

Side A

Martin: I'd come around here like this and around there, and back there, there was almost about 3 miles around. And they cut a new ditch, right straight through. They'd call this the old bayou. We used to do a lot of fishing here, and so on. Now there's a lot of places like that. There's more of the stuff. That brings back memories to me, which probably wouldn't be much interest to other folks. However, this was from the beginning of time, was nothing but a marsh. There was wild hay, wild ducks, wild geese, snakes, mention it, they were here. Well, the river, like I showed you, it made a complete circle.

Laurie: Where did it make that circle?

Martin: About 3, 4 miles out here. Well, there were different places like that. Well, it slows it down, and that was how it would flood. And anyway, this land company from Illinois, they bought probably a thousand acres of that. And both sides of the river, oh for about 3-4 mile wide, about three miles from here, this was still marsh, and there it got higher ground, and the same way on, then it took on an angle. 8 miles out, it comes on an angle like this, South West. Well then 4 miles South of town here, it crosses the _____. So then, you can see it angles all the way from Northeast to Southwest. Well then by changing, they had the flood____. Well, we moved here in 1904. We got in there Friday evening. My son and I went in the yard, we had that much water. In 38 days before we're sowing again. Nothing but a boat. Well next they were back, wild geese.. Well anyhow, it was impossible to move. There were others that, every spring it would be like that. People would come in, this land company from Illinois, Kodiak Illinois, had formed a company, and they came in and brought the whole town, acres of it.

Laurie: Do you remember when? How old were you when the land company came in?

Martin: I was 17 at that time. But my father and mother and sister, two brothers and myself. They started cutting ditches to the river and bending it, and putting up buildings for farmers, and it looked very promising when there wasn't no water. Well anyway, there we sat. Well, we couldn't move. Water was over knee deep for 38 days, but the Eastern part of the farm that we ere on, there was a ditch run through, and beyond that, there was 130 acres that had been plowed the year before, and that's all that ever had been touched in that 800 acres. there was some timber, 100 acres or so. Well we finally did get that 130 acres in corn, after the water let down. We would have moved if we could. But there was no place to go on, impossible to even think of it. Well, we decided we'll have to stay now, we'll look for something else if we ever get out of here. Well we got a real good crop of corn, even as late as it was. We didn't have all the fertilizer, anything like that at that time, but it was all new land and very rich. It had been like that from the beginning of time, of course. Anyhow we had a real good crop. Well we sat one more year anyhow. Next year we had good crop. the third year we had another flood. It didn't last long, only a couple of weeks that time, but it was deeper water. So anyway, we

stayed there 5 years. When my older brother, this was in 1904, well he and his wife were married just after Christmas in 1907. He rented a farm farther out East and North, and that left father, mother, sister, other brother and myself. Well, in 1908 we had a killing frost. All our corn was lost in that. We lost everybody's. I guess that made two years in succession. One was the first of September and the other was the 2nd that we'd had the killing frost. By then, we're quitting now for sure. Well then, a mile West and a mile North, was higher ground over there, and a smaller farm. Where my brother was he had 320 acres, a half section, too much for one man, and over here there was father, another brother and myself, there wasn't enough for the three of us. So we split up and I went out there, he was about 8 miles out here, so I farmed with him during 1909. Well then, 1910 I ran on to a little blond girl who was born in Salt Lake City. She left there when she was about 6 months old. There's a picture of her up there. Anyway, she come all that distance hunting me. Anyway, she was raised to 3 years old, on some land in Chicago. Then she had friends who came out here to Knox, school mates, and she came out here to visit them, and that's how I happened to find her. But my brother then, where I was living with him, we got along very nicely, but he decided he would hire a man and farm that himself, and, well, to make a long story short, I got 120 acres and a little house, oh about 24 x 24 x 26 or something, a little 8 foot put off for a kitchen, and I'd met this young lady, she'd come out to visit her school mates. I met her, and she and I came to like each other for some reason, so we got married in the spring of 1910. And we had a little house, just fine for 2 people. Well we lived there that year, and then they moved farther out near where my older brother was. We was out there for 3 years. We moved from there to Lake County, in 1914 we moved there, and after a year we moved back to Porter County, and after a year we moved back here and couldn't get away every since then. So those 6 years is all I spent out of this township since 1904. And I was 94 last day of December this last year. Now she passed away, it'll be 9 years 4th of July. Well then, my sister was the oldest of the family, and then my two brothers and myself. Well after wife passed away, my sister had never married, you may have heard of old Dr. Oak, possibly, he practiced here 50 years. My sister was his office girl for 47 of those. Well then, she was living about 3 blocks up here by herself. that left me alone when my wife passed away. My sister was oldest old all of us. I tried to get her to come live with me, well my wife and had both tried to before, Dr. Oak had retired. No, she had her own little home and she stayed there. Anyway, she had got to where she could hardly navigate - she was 6 years older than myself. So, well I lived alone until about a year and a half after my wife passed away. My sister was getting mighty tottery. I said and I you live alone, you're fixed here and everything, I said come live with me, there's plenty of room for two of us. Well she agreed, so she spent four years with me. She passed away at 96. So here I am now by myself again. But it would be interesting if you could come here when there's no snow around, especially, and I could show you around the old river and it would really be interesting. There's some spots around along there that looks very similar to what it used to. There was prairie land which was all farm, and then there was timber all along the river. Well that's about all gone.

