

Interview with Earnest Bracken at his residence on August 23, 1978. The interviewer was John Brennan.

JB: Mr. Bracken, what year were you born?

EB: Nineteen hundred. I was born on the old John McDonald farm, that John McDonald lived on when he first came to this country in 1836.

JB: John McDonald was one of the original settlers here.

EB: Yes.

JB: What are some of your earliest memories about yourself and your family?

EB: Well, uh, really I guess the first thing I remember You know in the early days the woman believed in ghosts-they called them haunts in those days. My mother was at some meeting and I must have been a real small child; but you know they was talking about haunts showing up here and there. And you know that still stuck in my baby mind. Of course that scared the wadding out of the kids you know. They didn't have any trouble finding their kids after dark, cause after a few of them haunt stories you wouldn't get a kid outdoors after dark.

JB: Do you remember any of those stories?

EB: Yes I can...even that small I can remember one of the places that the haunts hung out was the woods that separates Nolten up here on Division Road from the Wilson property. I can even remember that's one of the places. I re- member telling around here and there one of those haunts would show up. Some of the women believed in those haunts, for sure. Yeah.

JB: Did the haunts have forms, or were they sort of ideas?

EB: Well they, they'd see a kind of a floating substance in the air along them woods. Something strange you know and...

JB: Hmm. Are there any local legends about the haunts?

EB: Not outside of that, but they tell around different places where they would see him--now they didn't seem to believe that they stayed in any of the houses or cabins. They were just out in the woods and wild places.

JB: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

EB: I had one brother. One younger.

JB: What kind of games did you play with your buddies, and your brother?

EB: Well we didn't have money any, but, we would fix up string balls and throw em: take a ball and wind string tight as ya could, and then sew them so they'd hang together; and then we'd get together and choose up sides and play with that. I remember one time we played the day before and the ball got Wet. The next game we started playing that thing was hard as a rock. That day I was one of the catchers, and of course the first thing happened why, they fouled one off and I got it right in the eye. That ended my catching career forI never caught again until after I played independent baseball.

JB: Where was the first school you attended?

EB: Uh, Lakeview School one year and a part of another one. And then my parents bought this old McDonald farm from the estate, and they moved down here. My grandfather at that time lived next door to the Lakeview School. I stayed with him; but then when they moved down here then I went to school down here. I can remember that they had two saloons at that time, and Mill Creek had a reputation for having a lot of brawls in those days in those saloons.

You'd go by and you'd hear a row in there going on and of course a small boy: I was deathly afraid of those places. I remember I walked clear on the opposite side of the street when I'd go by there to and from school, ready to run if I'd hear a commotion.

JB: Do you remember the first time you entered one to order a drink?

EB: No. I never entered into the saloons. I can remember though--I'll have to modify that a little--when I was a small boy my father he mother'd go to town and while she was around shopping why, dad he didn't have anything to do, and he'd usually go down to the saloon, of course take me with him. He had to take care of me. I can remember him taking me in there and setting me up on the bar and giving me some sips from his drink. I can also remember the table in there, in those days, where they had the free lunch. That was of course at LaPorte, Indiana. And I can still remember when they didn't have any electric lights in the city of LaPorte. Some kind of old streetlamps there that had the lights, originally.

JB: You had an anecdote about the churches in Mill Creek at one time.

EB: That was in Wills Township. The Baptist church has since been torn down, and abandoned. That was the first church built in Wills Township. The next one then was the Christian church. Now they call it the Church of Christ. It's still active. There was quite a bit of rivalry between the two churches. So one time they had a revival meeting at the old Baptist church, and they put up a large tent to hold the meeting in, and some of the young men of the community, in horse and buggy days, drove up to the old Baptist church, tied their horses to a fence some distance from the church, and slipped up and untied all the ropes. Then at the given signal to let loose the ropes, and of course the tent come down on the people, causing quite a commotion. Well then, another time they had a Sunday school class at the old Baptist church, and the teacher asked the class where the devil come from. And young John Hunt, he spoke up and said, "From Sauktown".

JB: Sauktown is up north?

