

HAROLD WELKIE b. May 7, 1914 T-3-70

Interviewed by Laurie Ann Radke

January 17, 1978

Harold: Miss Radke had asked me to relate some of the incidences on the farm, and this particular one would be butchering on the farm, or the slaughtering of hogs in the fall of the year after the rest of the harvest was done such as husking corn, etc. Each family would butcher anywhere from 5 to 10 hogs, and the number was usually determined by the number in the family, plus one. Why plus one? Well, we usually gave some to Grandma or Grandpa, or an aunt or an uncle or a neighbor that would help. Some sausage or something like this, some head cheese, or something in just saying "thank you," or some liver or something like that. Our family, there was 5 of us, so we usually butchered 6 hogs each fall of the year. On butchering day we'd at least ask one or two of the neighbors to come in an help slaughter. And of course, in preparation for this, they, well, we had to heat our own water which we had in a big, black kettle. Maybe I should go back just a little bit further. What did we heat it with? Well, during the summer we'd have to fix all our fences where we kept the livestock in, and when a fence post would be broke off, we would take this and lay this behind what we called the tool shed and make a neat pile, and then in the fall of the year when we got ready to do something like this, well we had these old posts, and this is where we'd heat our water. Now the water was kept in a big, black kettle. This was brought to a boil or a little better. Then we'd take it over into a, well we always said the driveway, in the crib or greenery, and this was a place where we'd fixed us a bench, like with saw horses. Then we had a barrel where we'd put the water in, and this is where we'd scald the hogs. Now, we would go through this process, like pick one hog and go all the way. Anyway, we'd go out to the hog pen. Naturally we always picked out a nice looking hog, and of course we would shoot this hog, and then we'd stock it and bleed it good, haul it over, drag it over or haul it in a wheel barrow to the driveway, lay it on this platform, get this hot water and put it in the barrel, and then we had a regular stick that we put between the legs, and this was for the rest to hold on so we could dip this hog down in the barrel in the water to scald. And also as we would do this, we would turn the hog, so no part of the particular body would get scalded. Then we would take a knife and just always keep sampling to see if it was ready to be, what we would say, just like ready to be shaved or cleaned off.. We took this knife and just go along like that, and when it was ready, of course, we'd take the head in and do the vice versa or, whichever way we took first. Then, when we got it completely scalded we took it out to this platform, and each family usually had a real sharp and a very good metal butcher knife, and you'd just take this with both hands, and pull over it and scrape the hair completely off. And when you got through, this hog was just as white and pure and clean as anything you'd ever seen.

Laurie: What does it smell like when you're scalding its hair?

Harold: Well, actually nothing really to it, you never thought anything about this. Of course, when we'd get this hog scalded, then we'd take and use a block and tackle and hang it up in the driveway. This was like in between two corn cribs. We'd raise the hog

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up there and then usually the first thing was to cut it down the center and take the intestines out, and the liver and the heart. Well the liver and the heart you usually kept and separated because this was good eating. The intestines you usually pitched out to the back and the birds and the dogs and everything else ate them. Then you would do this continuously with each hog until you got your number butchered. Well this was really the first day's work. Then you would take, and put it in this, we called it in the driveway, in the grainery, and we'd close the doors, and make it tight so no animals or anything would get in there at night, and leave it cool over night. And this was usually in the fall of the year and it was freezing all the time, so by morning this was always good and firm so it could be easily cut. Well, then the next day is when we'd usually, like my aunts would come over, or some of the neighbors again, and we would start cutting these hogs in 2 and a half, and turning them in the house. Well the first thing you did then was trim the fat and cut you out a nice shoulder and get the lean off and you lay this to the side. You did the same thing with the ham, you'd have the shoulder, and you'd take the bacon.

Laurie: When you say the bacon, what do you mean?

