

HARRY BROERMANN

Joni: This is a portion of the Oral histories of Northwest Missouri of the 1940's program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today's date is November 14, 2008 and this interview is being conducted at the Northview Manor in Tarkio, Missouri. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. The interviewee is Harry Broermann, his birth date is July 30, 1916 and he lived during the 1940's and this interview is his story of life during this time period, including World War II. Okay, Harry we are going to talk a little bit about your background. Where were you born, when, and tell us a little bit about your parents and their occupations, and how many brothers and sisters do you have?

Harry: I was born July 30, 1916 and this puts me in my 93rd year. There is a story that goes with it that explains this. I think I might as well glamorize it at my age since I've gotten this far along. I'm a 1942 Army reject, I wasn't very happy about it at the moment, but some people said I was fortunate at the time, so I really was a tenant on my father's farm which had originally been purchased by my grandfather. My grandfather first came to this county in 1871, and he helped a cousin drive cattle in from Wisconsin, so this is cattle country. We have to remember that 78 per cent of Atchison County was horse high prairie, and his farm was located just across the road from Ranch 1 and 1 & 1/2 of David Rankin and most people know about as a big cattle feeder. My grandfather came in '71 and then he went back to Wisconsin and married my grandmother and he came back here and settled in 1874. David Rankin bought Ranch 1 and 1 1/2, it was 1600 acres. Over here with his cousin, about two years later in 1876. I think of our community, there was a grange hall, St. John's Farmers' City; Farmers City was a little country store, plus two school districts, North Polk and South Dale. This would make up this sort of community that was sort of unified as a combination of things. The first church services were held in my grandfather's home. He would go to Rock Port and pick up the minister and then they would have services that afternoon. Then they moved over to Grange Hall, which had been built by the grange movement in 1874, and it was while they were there that they got the idea, there were 22 founding fathers, and they got the idea of building a church of their own. They were there in 1875 but in '76 they dedicated this new church of St. John's which has been replaced now by a brick structure. My grandfather was known as the father of the community. He bought the land and then in turn sold it to my father. In 1913 my father bought the first piece of land, as a matter of fact, he said when he bought it, it had one row of corn and two rows of cockleburs. He broke the cycle of cockleburs by planting it to wheat for 3 years in a row. That was during World War I and the wheat prices; he said he got it paid for in 3 years. Then he bought another 160, the one which we lived in 1923. Then when my grandmother died, my grandfather settled his estate and he divided up the land, in fact, he had also said earlier that when he got done he hoped he got that first 40 acres paid for. When he died, he had 400 acres and all of his eight children had established farms of their own. He was one of 22. Another strange thing you might be interested in is that 10 of the founding fathers were related cousins. My great-great grandfather married a part the of Lauman family, there were three Laumans, three Broermanns and three Kaleys but they were all cousins, and so that gives them a certain amount of unity which you still see it today. My father, he seemed like he never had money but he always had equity, for that matter he also became a director the Citizens Bank when it went under back in, I thought it was '42 when Roosevelt closed the bank but it wasn't, they closed the