EB: Well they laid it outthey platted it as a town and then when the rail- road and a big canal, from the Kankakee, which was supposed to meet there, didn't materialize, then of course the town died. It was called Independence.

JB: You had a story about a man named Ross and a buggy seat.

EB: Well, the young man fromthe young people from Mill Creek to this side of Sauktown church would usually attend the church at Sauktown. There was a man by the name of Ross lived in the community. He and his sister, his unmarried sister would come to church at Sauktown. So the young men there at Sauktown--most of this group between here and Sauktown, between Mill Creek and Sauktown--they went out and they cut some thorn branches and made a nice little thorn nest and put it in the buggy seat where Ross was apt to sit down when he drove. And Ross had a horse that was pretty high-lifed. So when he'd go after church was out he'd untie the horse and then he would stay on the ground and drive the horse and buggy around to the church steps, and his sister would come out and get in and then he would ...as soon as his foot hit the step to go in the buggy, he'd have to land with the horse on the run. So of course, he and his sister, neither one discovered that thorn nest, and he landed in it. He went quite some distance down the road before he could get off of the thorns in order to pull on the lines in order to coral the horse.

JB: How old is the building we're in?

EB: Well, I don't know exactly, but I think around 1885 it was built.

JB: Was it built by the Collum Brothers?

EB: Yes.

JB: For what purpose was it built?

EB: Uh, for a store. At that time they did all the business in the town, and community, except the saloon. Everything else they had charge of. When they bought this block in here, this was virgin territory. The man who settled in the Sauktown vicinity come down here and he bought this, I suppose for, got a title to it for speculative purposes I presume. But he never done anything with it. So when Collums bought it it was all virgin timber. They cut it off and had lumber made; made this big store with it.

JB: What were their names?

BB: Wash and William Collum. They were half brothers.

JB: Was WashWould you call him local color?

EB: Well. Wash was one of those men that didn't believe in any nonsense of any kind. He didn't like Jokes. He never told any; he didn't like other people telling them. Yon might say he was all business. He was a typical business man. They said that he started out as a teacher, but he would hardly be the caliber of person to be a good teacher. Then he got into the store business.

JB: Was he the one who shot a man in back here, in a gun battle?

EB: Yes. On the back side of the store which was the west end, they had an extension built out. The farthest half of the extension had a cover over--and they kept their plowshares and farm repair parts there. And then on the north end, it was open, next to the building ...it had steps down. On the south end was a large gate which they could open to allow a wagon to back up, and load and unload. So somebody went to the front of the store and flushed two burglars: one an old man, and one a young man, out the back door. Wash he was waiting out there at the north end where he could see ...and when these two come over that gate, why, he shot and he killed the oldest man. He fell dead on the other side. Then another time he, when he was alone he flushed a burglar out. That time they had the battle at the yard at the south side of the store building. They emptied their revolvers in the dark, but neither one hit the other one ...and then they run together in the dark and beat and grappled, beating one another over the head and shoulders with their revolvers. Until finally Wash got the better of the other man. Then they took him over to Jess Collum, who lived in a house just west of this store, and kept him there until the, of course the sheriff could come out here. He had to come by horse and buggy; it'd take a considerable length of time. They made him roll his coat up and lay down on the floor with his head on that coat. He kept complaining about his head hurting him. They discovered while he was in the store, he went down to the cellar and he stole a can of cherries that Mrs. William Collum--she kept her fruit in the basement. He had that in his pocket all the time during that fight and hadn't broke it.

JB: Was there once a huckleberry festival here?

EB: Yes. Around from Fish Lake, between Fish Lake and Walkerton was huckleberry marshes, a lot of em. Big ones. And so they started up a huckleberry festival at Walkerton but some outfit from Chicago muscled in and took over and so instead of having a huckleberry festival and putting up a local party as queen, why, they'd go to a character with em and crowned her queen every year; and set up gambling places, and fleeced the people. She went around town a puttin on shimmy shows. And so, they skimmed some mother's boy, at one of them gamblin places. Made her so angry, dry time of year, she went out and set fire to the huckleberry marsh and of course it just kept burning until pretty soon the huckleberry marsh was, there wasn't enough of em to have a huckleberry festival anymore, and that ended the huckleberry festival.