Harold: That's the side of the hog. And of course, about the time that you completed one hog, you'd have somebody there that was, well out and ready to bring in the second hog, but then you would cut some of these pieces into small pieces, so you put 'em in a - well, it was just a regular food grinder. And this was always a big, big job. First you would separate some that had the lean and the fat, and some that was all fat. Then the lean that- well let's take the fat first. You'd run this through the grinder and you stood there and ground by hand. Then what would you do with this? We;; after you got the food ground then you'd take the kettle on the stove and cook it down, and this is where you made your lard. And then you would squeeze the cracklings out. You'd put the cracklings-

Laurie: What's cracklings?

Harold: This would be, the, after the grinding of the fat meat, after it was boiled. Then you would cook this down again so you would get all the grease out of it. And then this you would put usually into a crock, and you'd start storing it away. And this lard was just as pure a lard, and as white as you could possibly buy. Sometimes when we had a lot of lard, we used to sell a little bit of it. But usually we kept it for the whole next year's shortenings. Now the other part of it was the part that we mixed the fat and the lean, and this was what we called sausage. Well this again we would grind, and we did this by hand and we'd set there and grind and grind and grind. I know that after school, there were three of us boys, we all had a certain job to do, and we had to do this. And of course, even with the neighbors or our relations there to help, we still did it. And then you would take the sausage and you would put it in a great pain, maybe a tub, maybe even a wash tub, and you would start mixing this up, and then you would put spices - pepper, salt and cloves, sage, and mix this all up, get in it with your hands and mix it all up.

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Laurie: How much do you think you had in poundage?

Harold: Oh, I suppose that out of 6 hogs our usual butchering would be, well, 20 pounds at least for a hog, say 120 pounds of sausage. So what would we do with the sausage? Well, we'd put some of this in casings. Now people don't understand what casings are today, because they don't even see them. When we were really poor, why we made our own casings. And this come from the intestines of the hogs. And these were really small. And you would take these and you would clean them, from the intestines of the hogs, and then you would put 'em in salt water to purify them. And they would have to be in salt water so long and then you would clean them and then they was just as clean as they could be, and it was just like they were sterile. After we got a little, I guess you'd say a little more ritzy, we went to the store and bought beef intestines, or casings as we called them, and this is what we stuffed out sausage in.

Laurie: Did you eat these casings?

Harold: Oh yes.

Laurie: What did you make, was it like a hot dog or like -

Harold: Like a Polish sausage, or anything.

Laurie: You know those little sausage links in the store what's that put in, for manufacturing..

Harold: So this we'd put in the sausage stuffer. Well this usually held, I would say a couple of gallons of sausage. We had a spout on the outside. Someone would put the casing in there and someone would turn the handle, and of course, this would fill the casing. And usually you left the little end on the start and the end of the casing and then when you'd get 'em full, why you'd tie 'em together. Then you'd lay them out and you'd keep this up until you had your whole process done. Then what would we do with this sausage? Well there was other ways we did with sausage too. Some of it we'd fry down. By this I mean we'd put it in the skillet and fry it, not complete, just fry it to a certain degree. And then we'd put this in a crock jar again and put lard over it. And then it would stay that same way for 5-6 months. Why when you wanted to get it, you'd just dig it out and put it in a skillet, and you'd have sausage. Just like you go and buy out of a store. Then these casings, when we stuffed these casings, now this is the smoked sausage part of it, we would take and take this out to the smoke house and hang it up. And in there we usually had a saw dust and bark smoke. It was nice if you could get some hickory, but usually we used oak. We would start like a little fire in the middle of this, and you'd keep feeding that fire and you'd put the bark and the saw dust on it and it would do nothing but smoke. You leave it hand in there for a week to 9 days, and you'd go out there and check on it and sample it. About then it was done. You'd bring it in the house. You'd take it up