Laurie: Did they sell the timber?

Martin: Oh, some of it. They put a saw mill in and put a lot of it building, putting up the new farm building. I don 't know how many thousands of acres they had of this land. It ran from the nearest house here, at 7 miles, even to 16 miles. Now all along the river, way off this way, on both sides was

just a little wild hay. That's all they ever had there, since the beginning of time.

Laurie" Did they harvest the marsh hay?

Martin: Well, it was used for packing hay. Some of it was used to find hay for feed. Now, there was a bunch of German people here who had migrated from Germany, and they had several , up North, owned the higher ground, oh, for about several miles, and they would raise __ cattle. They'd go out there is this marsh, and grab a piece of hay, and that was there, that's all it cost them. Well they'd haul that home and they'd sack it for winter feed for those cattle. This man opened the gate and off he goes, 'cause they'd done that for years. Well anyway, there was a ot of this hay they called packing hay. And it was shipped, oh, far and wide, I don't know where all. It was bagged and shipped to , oh, the South end of Chicago. they'd use it in there for bedding in the stock pens, and I don't know what they did do with all of it. About every 3 miles along the railroad they made siding. they set cars in there to load this hay in. Now you see there was 5 railroad here at that time.

Laurie: The early 1900's, you mean?

Well, now you cross one, out here __ town, that was new one at that time, that was the Chesapeake and Ohio. This was right here, run from here to New Buffalo and up into Michigan, and away off South West, you run straight here about a 1/4 mile, that's the Pennsylvania. About 3 miles South is the Erie. We could here a train whistle every 15 minutes every day or night. Now they closed the Erie completely, it was a wonderful railroad, and more of a business. Well, they all were, but there' just hardly any railroad business anywhere. the Pennsylvania still runs. And the __, they go from Michigan to somewhere down in Kentucky, I don't know where. They used to run a passenger South in the morning and come back in the evening every day, and all those passenger trains, everything you could think of, every few minutes. Now this has all been reclaimed and has proved to be some of the most valuable farming land in Indiana. It is, I think, some of the top ranking farm land in the state of Indiana.

Laurie: When the Illinois land company came in and bought all that land, how did the people of the town think about that? What did they-

Martin: This town, there was either, I believe, ten or twelve houses in this town.

Laurie: Was the main street out where 421 is now?

Martin: Well, there was no streets. It was, well right where that plow sits, and all the rest of them. It was all plowed up, you know no houses. the next street over, there was 3 or 4 houses on that street, that run North and South, and just a little farther West there was a North and South street, there was 5 houses on that. When we came there was one house, you can see that right from the window here, if you can step over here. You see there's the chimney there. that was one home, and there was three right along that street.

Laurie: Those are along the railroad.

Martin: Well, the Pennsylvania is another 2 blocks over from here. There was 4 homes on that street. And there was 2 grocery stores, and then we had the Post office. Now that was the size of town. When they got to farming it, they built an elevator, I guess that burned down, 2 or 3 different ones, but people would move in, a good may different ones, they'd be farming right close to us, from Ohio, from Illinois. Well they were like we were. They moved in , there was flooding, and next year we were ready to move. We wouldn' t then. And in and out of those people. were buildings, farms, and nothing less than 320 acres in any farm and some were a full section. Well, that sounded good and they shipped their horses and their cattle and their tools an their household goods.. Always get the flood round here in the spring, and so the next year, another would be shipping in, these would be shipping out. There was two families that came here from somewhere in Ohio and thy never did go back. There were two from Illinois and ourselves. that's the only 5 families that came here and stayed. Well, they all stayed two long, There ain't none left but myself, from my family. There was a family by the name of Younggreen. They were Swedish people, I believe. They cam in 1902. There was 2 sisters and 5 boys, and they were folks, well they stayed. Well the youngest of the boys still lives at, well, my __ isn't too good, well he's the only one left anyhow, and the younger sister, she never married, but she died here about 6 months ago. Now she had lived right in this town, not on a farm of course, but from 1902 until 6 months ago. And the other, he used to, over them years, he worked for Kazanki brothers at the funeral home over here. I can't think, yeah, he's still alive, but he was younger than her. But he had lived in this vicinity for 40 years I guess. He worked with Kazankis and they had a big place there too, Union Mills, what I'm trying to say. He still lives there, but he's retired. He's the last one of that family. __There is another family that isn't anywhere near what was here years ago. They're all younger people. There are a few that's here that's oh, 70, 75 years old, a few, but I am the only one in this whole township that has been there all these years.