JB: About what year was that?

EB: Well, I don't know...that was...

JB: Approximately.

EB: That was before I was old enough to remember. I just heard them tell that story.

JB: Do you remember much of your family life? What went on during the days? During the dinners? Lunch, breakfast? What time you got up?

EB: Well, that was pretty much the same as everybody, they...back in the, especially my grandmother, they canned everything. They had a sorghum hatch. They would take that and have

sorghum made, and usually somebody kept bees if they didn't find a bee tree in the community. They'd have honey. And then they all planted an orchard in the early days. They'd take, you know, and have cider made. They would keep their sweetest apples and then they would boil the cider down into apple butter...and they would use these sweet apples in the cider to give it a little more sweeter flavor. They had a stirrer that had a handle on and then a piece of wood that hung down that holds then, and they would tie a corn husk through those holes and use those copper kettles, and while that was boiling that was my job for one, to stir that so it wouldn't stick to the kettle.

JB: Were the winters rough then? And how did the families get through them?

EB: Well, yes they would have almost every winter, they would have deep snows. You would have a little thaw and people would take and drain the mill. They'd have it made into flour and put it in a sled and take and walk right over the fence, going to the mill. But of course, they were all dressed well then: they had heavy clothes, and they wore what they called fork boots, so, actually they was dressed for it. And you know those early log cabins was, they kept them caulked up good, you know, and they were, you'd say, a pretty cold through,

JB: Mostly the fuel was coal and wood back then?

EB: Yeah it was, after they put windows in then, it kept cold out. They turned around and started building these frame houses without, you know, anything to keep out cold at all, and they was the coldest things you could imagine. But of course then they quit using log cabins and started building them just to be in style, but they was a poor place for the winter.

JB: Do you remember when the first electricity came to the area?

EB: Well, Mill Creek was the first ...er, the last place to have electricity. It didn't come here til Roosevelt was president. He started this rural electrification program in Northern Indiana. Then hustled over here, had a meeting and got people to sign up, before the rural electrification could get in here. So I don't know how long we'd have gone if it hadn't a been for that. Before they wanted a large sum of money to put the line into Mill Creek, but then when a little opposition showed up they was only too glad to put it in here without charging anybody anything. And this was the last community to have a black top road into, through the town.

JB: How were the first roads put in?

EB: They were just common dirt roads ...dusty. Every time in the summertime a buggy or a wagon would go, there'd just be a stream of dust, back of ya, ya couldn't see anything. I remember when a fellow the name of Art Jones from Rolling Prairie come down to take mother and dad riding in a model t ford, and so we took her around Fish Lake, and up there in the hills on these country roads ...and of course, it Was just a stream of dust back of that car all the time. I remember we looked ahead and there's a chicken in the road. Of course chickens didn't know what a car was, and he went right over that chicken. The chicken didn't know what was happening til after it was by. It didn't get hurt. It wasn't long til we come to a place and there was another old fat hen in the road. She didn't know what took place, the car, you know, went past

her and I looked back and got dust in her eyes I guess because she's trying to go right straight back up in the road in the dust. Yeah. And the trying to go right straight back up in the road in the dust. Yeah. And the horses, I can remember in the horses and cows when those early cars would go by ...boy would they take off for the other end of the field. They was just scared to death.

JB: About what year did the first gas powered auto come into the area?

EB: Well I have that information somewhere, but I don't know where to look for it right now. But they had, Doc Walkenshaw at Stillwell had the first car. I can't remember much about it. I think about the next car, man by the name of Hosteller had...then about the third car, Edward Behr had, and it was nothing more than running gears with an engine, and made a terrific noise as it was going down the road.

JB: Was there a big celebration for Holidays with the family back in the early nineteen hundreds?

