a lot of our people did.

4 MR. UMBERGER: Is that right?

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yep, before they became managers  
6 of NRDs. And, Dick Beran and Ron Fleecs and, gee, I can  
7 name a lot of them.

8 MR. TURNBULL: Ron Sasek (phonetic) did too,  
9 didn't he?

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Ron, yeah. Ron came back  
11 from Vietnam, and we hired him as our western representative  
12 and then became a manager.

13 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yep. So, we have had a lot of  
15 great people.

16 Well, this is a very unique interview, Bill,  
17 because you were a soil and water conservation district  
18 director in Gosper County and a real good one, and you  
19 worked hard and you supported the NRDs early and then you  
20 became a manager and you were very involved in farming and a  
21 lot of things and worked hard with the NRD.

22 Do you have anything else that you'd like to add  
23 for the interview? We don't want take too much of your time  
24 and have the paper too long for you to read.

25 MR. UMBERGER: Well, I had some real good people

1 to work with. Russ Edeal is the one that comes to mind more  
2 than anybody else. He was a very good board member,  
3 conscientious. He was the one that suggested that I become  
4 the manager.

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

6 MR. UMBERGER: I guess that's one of the reasons  
7 that I think he was all right.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, yeah, but he --

9 MR. UMBERGER: He was very forward-looking and he  
10 realized the friction between the Central District and us to  
11 start with and we got along well.

12 MR. TURNBULL: Russ was the chairman when I got  
13 hired. Russ Edeal was the chairman when I was hired.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

15 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. That's right.

16 MR. TURNBULL: And Millard Johnson was the  
17 treasurer at the time.

18 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah, that's right. But, Russ was  
19 good. There's no doubt about it.

20 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah, he was, at least with me, he  
21 would come in to talk to me about, you know, what was going  
22 on, what was happening, but he was always very careful never  
23 just to tell me what to do. It was just -- he just kind of  
24 laid out some generalities and then he'd leave and I would  
25 sit there and wonder, "What did he want me to go, which

1 way?"

2 MR. WILLIAMSON: No micro-management.

3 MR. TURNBULL: No, he was not a micro-manager at  
4 all.

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: And that's good.

6 MR. UMBERGER: Well, that's right.

7 MR. WILLIAMSON: A board member should not be.

8 MR. TURNBULL: He was excellent that way.

9 MR. UMBERGER: I'm sure that he helped me the same  
10 way.

11 And, I was still farming. I would come home from  
12 work at five o'clock and feed my cattle. And it got awful  
13 tiring. In 1984, I finally sold my cows and calves, and my  
14 daughter married a good farmer and he took over the farm, so  
15 I didn't have anything to do but manage the last 10 years of  
16 my 17.

17 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah, your farm was south of  
18 Elwood, right?

19 MR. UMBERGER: South and west.

20 MR. TURNBULL: South and west.

21 MR. UMBERGER: Over in the hill and canyon  
22 country.

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: That's why you were highly  
24 interested in soil conservation.

25 MR. UMBERGER: Yes, I was. And, I remember one



1 year you cut me down, that NSWCP Fund. You cut me down  
2 pretty much and I was pretty irate about it. You remember  
3 that?

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Oh, yeah. You came to see us.

5 MR. UMBERGER: I saw you in a meeting.

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: I said, "Bill, we still like you.  
7 We got to look at that."

8 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. Well, you put the soil  
9 conservation in other places more than you did in our NRD.

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

11 MR. UMBERGER: And, I could understand that. I  
12 think we kind of got back at you later on when you started  
13 giving money for more water quality.

14 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah, but Gosper County was --  
15 when they were a soil and water district, they were always a  
16 good county on soil conservation, and, you know, then it  
17 kind of got mixed up I guess or something.

18 MR. TURNBULL: So, the SCS people, Buddy  
19 Steinshour was the district conservationist when I was in  
20 Holdrege.

21 MR. UMBERGER: He was still there all the time  
22 that I was there. He retired just a couple of years after I  
23 left.

24 MR. WILLIAMSON: Can you spell that name, John or  
25 Bill, so we have it on tape?

1 MR. TURNBULL: S --

2 MR. UMBERGER: t-e-i-n-s-h-o-u-e-r.

3 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Thank you.

5 MR. TURNBULL: I think that's right.

6 MR. UMBERGER: Is that right?

7 MR. TURNBULL: That's pretty close.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

9 MR. TURNBULL: Who's the technician that was in  
10 Elwood, the older fellow? He'd been there a long, long  
11 time.

12 MR. UMBERGER: Owen Brainard.

13 MR. TURNBULL: Yes. The thing I remember about  
14 Owen Brainard was he had been a mule skinner in the Army in  
15 Burma in World War II.

16 MR. UMBERGER: No, that was --

17 MR. TURNBULL: Or am I thinking of a different  
18 man?

19 MR. UMBERGER: That was the assistant down there.  
20 But you're right. He was in the -- he had a mule, a pack  
21 mule, that they went across the hills into Burma, you know,  
22 during the war.

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Okay. The hump.

24 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah, he had some real tales  
25 about (indiscernible) --

1 MR. UMBERGER: Yost was his name.

2 MR. TURNBULL: That's right.

3 MR. UMBERGER: Robert Yost.

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Oh, Robert Yost.

5 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. And, Owen Brainard was in  
6 the tail end of the World War II and he was in the Marines.  
7 And he was in the Reserve, and they called him up for duty  
8 in the Korean War.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: Oh, they did? Yeah. I never  
10 realized that.

11 MR. UMBERGER: And, he was a chopper pilot. He  
12 was one of the guys that went in and got the wounded --

13 MR. WILLIAMSON: MedEvac, huh?

14 MR. UMBERGER: -- and took them back to the --

15 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yes. Tiny chopper.