bank in 1931. My father, because he had equity, I'm sure they loaned my father the money to buy the stock in the bank, to get the bank re opened. He went through the depression; he helped a lot of other people along the way. I think he was always farming about 400 acres, most of it belonging to his father. I think he hired all of his brother-in-laws, all of his nephews as hired men down through the years, and he had a larger operation, in fact I had one uncle who said we always had 14 head of horses, that was his mode of operation. He helped a lot of young farmers get started, his uncles and his nephews, he helped them to also get started. He was always broke, but he always had equity, his grandfather would sell him a piece of land give him equity, but they didn't have free money then he inherited 80 acres in 1928 when they divided his estate. He lived to be 92 years of age and died in 1933. I've really been a tenant; I've never owned an acre of land in my life. I was either a tenant of my dad's or after he died—well I live in a big house out there and my father always promised my mother that he would build her a house. That wasn't her choice of house, but anyway he built this nice big square house out there on the hill, he did this in '28 and '29 and he borrowed the money from his two sisters, who inherited money, and he built the house and as near as I can tell it was about \$12,000.00, and he got a bunch of mortgages around with the bank and finally he got a loan, a \$15,000.00 land loan from an insurance company. When he died he still owed \$15,000.00. Actually, I was merely his tenant. He had two other children beside myself and as a matter of settling his estate and paying off that \$15,000.00 mortgage, and so my wife, my mother and I; we pooled our resources, and floated a loan with the Federal Land Bank and we bought the farm back, and had 35 years to pay for it which I finally got it paid for in 2001. By then I had pretty much of a free hand of what I wanted to do, and on the farm I established a water management program which, well the first 160 my father bought was broken up into four fields which required a crossing to go from one to the other. We were taking water off of two neighbors, three neighbors and were creating ditches and so forth and we got those healed in, like I say, a water management program which I am rather proud of. It was designed originally for a cattle operation, we had two herds of cattle and we were using and the farm program at the time – had us sit down and we wrote it out to raise about 90 acres of corn on 400 acres. We would grind a lot of that. I also become president of the Farm Bureau and helped the Farm Bureau establish an insurance company and I have been a faithful supporter of Farm Bureau. In 1980 I said I attended all the annual meetings except 3. You always have those times when you say I can't afford to be away from home. I also discovered out of those 3 years, only 1 year did I do what I stayed home to do. That's a part of my working philosophy anyway. I have had a lot of great experiences; they've taken me to Washington several different times. Well, also in 1935, my father, this was one of his things, we had a fellow by the name of Allen Barlow, whose daughter had the first Grand Champion calf at the St. Joseph Interstate Show in 1920. She won a trip to Chicago and so forth, but Allen Barlow, he moved into our community and he talked, knew someone named Henry Klute, and my father and himself, the three of them, as leaders of the 4-H club. Actually we called it the Boys and Girls Club; it wasn't called 4-H until 1927. But anyway, 1927 was the first year where they had what they called 4-H camp, and I think I'm privileged to know some of the people, matter of fact I think I got to know 3 other people that attended that camp, and it was at this camp that they decided on name and pledge and so forth. In 1935 I won a trip to Washington, D.C. to the 4-H camp. That was my first experience of air conditioning in the Department of Agriculture building is where we ate our meals. We camped out on the mall, they had platforms to keep us up and everything dry and we camped with Army tents. In fact the fellow that I went with, he'd had polio, and I used to have to carry him to the shower, in fact he kept you busy telling jokes,

you never had a dull moment when you were with him, he was a great fellow. In fact his brother had gone the year before, and we developed some meetings, we'd meet each other, he was from Buckner, a suburb of Kansas City and then that's been a great experience ever since. I've been involved in 4-H, first as a member, well, I might tell you first, 4-H was started in the county here in 1916, I've met most of the state leaders except the first one, but I know what he was doing on the 3rd week in January of 1916. He was traveling over the county with a county school superintendent establishing school fairs, which sort of helped way up into the '30's kept the concept of the fair going here in the county, that's another story in itself. My grade school teacher, incidentally, my school, North Polk, is up here in the city park; we moved it here in 1975. But my grade school teacher was teaching at Homer School in the spring and so she got inducted into that school fair program and then she came up to us at North Polk in the fall of 1916 and so we've had it in our community since 1916. Of course when I started to school in 1923, that was also the time when Allen Barlow, my uncle and Dad started the Farm-City 4-H club and today we claim to be the nation's oldest 4-H club, that may or not be true but in terms of continuity, we've operated continuously since then. I've had some people from Nebraska feel somewhat offended, but they have never come back to document it, that they could beat that. So, I've been involved in the 4-H program for about 85 years. I've got some good leaders, I have had 5 good leaders, I try to find good leaders and I've got a great one now in Julie Jostein, so I don't know how long we'll be able to keep this thing going, but it has been a well established, I think it's the strongest club in the county at the moment. Actually there was a time we had 15 4-H clubs, when Ed Meek was here during that period, I thought he was a simpleton, but nevertheless he was a super boy and he went out and hustled and they organized 15 4-H clubs here in the county while Ed Meek was here over a 15 year period. We've always been a part of it. There was basically 15 clubs scattered over the county but each of the women's clubs sponsored a 4-H unit, that's the way that it was done. I become the manager of the Charles W. Broermann Farms, Inc., used my father's name, signature, in our corporate structure and so in '96, my wife and I put our shares of stock into a trust which presently, I'm the sole trustee of all the stock in the corporation. When something happens to me, and I don't think I'll take it with me, my youngest son will be managing it. He can manage it for _____ family and hopefully he will devote maybe half of it maybe goes back into the farm itself and maybe the other half for community service. That's the way we presently have it set up, so I've never owned an acre in my life, like I said, but I've enjoyed the use of it.