EB: Well the Harness's used to have a, for years had a reunion. They'd usually have it either in Walkerton, or somewhere down here on the marsh between here and Walkerton. Some of the relation's property. I remember one place they used to call it Loophole they had the meeting down here somewhere. I couldn't find it now. But the Brackens they never, they wasn't any other Bracken group around here, so there our relation is all in Illinois, Virginia. But they have, in Kentucky they have a county down there, that they Bracken Township...over next to the Virginia line. So we didn't have any of our group up here but my grandfather, and his descendants.

JB: Could you tell the story of Milo Little?

EB: Well, he was the son of Levi Little, one of the early settlers here. So he had a habit of throwing his weight around. He'd go to dances, especially. For no reason at all, he'd haul off and hit somebody. And so he hit a small man, named Bill Windjit, and a few dance nights later why somebody went outside and--they found him stretched out, somebody laid him out with a piece of pipe. Beat him up bad.

JB: Milo Little?

EB: He was the one that got beat up. Yeah. They could only suspicion who used the pipe on him. They claimed that later on he died from it, the effects of it. Levi Little came here in an early day...and this marsh over here now that they're taking the peat out of...Milburn Peat Company: they originally called that Little Lake. It's a shallow lake. But the local people always called it Cranberry Lake; it was a cranberry marsh. The water would be down there in the summer, produce cranberries. The official name for the lake was Little Lake.

JB: Have we talked about the rattlesnakes in the area? Back when they used to cut the marsh hay.

EB: Well of course the Kankakee Valley had vast stretches of nothing but marsh hay...which of course was the reason the prairie chickens was here. And people you know, rather than raising

their own hay, why they'd go down here and cut marsh hay. Of course they'd have to cut it with a cradle, rake it up, and doodle it, usually for a few days, before they'd get it hauled. But when they'd go to load it, why, you'd usually find rattle- snakes. Then under those doodles you had to be careful throwin that hay up there, ya didn't throw a rattlesnake up to the person loadin the hay. More'n one person has...rattlesnake got throwed up, and then they used to have fellows that stacked the hay. There was more than one fellow that come down in a hurry off of them stacks when they throwed up that hay.

JB: Did you say the Lincoln Park Zoo sent out a man once?

EB: Yes. A young man by the name of Burdon that lived on what we call Long Island now, east of Mill Creek. They of course lived in that territory and...so they went on to a extra big rattlesnake, and they captured it. They contacted the Lincoln Park Zoo, and when they found out what a big rattlesnake it was they was interested enough to send a man with a cage by the grand Trunk Railroad, and the Grand Trunk stopped down here at the nearest crossing where these people lived and let him off, and he got the rattlesnake, and then they stopped another train to let him board it and take the rattlesnake to the zoo. Yes.

EB: Would you say the good old days were really the good old days, or would you say these days are the good old days?

EB: Well, I think, actually, in spite of all the troubles we've got now, with crime and one thing and another, they still didn't have the problems they had in the old days, because you couldn't rush a person to a hospital if they took suddenly sick. And then the winters, you know, were usually snowed up tight. And you had to....there wasn't any county highway department to come out and keep the roads up. If there was a big snow out, get a group get together and dig out locally.

JB: Would you say the community was closer knit then?

EB: Oh yes, definitely. Even, you know, when somebody died, a few of us always went in; some of them sat up with the corpse. Whenever any- body died that was standard procedure.

JB: They had the wake in individuals' houses, rather than in a funeral parlor?

EB: Yeah. They didn't have funeral parlors then.

JB: Mr. Bracken, as I said before, we'd prefer ifwe have a regular history-we'd prefer if you would talk about what you'd like to talk about: old stories, anecdotes, personal reminiscences within the county, and stories you've heard from some of the old timers about this area, Lincoln Township, and the western part of the county. You were saying something about your great-grandfather's brothers...and wolf calls.

EB: Well, Peter Harness and his four sons came here from Ohio, in an early day. And these sons along with some other boys in the community, they formed a gang--they called them the Harness Gang. And they would wolf run people. They would be mostly people who had just moved in--

or, they would find out the roads through the woods that some young man returning home late at night, after calling on his girl friend, would take. These were the ones they would "wolf run" mostly.

