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Transcript

Name: Warren Strunk

Date Interviewed: 8/12/1999 Date Transcribed: 11/22/1999 Tape: #68

Project Number 20012

Tape FLHP0155

15:01:01

Q:

Well, you can just talk to me, totally ignore like, I always tell people it's like ignoring the elephant in the corner (both laugh).

(Cameraman: We're rolling, and speed.)

15:01:14

Q:

Great. Okay, first of all, if you could give us your name and spell it, just so make sure we have it right.

A:

My name is Warren Strunk, S-T-R-U-N-K. Uh, I should say my middle initial is I because I have a son who is also a Trustee. And his middle initial is E, so we have to distinguish between the two of us.

Q:

Great, and if you could give us a little background about how long you've been in the area. Um, a little bit about your family, where you were born, went to school.

15:01:43

A:

Um-hmm. I was born in Cincinnati, and um, uh, grew up mainly in the Western Hills area. Uh, my wife and I were married in 1953. We later had two children, uh, Warren E. (chuckles) and daughter, Sharon. And um, I uh, graduated from Western Hills High School, during World War II.

15:02:09

A:

And in those days, the old saying was, "They hand you your diploma in one hand and your greetings from the President in the other." (chuckles) And off to the Army we went. So I served in Europe, uh, fortunately for me it was the tail end of World War II, so most of my experience was in the occupation forces uh, at the end of the war, and following for some period of time.

15:02:32

A:

Uh, after returning home I went to uh, Chase College in Chase College of Law. And uh, then I uh, was employed several years by United States Gypsum Company, a large building materials manufacturer. Then I worked for Clayton Scroggins Associates, who for several years. Uh, that is a management consultant firm for physicians, dentists, hospitals, that type of thing.

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15:03:03

A:

And engaged in rather extensive travel with them. And uh, then I finally wound up working in the, for several years in the criminal division of the uh, Hamilton County Clerk of Courts. And, from which I am now retired. And concurrent with all that, I was also a township trustee for Crosby Township. I uh, was appointed to fill a vacancy.

15:03:29

A:

One of the trustees died, I believe it was 1960 and I was appointed to replace him. And I uh, served until uh, the end of 1989. So almost 30 years, 29 plus years.

Q:

Tell us a little bit about your responsibilities as a trustee.

15:03:50

A:

Uh, responsibilities as a trustee, uh, you're involved in a number of things, mainly um, uh, you're somewhat analogous to the County Commissioners, except your jurisdiction of course, is the township, whereas theirs is the entire county. You're responsible for the roads in your township, uh, the maintenance, fire and life squad protection.

15:04:14

A:

Uh, keeping the grass mowed and the weeds cut (chuckling) and the rather mundane things that occur, that type of thing, but you're also of course, charged with the safety of your community.

15:04:28

Q:

And how did Fernald um, how did it uh, affect the community from a Trustee's point of view?

A:

Well, uh, the first several years I served as the trustee, which was beginning as I mentioned earlier, 1960, until the middle '80s, uh, it didn't seem to have a whole lot of effect. At least not outwardly so. Uh, the uh, the people accepted it. I think most of us knew there was defense work going on there. We didn't know specifically what, and um, and of course, the Cold War was on at the time.

A:

15:05:09

And I think generally it had the approval of the community. Uh, and so it uh, had the little outward effect at any rate, until um, until the middle '80s or so, and whenever the environmental issues came up and, well we know all about that story. And of course it had quite an effect on the trustees. I think our big job was to um, try to, divulge as much information as we were able to develop to the people, try to keep them calm.

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15:05:46

A:

And uh, to um, uh, develop a relationship with the uh, plant, with the plant management, the Department of Energy. And the, at first it was somewhat difficult to do, but as time wore on uh, it became a very, I felt, a very good, cooperative type of thing. Cooperation was rather good between us all. I felt rather positive about it really.

15:06:15

A:

But uh, it did, uh, I think the biggest thing to the community as a whole, was the fright that it threw into the community. The fear of cancer, this type of thing. I personally did not feel that fear. Uh, but I certainly had a lot of sympathy, a lot of empathy for people who did, particularly for those who were very close to the plant, who lived, right under the plant's shadow, you might say.

15:06:47

A:

Uh, I was very concerned about them. But as time wore on, I think that um, that uh, things have worked out fairly well. The um, our main concern of course, once the problems developed. They were there, we had this big problem, how does it get cleaned up. That was I think, the main concern for the Board of Trustees.

15:07:14

Q:

And uh, if we can go back in time just a little bit, um, were you in the area when they were building the plant?

A:

Uh, we lived in the Western Hills area. I knew about the plant being built, and reading in the paper, but we did not live out here at that time. I think the plant was built uh, around 1950, or in the early '50s, and we moved here in 1958 from the Western Hills area.

(Pauses and chuckles while a loud truck drives by behind)

15:07:42

Q:

When you first um, caught sight of the plant when you moved here, uh, what was your first impression of what it looked like, just the physical plant?

A:

Well, at the, at the time uh, it just looked like a huge factory to me, at I don't recall that it had any particular impact in my own thinking. Uh, I didn't think it was a particularly attractive plant or anything of that sort. It just at that time seemed to sit out in open spaces by itself, rather isolated. But uh, I um, had no particular thought other than this huge factory sitting out here (chuckles).