Joni: So could you tell us what your life was like just prior to World War II in the 1940's?

Harry: Well you see, my father had a couple of sons that he tried to talk us into, offered to buy us a new wagon and team and everything if we would stay home and pick corn, but we decided we weren't quite ready for that yet. We graduated, see we graduated, well, our educational background, my brother and I we went through, well, see I didn't start grade school until November; ordinarily we start in September, but I had blood poisoning and we lived 3 miles from 4 different schools, so they held us back, held my brother and I back, I just found this out a couple of years ago in the school records, held us back until November, and then we stayed with my grandmother, who lived a mile from school and that's sort of the way I started _____. I got to know my maternal grandfather that way, he had his leg all bandaged up, he'd got an infection with trimming hedge somehow or another, and grandma always said he had dropsy, whatever that was. But anyway, he died in 1925, but at least I got to know him like I say, there's a picture that was painted of a white haired grandfather, a loaf of bread on the table,

and he's reading the Bible, and every night he would read a chapter out of the Bible. He was also the secretary of the Church when it first started in 1886 and he also did some teaching in a church in earlier days. I don't know exactly what or how much, but I've had the privilege of writing the church history, I explored it anyway. There's another important thing, anyway I think it is, 43 years ago I was involved in a car wreck down by Savannah, I was traveling with two preachers, we were going to a church meeting down in Atchison, Kansas, and we were on our way back up to Savannah at the weigh station and if I was to blame anybody I would blame the man at the scales. There was a trucker that wasn't overloaded, but he had too much on one axle and that was the 3rd time that he had to make that circuit, a shift his load and he pulled in front of us and we hit his fuel tanks. But anyway, my pastor was sitting in the front seat, and his head went through the windshield, it knocked a hole in the windshield and he settled back down. But anyway he died about 2 weeks later, and they said if he'd have lived he would have been a vegetable so probably just as well. They took us to the emergency ward in St. Joe and sent me home and like I say, I knew I was going to feel rough the next day but I had an appointment to have the car serviced and I also knew that I might have to be prepared to provide transportation for the ministers family so I went to a meeting and about 2:00 that afternoon they were paging me saying I had a broken neck, so they put me in the hospital for a few days and put a collar on me for 8 weeks and we wrestled with that for awhile. But anyway, since then my back has become rigid, thank goodness I'm in an upright position, and my neck has limited movement, the left rear view mirror on my car has no value because I can't reach it, turn far enough to see it, but anyway, as a result of that I changed my life style. I would run the tractor a couple of hours and I'd come home numb and uncoordinated and my son, he'd graduated from high school and he joined the Navy, and I decided I didn't want to try to farm 400 acres by myself, so it's been crop sharing since, and that gives me more time, so I started visiting the library at Tarkio College and got to know the staff real well, and since then I've gone over to the library in Rock Port and the Courthouse for the land records. It's been most interesting but it just gives me more time to do some of these other things.

Joni: Let's talk about propaganda during World War II. Were you aware of the propaganda?

Harry: This is before I have to say I remember the propaganda at the time, I didn't with my personal living. But when I was in college I had a roommate, Ted Driftmeyer, of the Driftmeyer family up in – he was – in fact he was a debater and what have you and in the summertime he would go down to Taneycomo and YMCA camp and work down there. I knew when he came back he had a song "We Don't Want No War No More, No More". After the war had taken place I saw in the paper that the Germans had infiltrated the YMCA and maybe they indoctrinated him and Ted, he would set up, he was the head of the YMCA there at Tarkio at the college and he would ask me to come and compete with him, I didn't have a chance with him debating some of those things of war issues, but I am sure that he was a victim of that. That was '38 and '39 when that happened, but if it was present both of us maybe weren't aware of it. But I can't say that I heard any real propaganda at the time here locally.