I remember one particular story: a family moved into a cabin in the community one day, and that night the Harness Gang gathered...surrounded the cabin and started howling like a group of wolves. The windows in the cabin, they'd just cover them with a cloth, or paper, or something. In those days the windows didn't have glass and so one of them listened at the window. One of them, he went and scratched at the door...and they kept howling. And scairt the family, And they heard the man say to his wife, "If the Lord spares us til morning, we're leaving." The next day they loaded up and left. This was a sample of...you know. And then there was one man, a German--and this young man in the community was calling on one of his daughters. He started home and the wolves started howling around him and he went back. He wouldn't go on home. The German said to him, he said, "Go on home. That's just that Harness Gang." But the next morning he went out, and he had some hogs there in the pen, and the wolves got in and killed his hogs. He found out that wasn't the Harness Gang, and boy was he angry. He told the young man "You brought those wolves here, got my hogs." And then in the early days, when they first settled here, why, rattle- snakes were so thick, and it was quite a problem. People in, (?) and stalk, and being bit by rattlesnakes. From the Indians they learnedIn the com- and being bit by rattlesnakes. From the Indians they learnedIn the com- munity there was what they called a "snake fern" that grew that they could make a brew of, and also a poultice, and treat snakebites, and it really worked, It was said that how they found out from the Indians thatsome- body managed to get one of the Indian's intoxicated. While he was intoxicated they paid him a little money and found out the secret that way.

JB: You were saying when the first settlers came here, they relied upon herbal doctors?

EB: Herb doctors, Yeah.

JB: That was before any regular physicians came into the area? Did they bring their learning with them? Or did they pick some up here and...

EB: Well, in here, in their day say, they didn't have any doctors in the community, and when they did first show up, why they would have to go off at a distance: what is now LaPorte, or South Bend. And so some people in the community had a knowledge of herbs. They would make medicine out of herbs, and they would go around and treat people that became sick. The wife of Peter Harness, one of the first settlers here, was a Herb doctor. And then one of her descendants, she also practiced (disdainfully) for a while, And then they was a colored family that lived in the community... and the husband, he made herb medicine and went around and treated people. I remember reading a letter from a woman that used to live, when she was a girl, neighbor to this colored family. Every time any of the children would become sick, why the mother would get some of this 'herb medicine' from the colored man. She said my, how we hated to take that medicine. It was so bitter. When an old woman wrote back up here, a letter one time, telling about some things, and she told that story in that letter. Some of the early settlers had faucets they could pull teeth. The first Wiltfong settled in the territory, the Sauktown vicinity, he pulled

teeth for the settlers. And then when Doc Walkenshaw finally established in Stillwell, he pulled teeth also, a long time, along with doctoring people.

JB: Were the herb doctors effective in curing illnesses?

EB: Well I believe they were. I remember the Harness descendants telling about one case a woman had cancer of the breasts. That was after doctors started showing up around LaPorte. Of course the doctors couldn't do anything about it. But an Indian squaw came along. She discovered what the trouble was, She went out into the woods and gathered some stuff, and made a poultice of it, out of it...put it on the cancer. In a few days it took the cancer off. They said the doctor tried to find out what she used, but she wouldn't tell.

JB: Were your descendants among the first in this area?

EB: No, they were about the, what you would call the second generation settlers. They were not the first ones that came here in 1836. They came about four years later, about 1840. That's on my mother's side. Then on my father's side, why that must have been about twenty years later before my grandfather came here.

JB: And his name was...

EB: Bracken.

JB: Where did he come from?

EB: Well he came from Indianapolis up here. When he settled there at Indianapolis it was just a small burg. They had a marshal for the town then, was all; they didn't have any police or anything. It wasn't big enough.

JB: Do you remember any particular stories that he used to tell?

EB: Yes. They had quite a rivalry down there between the republicans and the democrats. And just before election time, they'd put on parades. I forget what they called the parades; but anyway, they'd carry lanterns, of course with kerosene in them. The Democrats they was in a minority. Now that's the young, the young fellows. And they hid in a brick making yard there. They got a supply of bricks, and when the republican parade come along, they started throwing them bricks, and knocking out the lanterns. And of course, the Republican young lads, they charged them and had a real free-for-all fight in that brick yard. One of the Republicans got hit in the back and died as a result of the fight.