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15:08:23

A:

And I knew that they were engaged in defense work, of course. But specifically what, of course I wasn't, I had no knowledge of that.

15:08:33

Q:

How did you know about uh, uh, the fact that it was defense work, how did, how did you know that much?

A:

Uh, through the news media.

Q:

So they did do reports on Fernald when it was still first being built, or those couple of years.

A:

Uh, yes.

15:08:46

Q:

Can you tell us a little bit about that? Um, what kind of news reports were there? What were they exactly telling the community at that time?

A:

Uh, they were uh, telling the community as I remember, uh, that uh, they were involved in the production of Cold War materials. That it had something to do with atomic bombs. That was sort of the impression that the news media left. But the, again, they were rather vague, they had to be. And uh, but uh, to us it was just some kind of nuclear ah, weapons that ah, that they were involved in but beyond that our knowledge was rather vague about it.

15:09:31

Q:

And what about your friends and neighbors? What did most of them think ah, was going on over at the plant?

A:

Oh I think most of them ah seemed to realized it was some son of defense work and they seemed inclined to accept it and not question too much. Ah, I did have a few friends and neighbors who ah, because of the ah checkerboard in the water tower, checkerboard (chuckles) design in the water tower ah, had the idea they were producing some kind of dog food.

15:10:02

A:

Ah, *Purina Dog Chow* or chicken feed or something of that sort there and, and, but that really didn't come out until after the ah negative publicity began to come out in the middle-80's. But I did have

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Some friends who did think that. They would drive by and see the checkerboard square they immediately associated it with *Purina Dog Chow*.

15:10:26

Q:

Great and ah, how about ah, the surrounding community, in your estimation especially as a trustee, how did ah, the Department of Defense, or the, actually it was the Atomic Energy Commission, coming along to this smaller farming community and building a big plant, how did it change the surrounding community?

15:10:50

A:

Ah, I think that ah, that it ah, contributed somewhat to the growth of the community, that ah, more residential houses came in as a result of it. But I think the most notable impact from ah the community standpoint was ah, heavier amount of traffic as we had I think a lot of employees coming in from Indiana that worked there.

15:11:16

A:

And ah, the flow of traffic particular ah 7:30, 8:00 o'clock in the morning and 4:30, 5:00 in the afternoon. I think that was the most noticeable thing that we observed.

Q:

Wonderful, and um, also along with that ah, how many people in the township actually worked at Fernald? You mentioned a lot of people were coming from Indiana, but how many actually in the township actually worked at Fernald?

15:11:53

A:

Well, at one point in time and I think this was in the early to middle-80's, ah, when the problems began to break, ah, at least publicly break over there. Ah, we inquired ah, as a board of trustees as to how many people number one; were employed over there and number 2; how many of those employees ah, were residents of Crosby Township?

15:12:19

A:

They could not divulge to us how many employees actually worked there at the time, but they did tell us that ah, if I remember, I know it was less than 100 people, about 96 people. So ah, our thoughts were that ah, well we've got a community of approximately 3,000 people here, and if you average 4 to a family you're talking about ah what, less than 400 people that ah, are economically directly, economically ah, affected by the plant.

15:12:56

Q:

And how have some of your constituents, folks that live in the area that you know of, how have some of those people been affected by Fernald?

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A:

Well, I think they've ah, more than anything else they've been affected ah, by the fear. The fear of getting cancer, ah that type of thing. The health endangerment. Ah, and the ah effect on the environment that the plant might have had. Ah, I think that was more than anything else.

15:13:30

A:

I still don't know to this day how much of that was factual, how much was perception, but ah, I do think that was the greatest effect the plant had on the community.

15:13:43

Q:

And uh, they were a couple of camps that were in Crosby Township, a number of them closed down I guess, after all that stuff that happened in the mid '80s. Were you involved in any of that, or?

A:

We were aware of it but uh, we had no direct involvement in it. Ah, Ft. Scott for example is uh, owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, and ah, of course that was their own private decision. They really didn't consult the trustees on anything of that sort. That was purely their own decision. But ah, we had no direct involvement in the event.

15:14:25

Q:

Do you think that was a result of the feelings of the surrounding communities about Fernald?

A:

I'm sure that had a contributing effect. Ah, and I think that possibly there were some economic problems involved at Ft. Scott. At least, I was told that. But ah, but also there was a fear, and naturally a lot of the parents would not want to send their children out to summer camp there because of the stigma of the plant.

15:14:55

Q:

Great! Now we've sort of been consistently talking about a couple of the problems because of what happened in the middle '80's. Uh, give us a sort of a synopsis of what exactly happened at Fernald that caused so many problems in the mid '80's.

15:15:11

A:

The problem seemed to begin with the environmental groups pointing out, at least publicly, began with environmental groups pointing out that uh, that there was pollution in the Great Miami River as a result of the Fernald plant and questions immediately rose since we didn't have, or at least didn't have at that time had no city water in the township and everyone depended on wells, or cisterns for their water supply and mostly wells, because this township is very rich in water, underground water.

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15:15:52

A:

Uh, the, everyone began to wonder, including the trustees, as to what effect this was having on us, you know, healthwise, or what long term effects this might have healthwise. And I think that was the very first thing that uh, there was a good deal of media publicity on it.

15:16:17

A:

And uh, then uh, some of the uh, members of plant management started attending our trustee meetings and uh, addressing uh, and we starting having large turnouts at our public, uh trustee meetings at the time raising these questions. So it was very timely that they appeared and they kept trying to reassure us that uh, we had nothing to worry about.