Joni: What were you doing – how did you learn about Pearl Harbors attack?

Harry: Just the news on the radio.

Joni: How did you learn about the progress of the war?

Harry: Just watching the papers, in fact, we would have been busy doing other things. We didn't have time to worry too much about it.

Joni: Tell us about your experience, you said you were drafted.

Harry: Well I was happy-go-lucky kid here I was going to serve Uncle Sam, and what have you, and we were going down through the line, and I first discovered that my left leg had never developed like a right leg, I discovered it on the fluoroscope. I remember it was the 29th station and the man asked me about 3 simple questions and just reached over and put a great big red "Rejected" on my papers and sent me home. That hurt more than anything – I had a cousin right in front of me whose Dad used to cry on my shoulder about it.

Joni: What year was that and how old were you?

Harry: That was '42, June of '42.

Joni: How old were you?

Harry: Now let's see, that would make me 26 wouldn't it? I think that's right. I might have been 25 because this is June and I was born in July.

Joni: Can you tell us about what life was like during the war? What was going on around here, the farming?

Harry: If a person was set up, all set up ready to go, he made money during the war, but if he wasn't, you just had to hustle to keep up, and like I said, I was caught in that position. I can't say that I made a lot of money during that time, but we got along. Of course we were independent, my mother and my father always had a big potato patch, my brother and I used to have to pick potatoes 'til we got awful tired of it, and my mother always had a garden, she had her chickens, they milked some cows, so we were almost self-sufficient. We weren't lacking for anything. I was going to say, as far as the handicapped, my father-in-law, he was running the Farmers' City Store, and he run into the problem that he didn't have the proper classification, he couldn't get tires when he needed it, he couldn't buy sugar and the salesman instead of – wouldn't deliver merchandise out at the store, he'd have to take his truck and go over to Westboro Corner to pick up his supplies, and he finally gave up, and he started farming in '44. Like I say, I know more about his problems than I – I don't know that we had any problems.

Joni: How about the rationing?

Harry: We took it in stride, I guess. There wasn't any hardship as far as I was concerned.

Joni: What did you do for entertainment during that time period?

Harry: Oh, we would go to movies that type of thing. Fact though, I was- never even in high school I wasn't – we didn't go to the movies that much. Played a little baseball. Fact, we had two people that had tennis courts, had a little place to play tennis and that type of thing. Then we had at the Farmers' City, they had a baseball diamond down in a man's cow pasture, on Sundays we'd go play baseball up there. That's part of being a part of that Grange hall, St. John's - Farmers City community.

Joni: How was the gas prices and travel during that time period?

Harry: I don't know that we had any particular problems, I'm sure that we were restricted, but no more than anybody else.

Joni: Do you remember any songs or music during that time period?

Harry: Yeah, I got to say, one of my favorite uncles, he drove a truck, he always had a radio in his truck, I used to ride with him to especially take 4-H calves to St. Joe and Omaha and Kansas City, and like I say – fact – well he went to Sweeney Auto School right after World War I, and they taught him out there to remember to sing and enjoy yourself while you are working, and like I say, he was a jolly kind of a fella, obviously, he was one of my favorite uncles. Well, let's see, "My Blue Heaven" is one I remember. Then in 1940, Harry Cunningham, we had a quartet, my sister sang soprano, my future wife, she sang the alto, and Richard Howdy, who later become our County Assessor, he sang bass, and I sang the tenor, and one of our favorite songs was "God Bless America" patterned after, oh, that large lady who sang, did a beautiful job of singing it. That was one of our favorites, of course, we would provide music for political rallies in 1940.

Joni: How about the end of the war, how did you learn about "D Day" and the atomic bomb, how did you feel about those incidents?

Harry: In fact it, didn't worry me one way or another. Ah, maybe there was a little propaganda there, they justified the actions by the lives that were saved, so we were conditioned for it. I can't say that I had any definite reaction against it, one way or another.

Joni: Did you agree with President Truman when he dropped it?