And then another time granddad told, him and another boy had heard of a farmer had a watermelon patch up on a side hill. And so, the farmer let it known he was going to shoot anybody he caught in his watermelon patch. So these two boys decided they'd go an get some watermelons. The other young man, he took his gun along, shotgun, an old musket loader you know. They sneaked down in the valley. Of course it was dark and you couldn'tand the farmer he made the mistake of sitting on a stump up on the top of the hill. They could see him. This

other fellow with the gun, he give the farmer a load of shot. He took off for the house, and they had all the watermelons they wanted.

JB: Mill Creek was originally named Fish Lake...is that right?

EB: That was the official name when they platted it. Yes. When they first settled here there was so many skunks in the community that the people in the surrounding territory making fun of the community called it "Skunk's Glory". But finally the people platted in "Fish Lake" after the twin lakes over here called Fish Lake. But in the mean time, north of here, they had surveyed for the railroad to go through. And the Collum brothers, Bill and Wash, they bought a piece of ground and started a small store. And Bill, he put in for a post office. It was right close to where they had a small dam, and what the people call the "Big Creek" here. So, of course, if he started a post office, he had to have a name, and since there wasn't any name for that community he adopted mill for the mill, and creek for the creek that run next to his property. So that post office was called "Mill Creek". Well then when the railroad put through what is now Mill Creek, why, Bill and Wash they bought a piece of ground, and put it off, and put in a big store building. And of course moved the Post office in the building, and that made him a living in Fish Lake. But the post office was already named Mill Creek, so ...then if the people wanted to receive mail they had to use the name Mill Creek for the post office. It then became Mill Creek. And when they first built the railroad, they didn't go any further than Valparaiso, Indiana, on one track. East of here there was a piece of high ground they called "Long Island!" They put in a side track there, but they didn't build up around there, and they started building up around Mill Creek. And so, they abandoned that, then put in one at Mill Creek.

JB: Do you remember any stories about the first settlers that might not have made the history books? The Littles? The McDonalds? The Quinns?

EB: The Quinns were like the Brackens, they weren't the first settlers in here. Some of the old stories have been printed in various publications that was put out early.

JB: What year did Quinn's saloon start in?

EB: Well, Hughie Quinn, he had one of the last saloons. They was some early saloons in here before that...and really the first one was more of a tavern than a real saloon. I've heard them tell in the early days you couldn't sell drinks across the bar. You had to buy a certain amount. I would assume that was what caused the trouble. But anyway they hadthey would bring out workers from-they called them hoboese- from Chicago to work at the Swift and Co. ice plant over here at Fish Lake. One day some of them down and the saloon keeper wouldn't sell them drinks. And so they wrecked the place. Threw the saloon keeper out, and his stove out...and one of them got behind the bar and gave everybody free drinks.

Kankakee Township...is that right?

EB: Yes. They took some townships off the Kankakee; one of them was Pleasant. Lincoln then was a part of Pleasant Township.

JB: Did they split the townships because of the growth in population?

EB: I think it was because local people wanted an identity of their own, more than anything else. And so they would set up their own township and that would give some of the local people a chance to be trustee and other office holders, and run their own community.

JB: What is the Trustee's job?

EB: Well really, originally, when they started the trustee why, he was kind of an overseer. He didn't have the authority he had later on. At one time all your local schools had a school overseer that was responsible for that local school. And then you had a road supervisor that was elected and was in charge of the roads. Even earlier than that they had what they called "fence viewers".

JB: Fence viewers?

EB: Fence viewers.

JB: What was their job?

EB: I don't know. Settle disputes, I would assume. You know, if there was a dispute over lined fences.

JB: What were the post civil war years like in Lincoln Township?