15:16:39

A:

And uh that if there were any problems that it was in the immediate vicinity of the plant. But from this distance uh, they didn't feel we had any anything to worry about. Uh, I think some of the public accepted that, others uh, were still inclined not to accept it. There was some skepticism, that sort of thing. And this just began to snowball mediawise until the next thing you know we were national (laughing) headlines, around the entire country. But uh, that seemed to be the uh, the beginning of it.

15:17:19

Q:

Tell us a little bit about what it was like to have this area part of national headlines. What was that like?

A:

Well, frankly, it wasn't very comfortable. (Laughing) Uh, it was uh, always presented in a rather negative way. Uh, the uh, national media seemed to present it to the public that uh, everybody within a radius of thirty miles of the plant uh, was gonna die within the next five years of cancer. And uh, that type of thing. So it really wasn't a very comfortable thing.

15:17:55

A:

And the more publicity was generated, (chuckling) naturally the more phone calls I received asking me about these things. And um, from my personal viewpoint, it was rather difficult because I, I am not a scientist, I didn't know exactly what was happening at the plant. (Clears throat) Excuse me. But uh, I uh, knew from my high school chemistry, I knew that uranium is a very heavy metal.

15:18:27

A:

And my own common sense told me I don't see how it could have gone much beyond the immediate vicinity of the plant. So therefore, in my own mind, I was concerned basically about the, the people who lived in the immediate vicinity of the plant. Not only in Crosby Township, but Morgan and Ross Townships as well. And so, I did have a concern about that.

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15:18:52

Q:

I had somebody tell me one time, they were coming by Fernald and, they were driving along on uh, on the road that goes by Fernald, and they looked over and Harry Reasoner was standing there, you know. And they were doing a stand-up right by the Fernald sign. (Chuckles) And I just always think o' that whenever you know, people talk about national media attention, what that was like, must have been. What was the very first public meeting like, directly after the news broke about Fernald?

15:19:20

A:

Uh, the first public meeting was right here in this building. (points to his right with his right thumb) We had to move the fire equipment out, and (chuckles) and put it outside, and uh, we had a very large gathering in of people. Uh, we had to put chairs in the fire bays, and hold our meeting in there where the fire and life squad equipment normally was. And uh, it wasn't a shouting type of meeting.

15:19:44

A:

These people were calm, level-headed. But they were inquisitive. They wanted to know a lot about it and just what was going on. Uh, and that was the meeting, the first meeting that the executives uh, from management at Fernald attended. And I think they did a, a very good job at allaying a lot of the fears of the people. As I mentioned earlier, there were some that were still skeptical.

15:20:11

A:

Uh, and I, I think a lot of that would naturally stem from the fact that everything was so secretive over there over the years. And that people, when things go on in secret, they get suspicious of it. And uh, and I, I think, nevertheless, I think that the executives who came over at the time did a lot to allay our fears. Uh, there were some misunderstandings.

15:20:

A:

There were some people in the township that did not realize this was a federal reservation, in fact, I think many of 'em did. So they were asking the trustees, "Why can't you just go in there and clean this up, you know? Take township workers and go in and clean this up?" And I had to explain to them that uh, being a federal reservation, we had absolutely no control. We could only go in uh, with the company's permission.

15:21:01

A:

Matter of fact, my wife and children when they were small, were out for a Sunday drive. We were over on state route 126 in back of the plant. And I saw the driveway and I said to my wife, "I don't see any reason why we can't just cut through this and come out on Willey Road." So uh, we tried it, and believe me, a guard chased us real quick (laughing) armed guard.

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15:21:26

A:

He was very polite, and uh, he realized what we wanted to do, but he let us know in no uncertain terms that we were just not allowed back there. And uh, this was the point that I had to explain to a lot of our constituents, and it put us on somewhat of the defensive. But that we were just not allowed to go into that plant, that this was a, a federal government establishment, and we had absolutely no jurisdiction over it.

15:21:52

A:

I think one of the things that always bothered me as a trustee about it was the plant paid no taxes, being a federal government entity. And uh, we had responsibilities towards the plant, uh, but uh, they paid no taxes to the local community. I, I still have a personal feeling, that that law ought to be changed.

15:22:16

A:

That any federal or state entity ought to be required to pay taxes just the same as any private business would, because they do require the services of the local community. And I think that they should be required to pay taxes. I'd like to see the law changed in that uh, regard. But at any rate, we had the problem of (chuckling) no revenue from it.

15:22:41

A:

But I will say this, in all the credit uh, to the uh, people, all the subsequent companies that have come along over the years. That they have developed I think, a very good, proper, positive relationship with the community, and done much to help the community. And I, both as a private citizen now and as a trustee then, appreciate that very much. I think we've established a very solid relationship with them.

15:23:13

Q:

And how did that relationship (interrupted by cameraman and tape stops).

15:23:16

Q:

You're doin' great. Now that I can see you, it's a lot better.

A:

Thank you. (Both laugh) That isn't a great deal of improvement.

Q:

Oh, no. It is for me. I like to be able to make eye contact with people, instead of looking at them like this (both laugh).

A:

Right, right.

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15:23:30

Q:

Okay. Um, how did the relationship with Fernald change down through the years? What was it like in the early years as opposed to after that whole happening in the '80s?