Harry: As I remember Mr. Truman, we in Missouri here, were sort of ashamed of him, but it turned out that he would become one of our great Presidents.

Joni: How were the veterans treated when they returned home?

Harry: I would say that here locally that they had their own operations and were fitting back into the family situation again so they had a place – I can't see that there was any restriction there.

Joni: Were you worried about the threat of Communism through that time period?

Harry: Like I say, it was a dirty word, but to say that I was worried about it, no I can't say that I was. No, it was just a distasteful thing that wasn't to our best interests anyway.

Joni: Did you have any concerns about the economy or inflation or the spread of polio or tuberculosis?

Harry: I had this happen in '52, and my wife come down with polio, and I was in Jefferson City and my father-in-law called me down, and she was in an isolation ward in St. Joe for 3 weeks, and that's the way I found out about it. Had to live with it, wasn't anything I could do about it except I could see her down the hall, but couldn't go any closer than that. Strangely enough, she wasn't crippled from it, but Dr. Niedemeyer become sort of an authority on polio locally, and is highly respected and the days she would come out, we had 2 or 3 little girls up there that my wife used to play the piano for and they sang at all kind of meetings and this and that. Well, the

oldest one, she come down with polio and spent another 3 weeks down there, so had that experience too, but she wasn't crippled either. I don't know whether it was anything that Dr. Niedemeyer did or what, but he seemed to be the recognized authority on it at that time.

Joni: What did you listen to when you were listening to the radio, did you listen to the news, homemaking shows, soap operas, farm markets, what was on the radio?

Harry: Well let's see, news and farm markets, like I say I don't know whether I had any favorite programs. I knew that they were there.

Joni: Was there any other stories that you can think of that maybe we didn't cover that you could think of during that time period, during the war, what were your concerns about the war?

Harry: It was just a nasty mess we had to clear up.

Joni: Did you take advantage of any of the things that were going on like housing loans that the government was offering at that time?

Harry: No. Well my father always worked with the ASC office and farm programs, that type of thing. He was a kind of a trouble shooter, I know of a couple of situations where we had some disgruntled people they sent him out to humor them a little, bring them back in. My parents were always involved in the community activities like special road districts and county fairs and that type of thing so that was the climate that I grew up in.

Joni: What do you think of the differences between the war today and the war in the '40s in World War II?

Harry: Well we were unified back at that time and right now I think it is a sad thing that we are so divided.

Joni to Margaret: Do you have any questions that you would like to ask him?

Joni: We have time, is there something else that you would like to tell us before we

Harry: Well I was going to say I had some other people, I think Alton Hanrath, he was working for Dr. Speeley, a veterinarian there, who had a problem of sleeping sickness in horses and he would drive, Dr. Speeley was kept so busy, he would drive the car helping Dr. Speeley. When he joined the Army or I'm sure when he was called up, he took the Calvary. While he was in the Calvary, they closed out the Calvary, reclassified him one way or another, but apparently he has a story where they buried the final horse, and like I say I would recommend, you might want to check out Alton Hanrath, he might already have that recorded because he operated the electronic equipment at the church, recording a lot of those things and he may already have some of that already recorded. He's another one I'm suggesting you might want to contact him. He's just a few months younger than I am. Then I've got to say I have my son, my youngest son, all three of my children who were in the Navy during the Viet Nam situation. My youngest son spent 2 terms in the Navy. He went into the submarine force and I think it was during the 1st term he did some research work at Walter Reed Hospital where they put him in a cell, oh, out of sight, out of contact with people, and they would send food down to him, and he had to learn to live by himself. That's I think to me is an interesting thing, I just knew about it, and he went along with

– his first term was in a diesel sub – his second term he went to a nuclear sub. He always said he preferred the diesel sub to the nuclear, I don't know what the basis of it was, but that's about all I really know about it. My thinking there is that he may have some stories there that might be meaningful.

Joni: Well we are planning on interviewing some Viet Nam vets later.

Harry: My thinking is that maybe he might be one. Then also I might tell you at the Tuesday where they have the Veterans' Day activities over at Rock Port they mentioned that Sherry Adams who's put a lot of these things on, a list of all the veterans on the computer apparently has a collection of stories, also Mrs. Dan Fries, between the two, they may have a bunch of stories that you might want to investigate. I don't know what they have, but they mentioned that they had them. They've made corrections to some of them. Some of them will be meaningful and some of them won't.