Laurie: When they were draining the ditches, did they hire local people, I mean draining the marshes, did they hire local people?

Martin: Oh, yes. Well it took a lot of people to cut this hay, then they had to bail it, load it in the cars, and ship it, and of course, these German people, oh they're all still some of them living out North and East, but the older ones, they're all gone, of course, but I don't suppose they were really supposed to cut the hay off of that. It was really government land, a lot of it was.

Laurie: When the land company came in, they bought the land from individuals who owned the farms?

Martin : I don't hear too good.

Laurie: When the land company came in, did they buy the land from individuals who had farms?

Martin: Oh yes, well there was about 2 or 3 families that owned the whole works at that time. And the older people were all gone, there were two brothers and two sisters that still lived there. They owned as far as they

could see. They'd bought the land from the government at a dollar an acre. And heaven knows how many thousand acres they owned. The bulk of it, most of this land, they owned at that time. Now the story was, I never knew, I have saw the two sisters. They were real old ladies. The two brothers I never saw. the story was, that they both had their eye on the same girl. And they were puttin' up quite a battle about it. Finally they agreed she wouldn't have neither one of them then. They agreed to never speak to each other again. Well, one of them took this and the other one that. He'd tell them " Now you tell him" and then the other one " Now you tell him that." That's the way they held a conversation. The story was that they never spoke to one another again. Each come to tell the sister, "well you tell him so and so," but he wouldn't tell him himself. Then the other one wouldn't answer, and he'd tell the other girl to tell him, well it was kind of comical.

(SIDE B)

I know they bought, well now 8 miles out here, before the river crosses Highway 8, which is just a block over here. now they had a son build on that. And all of it from there on down about 7 miles, they had everything on both side of that.

Laurie: The land company:

Martin: They did. Oh, they had thousands of acres, no question about it. Along the river they lost the timber, that's all gone, practically so. And then of course the river was so winding, that's what held the water back in the spring. Well then they cut those circles off, the one place they call the bayou now, but it is the old channel.

Laurie: When they cut those circles out, how did they do that?

Martin: With a dredge boat. Oh all the ditches, they ditched the whole country here. And a dredge boat, they had a dipper that anchors here and then they could dig out in front. Oh it had a great long crane on it, I suppose 40 feet long and the dropped that in and dug it both ways clear across, it had mounds of dirt. they cut, oh I suppose anywhere from 30-50 foot wide and deep. So I'm so sorry that you couldn't have come,

Laurie: well we can come back when the weather's nice.

Martin: If you could come back a couple of months from now. I would say, oh, about the last of June, you'll see this whole country in a crop. They raise corn. We use to raise corn, wheat and oats. Well now it's just corn, wheat and soybeans. they're all big farmers. Now we had four horses on what they called. a __, we followed behind that like this, walked behind. It took four horses to plow that and turn that over. Now they go out with a tractor with 8 or 10 plows behind big as that and they plow more once across the field than we could in a whole day. But, they're all big farmers. Now they can't afford 160 acres, it was a big farm for one man at that time, so that would be enough to __ on now, with the machinery they use. A doctor here, he bought a farm West of town, very close to 300 acres. Now he practices medicine an he farms here himself. He has a tractor and 8__ plow. Well he's plowed about a foot an a half, well that'd be about 20 feet wide, and he farms this himself in the afternoon. Well he's here in the morning. He goes to Michigan City. He's in __ Hospital. He's there to see patients in the morning from 9-12. In

the afternoon he's out on his farm. Sometimes, the harvest, he usually doesn't plant anything but corn. He'll run his corn picker, they plant four rows at a time, nowadays whereas two used to be a big job. The planters are wide, they plant four rows at a time. The picker does the same, he drives through there and it picks this up and runs it through the shower, it comes out into the truck, his wife brings it to the elevator right from the field.

Laurie: How'd you used to do it?

Martin: We don it this way:

Laurie: Oh you hand shelled it? Did you have to hand pick it, too?