A:

Really, there, there was little or no relationship with the community in the early years. Uh, through the '60s and the '70s, uh, very, very little or no relationship existed. After that occurred, uh, in the um, again, all the news media coverage that existed in the '80s. After that occurred, the relationship warmed considerably.

15:24:08

A:

I think uh, at first, there possibly was a little antagonism, more questioning on the trustees' part, "What have you done to us?" That type of thing. But uh, and again, our main concern was, Oh, my, are they gonna close up the plant and walk off and leave the problem here you know, for us? (Chuckles) And what was going to happen, and we had that kind of fear.

15:24:32

A:

But um, again, in discussions with the uh, with the plant executives, uh, they assured us that we had nothing to worry about. They would clean the mess up and uh, and I feel satisfied now that they are making every good faith effort to do so. Uh, and I uh, uh, felt that the relationship then warmed and, and became very good, as I mentioned, a very solid, positive relationship.

15:25:03

A:

And again I appreciate both as private citizen and former trustee all the many things the plant has gotten involved in our community and helped establish this relationship. So I feel rather positive about it now.

15:25:19

Q:

What steps did you have to take as a trustee to make sure that Fernald sort of opened up to the community?

A:

We had numerous meetings ah, with ah, management officials there, the three trustees, and um, ah, we, we asked them if they could open up to the community, offered several suggestions to them. And ah, one of the suggestions that I personally offered was that ah, I felt that they were some what at a disadvantage because they'd enshrin-, enshrined in this secrecy over there and ah, the community was suspicious you know.

15:26:01

A:

Are they hiding their ineptness behind secrecy and this type of thing? And are they going to kill us in there; they're hiding this fact? You know, are they going to kill us with cancer and all this type of thing? I made the suggestion which ah, they seemed a little bit reluctant to accept. But I made the

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suggestion that ah, when ever you make a mistake, as the public' s very forgiving, release that news to the public.

15:26:27

A:

Hey, we goofed up here, release it to the public. And ah, and I, I think it will build a trust relationship. Because people are forgiving and they all know that every human being makes mistakes and ah, they are ah, again are forgiving about this. And I really do think this worked. As I mentioned they were a little reluctant at the time to accept it, but ah, later they told they were going to give this a try.

15:26:53

A:

And ah, they had talked it over with their lawyers and everything ah, so ah, they, they started opening up publicly, public wise ah, and ah, as soon as anything occurred, any little minor accident occurred there would be a knock on our door, and somebody, a courier delivering (chuckles) a news release as to what had happened.

15:27:17

A:

And I do recall at one of our trustees meetings one of my fellow trustees jokingly said that everybody spills a salt shaker in the cafeteria I get a knock on my (chuckles) door about it. And ah, but we did appreciate their doing that and, and I think that this open honesty ah, I believe it has helped the public ah, accept what is happening over there. And ah, accept the fact the situation is being cleaned up now.

15:27:47

A:

And ah, I think generally the public is supportive of them. The only negative comments I hear now and then is somebody saying I wish they could speed up the process. But again I'm not a scientist and I don't know what ah, all was involved over there, but I can just visualize in my own mind that you're dealing with materials you don't know exactly what they are and they're highly contagious materials shall we say.

15:28:13

A:

And ah, damaging materials that you do have to be careful and come up with a very careful game plan as far as ah, cleaning the contamination up.

15:28:26

Q:

Great, yeah that's ah, that's a big change, and ah, for it to be ah, was it still the AEC then, the Atomic Energy Commission?

A:

Ah, yes, at that time it was.

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Q:

When you actually tried to get them to ah, divulge to ah, how has that changed emergency procedures in the township?

15:28:50

A:

Ah, number one it ah, it ah, we established through the fire and life squad service, a good relationship with the plant. And they ah, we now have a mutual aid agreement with the plant. They assist us with their equipment, we assist them when needed. And I think that probably came about through a lot of exercises ah, through our civil defense ah, planning, both nationally and locally.

15:29:22

A:

And ah, we would ah, spent many a Saturday ah, having mock situations arise and I would usually work out of Civil Defense Headquarters over in Hartwell at the time, but we had trustees and other personnel on call here at the township building. And they ah, ah, I think through that, that enabled our fire and life squad people to establish ah, more solid relationship with the fire and life squad people, safety people at ah, the Fernald plant. So ah, ah, I think that has worked out very well too.

15:30:01

Q:

Was that mainly a joint response, those drills?

A:

Ah, yes, right, um-hmm.

15:30:07

Q:

Tell us what a typical, well actually we need to change tapes. Sorry, I was so excited there I had a.

(Tape ends)

TAPE FLHP0156

16:01:01

(Cameraman - all right we are rolling)

16:01:03

Q:

Now I'll ask you my favorite, question. Um, with the joint response ah, what's a typical day of mock drills like?

A:

Ah, somewhat chaotic, not really ah, I say that facetiously. Ah, it um, you start very early in the morning, well really ah, before that there's a lot of preparation, everybody having to know their assignment, ah this type of thing. And ah, then ah, as we said, we start rather early in the morning and it'd run 'till about mid afternoon and such.

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16:01:44

A:

Ah, I think of the feeling, there's a little feeling ah, on everybody's part of hectic-ness at first, on the onset but as they get more comfortable with the situation the it's ah, ah, it gets better. I think the ah, the fun part about it is ah, maybe I should put quotes (demonstrates quotes with hands) around that word "fun," but to me the most interesting part, you never really knew what was gonna happen next.