Joni: We'll have to check those out. Well, we still have a little bit of time if there is anything that you want, any other, it doesn't have to be World War II, if there is anything else you, like the beginning of Atchison County.

Harry: The beginning of Atchison County? This is a great county; most people don't always appreciate it. I've got to say, as a matter of fact, I'm also sitting on the – I sat on the committee, I've got to say they never put veterans in the memorial building foundation, the Atchison County, I say Veterans' Memorial Foundation, I tried to get them to include veterans in the title, but so far they haven't done it. But I've been involved in that one, like I say I'd like to help, in fact, it's going to take a lot of money to get it done, it's going to cost about \$50,000, maybe \$80,000, I've seen two figures for cost of the _____ Memorial Building and like I say it's going to cost probably \$3,000,000.00 to fix it up. There is some major repair that needs to be done in fact we let a contract at one time and then we discovered we didn't have quite enough money to get it all done, so we postponed it, and now we've got – then we become involved in this Walk of Honor, I'm not too sure that was a good deal, this is Hardin Cox's idea of course, they had something of this sort down at the memorial down at Kansas City. We started out we was going to put bricks down there and some of the people said, well I don't want to have a brick down where they throw cigarette butts and spit on it and walk on, it so we made a different kind of project out of it, and I think it pays for itself at the moment, but we're going to have overhead to take care of it down through the years. I don't know how the whole thing is going to balance out, I wonder about it. It kept us busy, and I think we have a nice project, and it's a nice tribute to the veterans.

Joni: Sounds like a nice tribute. Well I think it's about time. I think I see your therapist coming in here, so I guess we are going to have to be done for now.

Harry: Anything I can do to be helpful, I'm restricted, well in fact, I'm restricted in more ways than one. My son and my doctor are trying to make an old man out of me, so in order to validate their position, they feed me water pills and blood thinner, and actually well, in fact, I'm really here to – I've got to live down here – well Dr. Burke – in fact, I had a complaint of knee here and he said use a heating pad on it, then he gets to work down there and he picks – I had a whole bunch of little blisters and he picked all the skin off of it and he ended up with a patch about 8" X 8" on my shin, and now they are trying to get it healed up, and they're supposed to wrap it up

– matter of fact, the way it really came about – week ago Friday, I was going to go out and get my mail about 6:30 at night, and I was shifting from a chair over to my walker, and for some reason, I don't know why, it gave me a flip and I ended up on the floor, like I say I'd done this before, I'd fallen before so if I get on the floor someone has to come and pick me up, because I can't get up by myself. So my son he was helping Larry Irwin out here pick corn, and I knew he'd be through there, I thought about 7:30, it was 8:30 when he came through and when he came through he said "How long have you been laying here?" I said about an hour and a half. He said tomorrow morning we are going to take you to the nursing home, but I think he thought this 8 inch patch on my knee was too big for him to handle. I had a little one, about the size of a dollar on this other leg, he done a good job on that one, but I think he decided this was too big for him, so here I am. He's also taken my driving privileges away from me, but he does a pretty good job of furnishing me drivers.

Joni: That's good, yes, we went to a Pony Express meeting the other day, and they all wondered where you were.

Harry: Yes, I've missed a couple of those.

Joni: They were all asking about you.

Harry: Well, fact I wanted to go too. Actually, my son had set up some other appointments, so I couldn't make that one. I don't know whether he would have taken me down that far or not.

Joni: Well we're planning one in April or March, over at Maryville, so maybe you'll get to come to that one.

Harry: Well, I'll do my best. Like I say, it a great time, we've a lot of good things going for us. The Atchison County Development Corp has got a number of things, and it gives us a chance to share it with other people. I may be a little bit braggadocios about it, but like I say we've got a great county. I don't exactly like our complacency about it, but we have a lot of work to do.

Joni: Yes, we all do. Well, we appreciate your time today.

Harry: Well, my privilege.

Joni: Well, thank you, and hopefully we'll come back another day, and do something else.