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in the attic, you'd put it on a pole like this and there is hung. Whenever you wanted a hunk of sausage, you'd go up in the attic and bring you out a hunk of sausage, and there you had smoked sausage. Now we did the same thing with, we called it liver sausage, the same thing you buy in the store today, only this was made a little differently, usually we used some of the liver, some of the heart, and the part of the head of the hog, and then we'd grind this up and that would be more

like a white meat, white sausage, and the smoked sausage would be more of a red sausage. But we would do this similar but we never smoked it. It was always kept as fresh sausage. Now when we completed the sausage thing, then we went to work. We took the hams, the shoulders, and the bacon. We'd take and put them in a barrel again and in this barrel we fixed us up a brine of salt. And this brine had to carry an egg, that was the weight of it - that's how you det. But we would do this similar but we never smoked it. It was always kept as fresh sausage. Now when we completed the sausage thing, then we went to work. We took the hams, the shoulders, and the bacon. We'd take and put them in a barrel again and in this barrel we fixed us up a brine of salt. And this brine had to carry an egg, that was the weight of it - that's how you determined it. And then you'd go and leave it in this brine for a week to ten days, something like that, it seemed like til this brine got all of the salt and got all the way through that. Then you'd take it out to the smokehouse and smoke it for two weeks to 30 days, whatever it would take, til it would - well, everybody had a sense of when it was done. You had to be around it in order to know when this was done. Now this we did with all of those hogs. Then what would we do with that? When we get done smoking again, at that time we used to buy some large paper sacks. We would put a ham in a sack, or a shoulder, or a piece of bacon, tie this shut, and again take it up in the attic where it would never get dry, never freeze or anything, hang it up. The next summer or after that when you'd want a smoked ham, bacon, shoulder, whatever, you'd go up in the attic and you'd have your meat.

Laurie: Some people had smoke houses and they hang it in there too..

Harold: And this is the way we usually did our sausage and butchering day on the farm. I shouldn't say a day, it would be a week. Because from the time we got started butchering until we got all hogs cleaned up, all the lard cleaned up and all the sausage made, it was usually a week's work. Now this was just a typical butchering week on the farm. And I experienced this may times, as a small child.

Laurie: So this puts in the 30's, 20's and 30's?

Harold: The late 20's and early 30's.

Mrs. Welkie: So up until, well most of them, until after the war, did all their own. We did all our own until 1945 and came home and that fall, up until about 1948 we would go and buy a hog and have it butchered and have it smoked, and we'd make our own sausage. The definition of what he did on the farm is similar to what we did. I was

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raised in Kentucky, and my grandparents, I was going with them after school, at the time we lived in town because my mother taught school, but my grandparents would butcher hogs the same way and they would do like he did, only they would do it on a bigger scale because my grandfather felt that he should do for his children, and there were four to five boys and then he's have tenants. So they came for three weeks doing all this. But we made sausage and we made cheese and we cured it and we used the same process they did.

Harold: Yeah. Liver and heart may times you ate it by yourself and this is very good fresh- fresh liver. Many times when people came and helped us we'd give them half a fresh liver, and it was just a neighborly thing you always did. We'd help the neighbors and they helped us back.

Laurie: I have a couple of questions. How big, how do you know how to value what you butchered?

Harold: Well, this would be over 200 pounds.

Laurie: How long did you keep them before you butchered them?

Harold: About 6 months. 5 1/2 to 6 months.

Laurie: You never butchered then new?

Harold: No.

Laurie: Is there a difference in taste between a mature hog and a very old hog?

Harold: Oh yes, well they would just be a lot tougher. Those are the ones we sold (laughs).

Laurie: Those are the ones you sold!

Mrs. Welkie: Then we used to- my grandparents, and my dad and mother, they lived on the farm with my grandparents, and they would butcher a cow, you know, beef, I can remember when I was a little kid, we had, we called it a smoke house. But actually it was a room bigger than this, and one end of it like this back here is where they would butcher, and they would hang all their meat in there in the winter time. And they would butcher this cow or calf whatever it was, and they'd hang it there. Well I was scared to death of that when I was a little kid. We'll I would go in there and my uncle would tell me if I wasn't good they'd put me in the smoke house! We'll I'd be just so scared because I could look in there and see the beef hanging there and I can still see it today. They'd cut the beef and then they'd divide it with their brothers and sisters. At that time the children

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lived at home. It wasn't nothing that the son would get married and he'd take his bride home or she'd take him to her home, and they'd live together, you know.