16:02:13

A:

And only those who planned the drill knew this ahead of time what the plan would be and sometimes they would throw some pretty interesting things at us (chuckles), you know. Ah, my job during those drills as I mentioned earlier was to work at the ah, Civil Defense Headquarters out in Hartwell. We had a team stationed here in the township and I would be in constant telephone communications with them. Mainly passing on what is happening, what we've been advised is happening and what we expect them to do about the situation.

16:02:47

A:

Ah, I think the heaviest responsibility to me was our civil defense director use to tell me that ah, that ah, now your the representative of the people in the township, they're depending on you. They're looking at you in this situation ah, we want you to come on with a calm voice, you're going on radio, TV, we want you to keep a calm voice and reassure your people.

16:03:18

A: Tell them what's happening, but to reassure them that everything is all right and what is being done to alleviate the problem and this type of thing. All we stress, you've got to build confidence, the people have got to have confidence in you.

16:03:30

A:

You're their representatives (chuckles) so I have to say that ah, when we would have the mock part of being on radio or television that ah, ah I, I had a certain amount of a, well not stress but a little bit of un-comfortableness ah, am I building these people's confidence in me (chuckles)? That type of thing.

16:03:53

A:

(Siren sounding in background) But, they were interesting days, they were fun days and I think we profited a lot from them, I felt, ah (siren is louder).

(Cameraman - Might want to wait on that one)

(Tape cuts out and begins again)

16:04:03

Q:

We're pretty far in the background.

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A:

Yes, they do that at sirens, I think that, I think it pierces their ears.

Q:

Yeah, it's very loud to them.

(Cameraman- we're rolling again)

16:04:10

Q:

Okay, I'm sorry go ahead with your thought there.

A:

(Laughing) Ah, I, I did feel comfortable and I think the team generally felt comfortable that if ah, ah, a real emergency had occurred, that we'd be able to cope with it. And ah, I think the joint response exercises were very valuable in that regard.

16:04:33

Q:

Now, you lived here ah, a lot of course during the Cold War too, what was the Civil Defense's role during the Cold, Cold War? What kind of things were going with Civil Defense during the Cold War?

A:

Actually out in this part of the world ah, there, there really was no active civil defense program during the Cold War. I think there was probably in Cincinnati and Norwood and some of the bigger cities but out here we really had none. And ah, when I look back on that we probably should have because ah, I realized, and had realized for several years, but just neglected to do anything about it frankly.

16:05:12

A:

Ah, that, that plant would obviously be high on the Russian priority list of targets to bomb. If ah, the Cold War flashed into a Hot War. So, ah, I just thank God that nothing happened like that (chuckles) over the years. But ah, I, I would have to admit that as a trustee I didn't not do my duty in foreseeing that there was a need for a civil defense program out here.

16:05:42

A:

I really don't know looking back on it, how the people would respond if they would really thought oh this is why, why bother, you know, that type of thing. But I do realize now that it could have happened, it might have happened and it ah, scares me to think about it really.

16:06:03

And what was a typical American's mindset during the Cold year, especially in this ar-, during the Cold War especially in this area?

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A:

Oh I think the general feeling was ah, it could happen but ah, I don't ah, it probably won't. That type of thing. I don't think there was any alarm or fear or anything of that sort, it was just ah, a thing that we'll rely on our federal government to protect us and ah, in case anything happens. And, but to say that there was any great alarm about it, I don't think that existed at all.

16:06:38

A:

I think there was this leftover feeling from World War II, hey we beat our enemies in World War II, Germany, Japan and Italy, ah, we can certainly handle the Soviet Union and if neces-, and China if necessary. And I think we had the feeling of ah, the people, that we were super powered and they're just not gonna defeat us. I, I can't really see that there was any great fear or apprehension among the people at that time.

16:07:09

Q:

And the people in this community, how has their attitude towards the government changed since um, all the news at Fernald became public?

A:

I, I think there's a general mistrust of government. I, I don't that Fernald is certainly entirely responsible. That may have been a contributing factor but I, I think that too that the people have seen that the social programs of the government haven't worked very well really. That ah, we thought that at the time they were a acti-, that they were gonna alleviate the problems and obviously they never alleviated the problems.

16:07:50

A:

And ah, I think that people just felt that government has the philosophy if there's a problem, throw money at it and it will go away. And I think they realize now that this just doesn't work that way. Ah, wish that it would but it doesn't. But I would characterize that it ah, that Fernald had a whole lot to do with that attitude it may have contributed to it somewhat.

16:08:17

A:

Particularly them was skepticism back in the '80's ah, about the Fernald plant ah, and in mind I think it's a beautiful story. I think it ah, when all this all first exploded there was a distrust of government, they lied to us, they didn't tell us what was going on. They didn't tell us there was any danger in our community and that type of thing.

16:08:41

A:

But I, and all parties involved, federal, state, local ah, just everyone that was involved, there's a certain amount of antagonism that ah, at the beginning. And ah, and I think that part of this was due to the fact of pending lawsuits and of course things of that nature.

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A:

Ah, which always divides people and ah, and there was of course the natural feeling you have, some who were ah pacifists. I suppose who felt that they ah, that we should just turn our weapons into plow shares, you know, and all the problems will go away.