Martin: Oh, one man, if you had a hundred bushels, we just through the ears in a corn crib and let it dry out and then had a sheller to come there. They shell the same way with their small grain, they drive through and we'd go through with a binder, 8 foot wide. that would take it out in bundles and tie it, then we shucked it. Left it sure out good, then come out with wagons and put it on there and haul it to the separator. But now they pick it, run it right into the wagon and from there to the elevator.

Laurie: What did you do with your corn before an elevator was built?

Martin: We would shuck it and they had cribs built for it. So it would lay, there were cracks a little bit to let circulation through.

Laurie: what I meant was did you use the corn for your own purposes, you didn't sell it or anything?

Martin: Oh yes, oh yes, Oh no - we had to husk it by hand. And a right good husker, he could get 100 bushel a day. I could get 75 or 80, many a day that was my limit. But you

husked two rows, walking between them, having your team and wagon along here. See here was a row and here was one. There was a hill and you'd go in between, and that the was the way I could handle it. You'd get a wagon load and scoop it into the crib and let it sit there so the moisture would dry out there, and then like the old trash machine only a corn sheller, they would shell it and haul all that to the elevator in town and from there it gets loaded onto the freight cars. Oh boy, I don' t know how people - well we didn't know any better. We'd have been just as happy if we'd had the right mind, I guess. Yes, it was a difference. Every spring, till they come last year and was loading up and leaving, and none of them come again.

Laurie: When you were flooded in your house, you said for 38 days, did you get out at all or were you actually stuck in your house?

Martin: Well with water around it, we had boats and hip boots, and we had to take out horses and cattle where there was higher ground someplace, where they was pasture we could turn them loose. Oh, we'd have the three of us brothers, we had about 23 head of horses. Each fella had to have at least 4 horses to make a team. And father, he helped out now and then. He does the chores. We'd have a hired man besides us three. But about 3 acres a day was a big day plowing for one man, but now they can farm more than that first time

across the field. And any of these farmers today, there's none of them that attempts to farm less than 600-700 acres, 1000 acres.

Jerrold: How many hours would you be working in a day when you'd do that?

Martin: Oh we got up about 6-7 in the morning. We come in at noon. We take a two hour noon, feed our horses and eat out dinner. We aimed for 9-10 hours in the field. Do a couple of hours in the morning and again in the evening. Well we didn't know any better. I think the people were happier those days. Of course, year after year they kept putting up more and more improvements. Always come to town in the evening. Finally they had seven grocery stores here where there was only two when we first came. And they had __, I can remember his horse and buggy. Stores stayed open. They had 3 saloons. Stores stayed open, oh, until 11-12:00 every night. the saloons never closed. There's a picture of the first church that was ever built here, that was '97. You two step right over there and take a look at it if you want to .

Laurie: Where was this?

Martin: This was your school house, right here. It was just behind the school house that was built in 1907 the only church in the town. They'd go to eighth grade and then have 3 years of high school, and then they'd go to Wanatah for the 4th year, and then they tore that town and built this school house here. They didn't tear it down, they moved it.

Laurie: Moved it from where?

Martin: Just about over a block .Old Mr. Charles-- , he was president of __. Well he bought that school house. They was going to tear it down, so he bought it and moved it over a block, gave it to the town, for everybody. Well, that stood there for many years. But then about 20 years ago they tore the church down, and built a new one. Then they tore than building down and put the new church where that building was. That was a meeting house for many years.

Laurie: What kind of meetings would you have there?

Martin: They had, when they first started, that was the only church here. We had Lutherans and we had Catholics and Dutch and everything.

Laurie: And they all used the Methodist Church?

Martin: This was Lutheran.

Laurie: Oh.

Martin: Now this was built about 5 years after they - the first one, everybody come to the old school house first, they was Lutheran and they was Catholic and they was Irish and they was Dutch, anything you could think of, everybody went there to church. They, well, that was used as a church and school both, a community house. Well then after they didn't use it as a school and they moved it they still used it as a community house, and now the

church you passed here, that's St. John's Lutheran, I think that was built 3 years later in 1909 or 10 is was built. Then they built a Catholic church over there. Just the other side of town now the Lutherans got in a little battle here and they split up, part of them and don't trust them and built one on the other side. Then we have these Christian Apostolic. They migrated here during the First World War from Illinois. They had built a church, and then they built a new one, on they've got a beauty over there on the South side, and a bunch of Baptists from somewhere, they bought the old one. And when these people split up, part of them went on the other side of the river, they're Lutheran too but they battle amongst themselves, you've got the Baptists and the old Christian Apostolic, oh they have a beautiful church. And right over here was the Catholic, that burned down at one time and they built a new one. but this sitting down here , in 1909 I think it was built, I know if was 3 or 4 years after this one. The picture in back of myself, that was our wedding picture. Her father was a coppersmith. He built the frame for that. Here's another piece of his work right there.