Laurie: Mm hm.

Mrs. Welkie: Whereas today they don't do that, or very seldom they do.

Harold: Another interesting thing might the apple butter - making the apple butter.

Laurie: Now for head cheese - I've had head cheese and I don't know if I want to ask what it's actually made of or not. Is it - how long does it take to process head cheese?

Harold: Well, you make it in just a matter of hours?

Laurie: Really?

Harold: Yeah. You cook certain parts of the hog together and grind it up.

Laurie : They usually cook it and grind it up and fix it. And they' use liquid to gel it, you know.

Laurie: Where'd you get it from?

Harold: The jaws. Well it mostly come from , let's say, the head, of the hog, the animal

Mrs. Welkie: His mother made the best head cheese.

Harold: Nothing went to waste- nothing. The head, the tongue, the jaws.

Mrs. Welkie: And then they'd take the feet and clean then up and they'd pickle the feet.

Mrs. Welkie: Oh, I'd just love it!. Once in a while I get hungry for it and I just go buy it. There's very few people around here today that do that. Although you find some of the foreign extracted people, Polish people -

Harold: We got some people around here do it yet --

Mrs. Welkie: And the Hungarian people. they still lean toward butchering their own meat, you know. And they' ll come out here and but the hogs. slaughter it out here. We have friends from Chicago and they used to raise hogs, and they butcher in the summer time right out here and they have fresh meat. Do you have any questions about that?

Laurie: No, you were going to talk about apple butter making -

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Harold: Apple butter - well, I have to tell you this - w have the original, my wife and I have the original apple butte kettle that we had to make apple butter. We have been offered \$350 for this kettle. It's strictly cooper. There was two things that went with an apple butter kettle and that was the stirrers. Now this is a unique thing, but this is really the truth. The stirrers were made with a long handle, and then on the end of the handle had like a one by four, it was down like this, and there was holes drilled in one part of it, and on this we would tie corn husks. Remember that. Why corn husks? Because as we would stir this apple butter. These corn husks would never scratch the bottom of your copper kettle.

Laurie: Oh.

Harold: We've got the large stirrer and the small stirrer. I hope that someday, well it takes quite a bit to do this, it takes quite a little cider and apples and so forth. But anyway, this used to be at least a two day job on the farm, and when we started we'd usually start in an afternoon when we'd get home from school.

Laurie: It was in the fall?

Harold: In the fall of the year. And this was when the apples were ripening on the trees. And of course we had probably at least two dozen apple trees on the farm, and certain trees we had were juicy for cider and others were cooking apples. Well, the older ones would usually go up and shake the apples off the tree and then you'd go over there and separate these likewise. And so you separated what we called the cider apples from the cooking apples. Well, the cider apples just went into a sack. And then we took these, well at that time we took 'em over to what we called a cider mill and they'd pour the apples in there and the cider would come out. Well, the Pinkton's over there, friends of ours, had the cider mill, so that's where we went with it. And now the cooking apples, of course, we'd probably start peeling the night before so we'd have enough apples to cook. The way we would do this, our kettle was 100 gallon. So we would get approximately 90 gallon of fresh cider. We would cook this down one half to 45 gallon. Then is when we started adding our apples. Now how many apples would we need for 45 gallon of cider? Cooked down, we needed 45 gallons of apples - peeled applies, sliced and quartered. So after this cider was boiled down we started adding apples. And then when you started adding apples, you stirred continuously. Somebody was always there. At home usually my aunts were there, I had two aunts living close and they would be helping us to peel the apples and cook the cider down and stir the cider. Now, as we went along naturally you'd start, oh, let's say 9:00 in the morning to start boiling this cider down from 90 gallon to 45 gallon. And this usually took, well 3 to 4 hours, jut to boil it down so you'd get all the water and impurities out of it so it'd be just perfect. And then, of course you'd start adding the apples and as you added the apples you'd keep stirring. And when this 45 gallon apples were all in there you just stirred and stirred and stirred and stirred, and you'd think, for gosh sakes, are you ever going to stop stirring, but you didn't dare to, because otherwise it would stick on the bottom of you r cooper kettle. You didn't ever want that to

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happen. That's why you had these corn husks tied on the bottom of these things, and then they were just like silk running back and forth on that cooper kettle. And then again we'd boil this time to about just 45 gallon. When it gone to about what we figured 45 gallon, then we'd start adding out spices to make the right flavor in the apple butter.