16:09:23

A:

And then of course you have the extreme opposite let's go bomb them right now, you know, before they bomb us. You have those kinds of things, those kinds of extremes but I think in some point in time ah, and I couldn't tell you when this occurred, but at some point in time it all seem to come together that there finally, this feeling of trust for each other developed.

16:09:46

A:

That we were all in this together, our goal was to clean up the plant, all of us contribute whatever resource we had to that goal and I think that when we reached that point, then, then I think things really began to take shape and we could really see movement over at the plant.

16:10:05

A:

And to me that's a beautiful illustration of what can happen if ah, all the units work together. The private sector as well as all levels of government work together. I have always kind of a felt very prideful about that happening. Not that I was responsible for it (chuckles) but maybe contributed a little bit towards it anyway.

16:10:29

A:

As a trustee did you ever tour the site?

A:

Ah, several times.

Q:

What were your impressions of the site when you were there?

16:10:37

A:

Ah, the first time ah, we trustees went there and I think we were touring it annually and I think they still do if I'm not mistaken. Ah, but ah, the first time I toured the site I thought, what a mess (laughing). Will they ever get this cleaned up? And each time you go back about a year later and you could see the progress being made and ah, that was very comforting really.

16:11:05

A:

So I, yes, I toured that plant several times and enjoyed it, in doing so and ah, again to me I felt my knowledge of the plant was enriched and that ah, but mainly that I could see progress being made in the cleanup process. That was the most comforting to me.

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16:11:24

Q:

What was the most striking ah, progress that you remember seeing?

A:

I ah, suppose the buildings, the change in the buildings, that would be mainly, that was of course the most obviously visible thing that you would see. Ah, the change in the buildings the ah, fact that ah, that ah, there was a furniture fixtures, equipment things like that, that had been decontaminated. That was pointed out to us and ah, ah, course I had know way of knowing other than their word for it that it'd been decontaminated but all I could see in my minds eye was that ah, it looked better than it did a year ago (chuckles).

16:12:08

A:

When I went through the plant it just looked cleaner to me, so I, I, in my own mind I automatically associated that with decontamination.

16:12:19

Q:

And how do you think the clean up is progressing now? How do you feel about it now?

A:

Oh I still feel that progress is ah, rather rapid progress is being made. Again I, I guess there are times I think why do we have to wait until 2003 or what ever the target date is ah, I wish they'd get it all out of there now and get it cleaned up but I realize that they, they, that it's not realistic, that you just have to set goals and go with 'em a step at a time.

16:12:49

A:

And ah, I do feel that ah, that very positive of impact is being made in the cleanup process. I feel good about it really.

Q:

How do you feel about them ah, ah, shipping waste off-site. Were you involved with some of the discussions about the trains and the crossings and those types of things?

16:13:07

A:

We got into some early discussions in the later years of my services as a trustee about that and ah, ah yes we felt that, selfishly perhaps, but ah, we'd like to see, rather see it out in Nevada than out here in Crosby Township, ah, the waste. And we were involved in doing it, I had some apprehensions in my own mind about ah, the, the safety of the railroads.

16:13:38

A:

There were so many ah, weird stories of accidents happening on the railroads and ah, I just thought, I hope that they really done a good job of fixing those road beds so that the trains get to the dump site

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without any accident or anything of that sort. That, that did concern me really that there might be an accident but ah, I just had faith that tile road beds were conditioned so the trains could make the trip.

16:14:09

Q:

Good, I've noticed in my discussions with other people that that has been sort of a big issue. That and also water. Can you tell us a little bit about ah, your dealings with Fernald when it came to the aquifer and the public water supply and those types of things?

16:14:26

A:

Well, urn, we were, we had a, a strong concern about the water particularly around the plant and, in that particular area. Uh, and I'm still glad to see them digging wells and perhaps monitoring that, uh, because I, I think, I would like to see that continued. I was concerned about the um, uh, Big Miami River about the pollution in it.

16:14:55

A:

And yet the um, I was also made aware that the aquifer from which much of the public water supply is drawn is from deep under the bed of the river. And uh, yet I thought well, there's still a possibility that pollution could seep over it a long period of time. Uh, and, and perhaps cause problems. But I, I think that uh, that's, that's being handled now, and I'm not too concerned about that any more.

16:15:24

A:

I never was really too concerned about the water, we're sitting on a huge uh, aquifer here. It's only about 22 feet deep, really. As a joke out here, in Crosby Township, if you build a house you can hit water with a post hole digger. Uh, but it's a wonderful aquifer. Now, I never got too concerned about it because it passed to the uh, above the plant, away from the flow and away from the prevailing winds and that type of thing.

16:15:52

A:

So I, I was never too concerned about this particular aquifer that we draw our own immediate water from, uh, becoming polluted from Fernald. That, that really, I didn't feel, was a legitimate concern.

16:16:09

Q:

Did you or any of your friends and neighbors receive bottled water from the government?

A:

Uh, I didn't. I did know some, have some neighbors that did, yes. Um-hmm.

16:16:19

Q:

How did they feel about that? Did that frighten them further? Or make them more concerned about the water supply?

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A:

Uh, well, I think they did until, uh, perhaps a little bit concerned. Uh, I think more, I think most of 'em felt it was a safety precaution. And it seemed that uh, after their wells were tested, they found their water supply was safe and uh, they went back to drinking it. And I think they were happy about it.