EB: Everything was pretty much living to itself when they first settled here. They would help one another. They weren't too much concerned with the other community down the road. They would go to what's now Michigan City and Gary, somewhere in that territory and secure salt. Then your stagecoaches, of course, brought in supplies. Passenger travel. Things like that.

JB: Was there a train depot in town?

EB: Not at the start--they'd just use a box car on the siding.

JB: Was there a train in town on which the passengers could embark and disembark?

EB: Yes. I don't know if they had passenger service when they first put the train through or not; but anyway, shortly afterwards they did.

JB: Were you saying something about there being a sight of Indian dancing grounds in the township?

EB: Well, it was just south of what they now call Division Road, between Wills and Lincoln Township. It's on a farm, a place now owned by a man named Gaffel.

JB: And they would go there and drink and get drunk, or was it more of a subdued affair?

EB: Well, of course, they didn't have any alcoholic drinks until the white man came...and that changed things when the white man came. They could get a hold of alcoholic drinks. By the time they was through with dancing and celebration, why, they'd be pretty well under the influence of alcoholic drink. They would keep the settlers awake as they would be going home, a yellin and a carryin on. And Newlove Layburn, he lived the first farm south of this dancing ground, and he'd, they would come by right close to his house. He particularly was very much irritated by their carrying on. Newlove Layburn also had a name of being an exceptional ax-handle maker in the community.

JB: He would do that with hand tools?

EB: Yes. Hand tools. He'd use hand tools...shape em out. Same tools they used to build brick buildings.

JB: What sort of game did they hunt along the Kankakee before it was drained?

EB: Well they had a little of everything. They had in the marshes--before the Kankakee was dredged--the largest concentration of prairie chickens in the world.

JB: What is a prairie chicken?

EB: It's related I guess to a partridge and those type birds, except they lived in the marsh. There was a few of em yet out west in the prairies. They like the prairie country. And then of course during the migration periods it was said that the Kankakee valley was the main migration route for water fowl in the, United States ...until the Kankakee was dredged. You see the Kankakee would overflow in the spring and winter. It was said that sometimes in the spring you could put a boat in at Mill Creek and boat clear to South Bend.

JB: Did you mention an earlier water route used?

EB: Yes. They had a portage at what is now at South Bend. The Kankakee River at that time went ...not too far a distance from the St. Joe. It was in the area of what is now a suburb of South Bend. It went within a few miles of it. So it was a short portage for the French to come down the St. Joe and then take the Kankakee on in to Illinois, and hit some rivers there and go in to the Mississippi and on south to their holdings in Louisiana. So that way they made early contact with the Indians in this vicinity.

JB: You said the first English settlers found some cabins decaying on what is now Fish Lake.

EB: Yes. When the....the English of course were the ones who came here of course and settled for farming purposes. And when they came here the McDonalds and the Dudleys and others; they found two deserted cabins, pretty well along in a state of decay. So there must have been some French trappers that built em, and was here long before the settlers for farming purposes came here.

JB: How would you describe the topography of Lincoln Township?

EB: Well it was part high ground and part marsh ground. After the Kankakee was dredged and they made this into farmland, whysome of the farmers if they had a bad year on the high ground they's hit it on the marsh. And if they had an early frost on the marsh then they'd hit it on the high ground. Never had a complete crop failure in the community.

JB: How was your mother descended from the Harness's?

EB: Well, one of the boys was Andrew, through whom my mother descended, and he was my great grandfather on my mother's side.

JB: Were the later Harness's as wild as the earlier ones?

EB: No they, they later became quite workers in the local churches, and they changed their ways somewhat. But they were....the earlier ones were more or less mischievous. The brother to this Andrew I was talking about, through whom I descended ...he had a brother named Peter. And so, as these colored families I was talking about before, one of them lived neighbor to him. So they sent one of the boys down to borrow something one evening from Peter's wife. So the boy he played around there some and he didn't get home until after dark. So Peter thought he'd have some fun with the boy. He hid along the path the boy was taking to go on home...and when the boy come along he growled like a wild animal. But he made a mistake of growling too soon. The boy run back to his place and then he had to walk the boy home. He wouldn't go home alone.