Laurie: What spices did you use?

Harold: Well, it was cinnamon, nutmeg, isn't that odd, I really can't tell you what all the spices were anymore. My mother is still living, she'd know just like this. At any rate, we'd end up with, by the time we got done, 45 gallon of apple butter. And then we would go to work again an put this in fruit jars. Half gallon fruit jars or gallon jars, and crocks and cover it up, take it to house, and that's where it would stay til we'd want it, take it down to the basement. And I mean it was

just as good an apple butter, and I still love apple butter, that you'd buy out of the store. But it really has a wonderful taste, and it was just an enjoyment for me, really to work with this type of a thing. I loved it - I don't know why, but that was a typical apple butter day, and like I say, it took at least two day's work there.

Laurie: Cooper kettles worked the best?

Harold: Oh, it was the only thing you could use - the only thing. The only thing.

Laurie: Iron kettles wouldn't work?

Harold: No, no, no.

Laurie: Oh....

Harold: There was something about it that it had to be the copper kettle.

Laurie: Then would you use the cooper kettle for anything else?

Harold: Nothing. When we got it cleaned up, we got through with it, we completely cleaned it up, take it up, store it in the attic til next year. That was an annual affair. Yep. And it's always been fond memories of this type of a thing. Another thing which you probably never heard of is sorghum making. We did that too.

Laurie: Oh, no, I've heard of it. I don't know how you do it, I just heard it.

Harold: Well we used to raise our own sorghum, just like you see sorghum out in the field today. I just don't remember what stage it got to, and then we kids used to have to go out and strip all the leaves off. Just nothing stood there but the sorghum stalk like that.

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Laurie: Was this in the fall too?

Harold: In the fall of the year too. And when the time would get ready you'd go out there and cut the sorghum down. Cut the top off, and you'd have, oh, maybe a hay rack load, laying on the hay rack that way - And so we had a sorghum press and a boiler not too far from the house. This was owned by the Reinkes again. And you took your turn at the sorghum mill.

Laurie: What was a press like?

Harold: A press was about this big around, and it had notches in it, and you'd just take and push your stocks through that, and of course to make this tune, we usually have the old horse hooked

on the pole and the old pole would go around like this, and you'd stuff the sorghum in it and the juice came out.

Laurie: So then it wasn't very big if you just -

Harold, Well, yeah, but then you'd drop this down into this juice. then when you'd get this juice made, then we had what we called the boiler, the sorghum, where you took the stuff over, and then you, well this a little bit more sophisticated outfit, because you had, at that time we built up brick walls where you'd put this thing to boil the sorghum down on and we even had this on like rollers, so you could keep it on the fire and keep it so hot or move it off a little bit, and this again you, when you would put the sorghum in there, it was an all day job, naturally, and when you would get the juice, then you'd put it into this, well we called it like a big vat, like. It was probably, I would say, about 10 feet long and at least 3 feet wide, and it just boiled. You'd get some kind of a scum come out of this and you kept dipping the scum off all day long - stir it and dip the scum off. And of course, I would say this would take you from morning til late at night. There was no way that anything that was added to it, it just boiled itself down to a particular juice, like, syrup is what you'd call it. It was sorghum syrup or similar. An of course, as you would watch this and not burn it or scald is again, you'd keep moving it back and forth, and keep stirring, skimming, I don't know, like a foam off the top and you throw that away, and by the time you'd get through you'd usually put it in a big glass jug or jugs, I should say.

Mrs. Welkie: In a half a gallon tin pail.