16:16:45

A:

But I, I think there was just this thought, "Hey, there may be something down there. Let's have it tested. In the meantime, I'll drink this bottled water, and use it until uh, until my well is tested." But I think most of them got good results on their wells, and uh, and then that alleviated the fears then, of course.

16:17:05

Q:

And as a trustee, what were some of the property value issues that you had to deal with regarding Fernald?

A:

Uh, in the township as a whole, uh, none really. Uh, again, the only property values that seemed to be affected, as I observed that, was in the immediate vicinity of the plant. That, uh, that those went down. But I would say in the township as a whole, uh, that did not happen. I was surprised. I feared that it might, but I followed that pretty closely. And through the auditor's office, and through real estate brokers and such. And actually, to the north of us, the property values went up (chuckles).

16:17:45

A:

And so uh, I think other than, uh, I think there's about a hundred and ten parcels of land in, immediately surrounding the plant. That's, it's those parcels of land that water was supplied to ultimately. Uh, I think their prices took a dip at the time. And then I know of some instances that they really did, but urn, here in the township, there was no serious uh, depreciating effect from it.

16:18:15

Q:

In light of that, how did you feel about the class action suit that was uh, filed?

A:

I uh, I had some, some mixed emotions on that. I felt, "Yes, it's the proper thing to do." Uh, I guess where my mixed emotions came from was uh, I felt that uh, some settlements were inequitable. Some people got huge sums, uh, well, not huge sums, but pretty good sums of money who I knew personally have never had any fear of the plant.

16:18:52

A:

Some of them had even told me, well they thought they made chicken feed over there. And they really had no fear of the plant. And there were other people who uh, uh, had I felt, had some real legitimate

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fears, for themselves and their family, and they, they seemed to get very little out of it. So uh, that that, was the only thing.

16:19:14

A:

I, I felt it was the proper thing to do, and I think maybe it speed up the cleanup, which was of the utmost importance to me. But uh, uh, I would just have to say I didn't think the settlement was fair and equitable in every instance. And I guess when you're dealing with that major a problem, it would be pretty hard to uh, make everybody happy, and uh, make every situation equitable.

16:19:43

A:

And I know the committee, I, I know members of the committee personally. Uh, the trustees of, of the uh, fund, and I know they, they sincerely tried their best. They worked hard on it. Uh, and they, they tried their very best, but uh, it was just one of those things that it's, again, hard to be fair to everybody (chuckling) in a thing like that happens.

16:20:08

Q:

Now that case never actually went to trial. Um, what was your reaction when the government decided to settle out of court?

A:

Well, having worked in the court system for several years, uh, some 17 years, I felt it was the best thing they could do. Uh, it uh, would've dragged on for years and years, and uh, been constantly in the headlines. I think it would have been divisive to the communities, not only our community, but the surrounding communities. Uh, and I just really felt really glad that they decided to settle. I, I just felt that it was the proper thing to do.

16:20:50

Q:

Great. Now, you mentioned to me that your son worked at Fernald for a couple of years.

A:

Um-hmm.

Q:

And uh, can you tell me your um, your reaction to uh, him working there, and also the types of discussions that you had, or didn't have (both laugh) about his uh, work there?

16:21:07

A:

Well, uh, he told me very little, really. Uh, and uh, I think he almost treated me as if I was one of the informants that (laughing) uh, might, might go and uh, inform on him. But uh, I'm just joking of course. But uh, we had very little discussions as to, uh, well really none, as to exactly what he did over there.

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16:21:30

A:

Uh, and I think one day while I was taking one of those tours of the plant, I did see him riding a bicycle from one (chuckling) building to another over there. And he waved to me, but I still to this day have no idea what he did over there, as far as that goes. Um, his employment over there came after the uh, big problems of the middle '80s.

16:21:54

A:

I think if I remember right, he probably worked there in the uh, oh, 1986 to '88, somewhere in that vicinity of time. I can't remember the exact years, but somewhere around there. And uh, it uh, I think that uh, safety had become a uh, strong emphasized issue over there by then. And he told me they were very safety conscious as a result of all these problems.

16:22:25

A:

And I never really had any fears of uh, him being contaminated, anything of that sort. But uh, had he worked there in earlier years, I might have had those fears of course. But he did it say that safety now was being very much emphasized. I think that uh, he felt uh, he expressed one feeling to me that uh, that I had always suspicioned. Uh, that the problems arose I think from possibly a couple of things.

16:22:59

A:

I think number one, the old saying, "familiarity breeds contempt," and I think that over the years as the employees got more used to handling the processing materials over there, they probably grew less fearful of them, you might say. And uh, and I think when that happens, and then you get a little too familiar with you're, what you're doing, that uh, and you begin to forget safety precautions.

16:23:26

A:

And it's just a natural thing to do, and uh, you just forget safety precautions, and then accidents do occur of course. The other thing uh, I think that from my own observations, prior to the middle '80s, there was a lot of nepotism in the plant. And uh, I, I knew so many people over there who had relatives who had relatives that had relatives working there.

16:23:54

A:

And, and uh, I guess the old problem exists with nepotism that uh, if your brother-in-law fouls up, you're not in a very good position to fire him. (chuckles) So, so consequently, uh, you're inclined if, if brother-in-law fouls up, you don't wanna wi-, make wife's brother mad at ya, or wife mad at ya, or her family mad at ya, so you cover up for him. It's just a natural tendency.