Laurie: It's beautiful.

Martin: Yeah - the part with the legs on it is separate from the others. He could build anything. He was a Dane. So was his daughter.

Jerrold: What year were you married?

Martin: Me? 1910. My wife passed away the 4th of July, it'll be 9 years this 4th of July. We last made it til March, 60 years together. I can't think of any day that I would change. The last year she was alive, about 8 months, she came down with cancer, but...

Laurie: You said she was a Dane - Irish and German, and did all these groups get along together?

Martin: I'm 99 .9 Irish.

Laurie: Oh, you are? What's the other 10th?

Martin: My mother's father was born in Ireland. At-- they boarded ship for America. It took 3 months to cross at that time on these old sail ships. But he was 6 weeks old when they left there and he was 97 when he died. But my father's, his ancestors were Irish an Scottish, but the Irish predominated and the few Scots got to marry Irish girls, so they nearly got all the Scots out of them, so I tell that I'm 99.9 Irish.

Laurie: Was there ever any trouble in town between the different groups, the Irish and. -

Martin: No, none. There used to be of course, in years gone by. They got into a few fights that weren't no fun.

Laurie: Were there a lot of fights in town:

Martin: No, hardly ever here. That was way, way back there in my grandfather's day.

Laurie: You said the saloons were closed, thy were demonstrated against?

Martin: Oh yeah. No they remonstrated them out in this township. Then they got 'em out. The town was all dry. They could go into Michigan or into Illinois or Kentucky or Ohio, but Indiana was dry until President Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, see we had a president before Roosevelt, when Franklin was elected, some way they found to let liquor into Indiana, and it spread all over the whole state since then. there was many years, if someone wanted whiskey they'd have to go across the state line to get it.

Jerrold: Did you ever go to any of the early saloons?

Martin: Well they were at the end of bootlegging then.

Laurie: Were there bootleggers around here?

Martin: There was, plenty of them.

Laurie: Any still?

Martin: No, no. No market for that. Well right here on the corner, now he has packaged, doesn't handle liquor at all, just beer and wine. There's only way it's handled now, according to population in the town. there must be at least 1000 to have one saloon, oh that isn't a salon any more, it's a tavern. .The other guy is here now. The two of them, one can handle beer and wine and the other can handle beer wine, liquor and all the rest. Now in those days, I was no better than anybody else, but I never did. I still could drink the whiskey when I was 17, and I can still taste it. I drank a glass of beer when I was about 12. My father liked beer and of course the saloons in those days, you never saw a woman in a saloon, never, no ma'am. Well I went to some with him and he ordered a glass of beer for a nickel, and he told the bartender to give me a bottle of pop. Well he said "I haven't got a soft drink in the house". Then Dad said, well get him a short beer. You get a long glass like that, about half as big as he had. Well I can still taste that, Ooh, did that taste bitter. Well Dad had paid for it, cost him a nickel, and I thought I'll have to drink it. We were mighty poor people. Everybody was in those days. We lived on a little old 80 acre farm with my grandfather. There was 12 acres in timber, that much in sand. We could make a living on it, but they never had any grain to sell. They'd keep a few cows and mother would make butter and kept some chickens, raised turkeys. She could sell eggs and sell butter and turkeys at holiday time. She had about 100, she got 14 cents a pound, the most we ever got for live weight for a turkey. She made our own clothes, never heard of going to a store and buy a pair of overalls or shirts or anything for a man. Underwear and everything. She had a sewing machine, the only one in the country. She made dresses for the neighbors. We could raise practically everything we ate. We had quite a few fruit trees. Of course if we had to go to town, we what they call a wagon, you've seen plenty of wagons, no doubt, about 15 horses to that and you'd walk to town. Rensalaer was the county seat. I can't remember living there. I was three years old when me moved to this little farm. I have this little picture, I'd like to show it to you. I was three years old, I don't remember going there. I think I've got just that picture with my whole family on it. This is my father, you see he had a pair of horses here. ___ This is myself. This is one of my brothers. This one and this one are neighbors, and this was my oldest brother who died when he was about 22. My sister, my mother, younger brother.

Laurie: That's a very nice picture.

Martin: I was about 7 years old when this picture was taken. But we raised all kinds of vegetables and fruit, we had lots of fruit there, and we lived there 16 years in that old log house.. First place I ever lived that I can remember. I was 3 years old when we left. I don't remember how we got there.

(Side B of tape ends)

Sue Rosselli

6/12/03