Harold: Well, we had bigger things than that, because it was , we would come up with probably at the end, 25, 30 gallons of sorghum. And this was mainly for ourselves, and then we'd maybe sell some or give some away. At that time money didn't mean too much, and if you gave a half a gallon of sorghum away, it was just a thank you to a neighbor that helped or something like that and went on. And that was a sorghum making day.

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Laurie: What do you use sorghum for?

Mrs. Welkie: Oh, it makes delicious cookies...

Harold: Syrup for pancakes and baking, and oh --

Mrs. Welkie: We were down in Kentucky just last New Year's weekend, and there was a place there and almost bought some sorghum, but didn't want to worry with it. you can buy it on the market, but it's a commercial type.

Harold: Similar to what we had done.

Mrs. Welkie: It's just more sophisticated in the way they're made, but you go down to Southern Indiana, there's lots of places that make it, Rockville, Nashville, Washington Indiana. In Southern Indiana there's lots of sorghum ready to be made down there. .

Laurie: Not up here?

Harold: No you don't see sorghum up here at all. There is some sorghum that they're using, and they're feeding livestock with it, cattle. It's sweet.

Laurie: When you were growing up did most of the farmers have small patches?

Harold: Oh, yes. They had their own apple orchards to make their own apple butter, their own sorghum to make their own sorghum, their own grapes to make grape butter whatever they would do .

Mrs. Welkie: Wine..

Harold: Well, I guess maybe it was rough. Because we had a pickle patch, maybe an acre of pickles each year and probably 2 or 3 acres of potatoes, and cabbage, carrots, and the day that was always teachers institute when we were kids at home, that was a day you ate potatoes. Period. that was it. And of course that was the day we dug potatoes, and we took all the potatoes into again what we called a driveway where there was cement, and we would sort these potatoes out, , and then maybe after you got them sorted out, Dad would take a load of potatoes, maybe 45-50 bushels to LaCrosse or Wanatah, and some days he's just about get into town and the load was gone, it'd all be purchased. Just going down the street and the neighbors knew he was coming and they'd buy it. The same thing with cabbage. We'd do the same thing with cabbage.

Laurie: When did you go to Wanatah with the potatoes?

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Harold: In the fall of the year, I would say like this teacher's institute, still teacher's institute, when teachers had that, oh, there's a Thursday and Friday in September when the teachers always have an institute, and that's when we always dug potatoes. Always.

Laurie: You sowed the cabbage too?

Harold: Oh, the cabbage was done earlier in the spring.

Mrs. Welkie: Well in the summer.

Harold: In the summer, yeah.

Laurie: Did you make sauerkraut:

Harold: Sauerkraut, oh, yeah that was good eatin'.

Mrs. Welkie: We made sauerkraut.

Harold: Oh, yes, at home we had, I think it was a 20 gallon jar, oh that would stand up about that big and yay hoo big around, and we used to stand there and cut the sauerkraut and then we had a regular stopper down by the bottom made out of a piece of __, and we'd stop it like this, and when you got this jar full you had to be sure to stuff it enough so the juice would come and cover all the sauerkraut. Then I don't know how long you'd leave it there before you'd start eatin' it.

Mrs. Welkie: It would ferment.

Harold: Yeah, you would cover it with, like a cloth, and then you'd sneak down there and lift up the cloth and reach in and take some out and eat it - yeah.

Laurie: It's just a lot of work.

Harold: Yeah. We've made it since we've been married, even. Just for the fun of it.

Mrs. Welkie: We made apple butter..

Harold: Yeah. But a small batch.

Mrs. Welkie: You know, a small amount, and we used to make wine, blackberry and grape wine, and jelly, I got lots of home made jelly at home, but you go back along our fence line, and I got gobs of blackberries and made blackberry jelly. . I don't know what

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I'm going to do with all of it because we don't eat very much of it - I usually give it away, you know, for gifts. 'Cause lots of people like home made jelly. But we used to do all of that. But, as time moves along and you get older you don't require that much food.

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