16 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. Oh yeah, those little ones.  
17 I rode in them a couple of times. They made me a little  
18 nervous.

19 MR. WILLIAMSON: And --

20 MR. UMBERGER: You drove them all the time.

21 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

22 MR. WILLIAMSON: -- the thing I remember about  
23 Owen Brainard, and maybe you guys observed this, it seems  
24 like on a warm day he would wear his hat with ear flaps  
25 down. Do you remember that? Was that Owen?

1                   MR. UMBERGER: Oh, yes. He was that way. But,  
2                   there was --

3                   MR. WILLIAMSON: Just a little humorous history  
4                   here from the past. We are kind of off NRDs here, but we're  
5                   going to wrap up soon. But, this -- Owen Brainard, well,  
6                   that's good.

7                   MR. TURNBULL: Well, you need to understand the  
8                   characters of everybody.

9                   MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah.

10                  MR. TURNBULL: That is what makes these jobs  
11                  interesting.

12                  MR. UMBERGER: But Owen Brainard is known to fly  
13                  that helicopter in and pick up wounded people and shoot at  
14                  the Chinese with his .45 as he was leaving.

15                  MR. WILLIAMSON: Wow. Yeah. MedEvacs aren't  
16                  really supposed to do that, but --

17                  MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. But he never talked about  
18                  that.

19                  MR. WILLIAMSON: No. No. Well, that's really  
20                  interesting.

21                  MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

22                  MR. WILLIAMSON: I knew some of those people but  
23                  never knew that background, so it's good to get the local  
24                  thing.

25                  MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

1           MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, to John Turnbull, thanks a  
2 lot for you taking part in this --

3           MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

4           MR. WILLIAMSON: -- interview, because it's really  
5 interesting to be sitting here by two former NRD managers in  
6 that particular NRD and some of the things that happened and  
7 reminding one or the other. John, do you have any closing  
8 thoughts?

9           MR. TURNBULL: Well, Tri-Basin was a really good  
10 place for me to get started, get my feet on the ground. I  
11 had been out of state for 10 years after I'd left Lincoln  
12 and college. So, yeah, it was a good place to get broke  
13 into the NRD system, good board to work for. And I got a  
14 lot of good experience out of it. Dealing with Central.  
15 Dealing with the public.

16           MR. WILLIAMSON: That's great. Well, Bill, we  
17 thank you very much for hosting us here today and we'll give  
18 you the final word. What would you like to say before I  
19 turn the tape off?

20           MR. UMBERGER: Just that it was an experience that  
21 I'm glad that I was able to serve as long as I did. I think  
22 the NRDs have done an excellent job throughout the state. I  
23 know several of the managers, some of them are still here,  
24 like John and Ron Bishop. I did --

25           MR. WILLIAMSON: Fortunately, we did get to tape

1 Ron Bishop before he passed away. So, we got his story on  
2 record.

3 MR. UMBERGER: When -- how long ago did he pass  
4 away?

5 MR. WILLIAMSON: Just a few months ago.

6 MR. TURNBULL: Wasn't very long ago.

7 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

8 MR. WILLIAMSON: Six, five, six.

9 MR. TURNBULL: It was after the first of the year.

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.

11 MR. UMBERGER: Well, that's sad.

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: Maybe you didn't -- maybe you  
13 hadn't heard of that.

14 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. I hadn't heard.

15 MR. WILLIAMSON: Because he just retired very  
16 recently.

17 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah.

18 MR. WILLIAMSON: He hung in there.

19 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah. He retired in -- I think it  
20 was last June, July. And the association gave him an award  
21 at the September conference, and then -- I think he passed  
22 away after the first part of the year.

23 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yeah. He had had some health  
24 problems, so --

25 MR. UMBERGER: But all of those folks I worked

1 with, I have admiration for all of them. Even Ron  
2 Wunnibald.

3 MR. TURNBULL: Yep. He was the manager at Alma.

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Alma, you bet.

5 MR. UMBERGER: (Indiscernible) fired him. Then he  
6 started working for the DEQ. And I'm relation to Jay  
7 Ringenberg, and he said that Ron Wunnibald did them a real  
8 good job.

9 MR. WILLIAMSON: Sure.

10 MR. UMBERGER: So, that's good.

11 MR. WILLIAMSON: Good guy.

12 MR. TURNBULL: He was working with livestock  
13 producers.

14 MR. UMBERGER: He was stationed in Holdrege then?

15 MR. TURNBULL: Yep.

16 MR. UMBERGER: And, I saw him sometimes when I was  
17 visiting down there right after he got the job. I asked him  
18 if the feed lots were giving him fits, and he said the feed  
19 lots were not nearly as hard as the dairy that was coming  
20 in. He had more problems with them then he did with the  
21 feed lots.

22 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, we'll wrap up here, Bill.

23 We thank you very much for having us up today in your  
24 beautiful setting here, and it's really good to see you  
25 after all these years and --

1 MR. TURNBULL: Yeah.

2 MR. UMBERGER: You're very welcome. I just have  
3 one more question.

4 MR. WILLIAMSON: Okay.

5 MR. UMBERGER: Why me?

6 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, because you were a manager.  
7 You were there early. You were on the Gosper County Board.  
8 I can remember that. And I know you.

9 MR. UMBERGER: Okay. Thank you. Thank you.

10 MR. WILLIAMSON: You were a good artillery man.

11 MR. UMBERGER: Yeah. Oh, yeah. That's right.

12 MR. WILLIAMSON: Well, thank you very much Bill  
13 and John. It has been a great pleasure and we'll be turning  
14 this over to the historical society for long-term keeping.

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