16:24:19

A:

And uh, I think those're the two things, he and I both discussed that, and uh, I told him that was a feeling I had. I had nothing to substantiate it, was just a feeling, and he, he agreed with me from his knowledge over there, in his two years employment there.

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16:24:35

Q:

Did you know any other Fernald workers during your years in the community, and if you did, what were your discussions with them?

A:

Uh, I knew several. Yes, quite a few, gone to church with some, and just knew others socially, and had one former trustee who was an employee over there, that I worked with him for four years as a trustee. Uh, again, as to what their specific jobs were, there, they, very little discussion on that, or none, really.

16:25:10

A:

But um, uh, most of them seemed to feel, s-, I'd say all of them that I knew, really, seemed to feel comfortable in their environment over there, and uh, that type of thing. Uh if you had a couple of them, jokingly, uh, I'd walk up to them and say, "I'm full of atomic energy," and like, and they'd say, "Yep, I'm gonna energize you" (puts hands up, palms forward).

16:25:33

A:

And that type of thing. "Now you won't have to pay your light bill because you'll glow in the dark." And that type of thing. (Laughing) But joking around, but I would say the people that I knew that worked over, even prior to the difficulties uh, public difficulties, uh they, they impressed me as being comfortable in their environment, I don't, they didn't seem to have a worry about it.

Q:

Now living so close to the Fernald plant as you do, how many miles away are you?

16:25:58

A:

We're about two, two and a half miles.

Q:

So you're fairly close to the plant. Are you on the medical monitoring program?

16:26:09

A:

No, no I'm not. I know several people who are and, and very satisfied with it, but I didn't, I never felt a need to, to do that.

Q:

Okay. And uh, what other organizations were you involved with besides being a trustee, I know that maybe you were on a couple of the other boards. Is that right?

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16:26:33

A:

Yes, I was uh, uh involved with uh the schools of the Southwest District. I was ah, on ah, an advisory committee for several years that they have that's an advisory committee to the board of education. And the board would come to the advisory committee and we'd hold monthly meetings and they'd discuss some of their problems.

16:26:54

A:

Or the teachers would come and discuss problems and they wouldn't feel they were, feel they weren't getting satisfaction from the board so they present their case to us. And the board members, present of course, ah, I served as president of that I believe it was for three years, I was on it for approximately ten years.

16:27:15

A:

I was also in the Harrison Kiwanis Club for a number of years and uh, involved in my church for a, well ever since I was a small child I've been involved in church. And involved in my church here in the community for quite a few years.

16:27:36

Q:

Great! Now uh, in your work with uh, the Southwestern School District, I've got a lot of people ask me this, they said that in their classrooms, as children, they remember that the teacher would say how many kids here, how many of your parents work at Fernald? And the children would raise their hands and they would count. Can you tell us the reason for that?

16:28:00

A:

I would suppose the reason for it, I've never heard that discussed at any of the advisory committee meetings. But I think what was happening was the federal government used to give the school a subsidy based on the number of pupils whose father, mother or both worked at the Fernald plant, or some of the other, or any defense plant really.

16:28:27

A:

And uh, and again, this is during the Cold War years, and they uh, and I suppose that the teachers reporting to the principal and they were double checking to make sure the federal government was giving them all they were entitled to probably. At least that would be my guess anyway.

Q:

Good. Okay, we're gonna take another break here and switch tapes again. I just have have a few more questions.

16:28:52

A:

Okay.

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Q:
Just maybe two more questions so we'll go ahead.

17:01:00
A:
Okay.

Tape FLHI0156

Q:
Great! Umm, can you tell us a little bit about some of the outreach programs umm, that Fernald has been doing with the Southwestern School District? Do you know anything about that?

17:01:16
A:
I'm really not that familiar with it. That issue uh, I do remember hearing uh, something about it but uh, that issue came up after I had retired from the board of trustees. So I'm really not familiar enough to comment on it actually.

17:01:32
Q:
Okay, I just didn't know from that side if you knew anything. Umm, they're tearing down the plant pretty quickly, like you said, the progress is being made at a pretty amazing rate. Uh, what would you like to see done with that land, when it, all the buildings are gone?

17:01:48
A:
When everything's gone? What I would like to see uh, is the uh, well let me back up to say this, first of all of course there's a stigma attached to the land and I think it's going to be there for many years to come.

17:02:03
A:
Uh but what I uh, my suggestion, if the President were to ask me what to do with it, which I'm sure he won't, but uh, if I were to be asked a plan for the future use of that plant after everything is removed. I would suggest this, that uh, that I believe the land uh, lies in either two or three townships, I'm not sure if part of it's in Morgan, or not, I know part of it's in Ross and the majority is in Crosby Township.

17:02:33
A:
But at any rate, I would like to see it turned over to those townships jointly. And uh, the township trustees appoint a commission to oversee the uh, land. And my first usage would be to uh, have it turned into a large game preserve.

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17:02:54

A:

With the idea being in mind that it might be uh, and you might be talking about a matter of something over thirty years, but ultimately if the animals and plants are restored to it and they are free from contamination with proper checks and that type of thing. And I really think that nature is such that if the animals themselves came back to it, I think you can pretty well be satisfied that that land is safe and inhabitable.

17:03:24

A:

And then whatever they wish to do with it, a big park or a big industrial sub-division, or whatever, that would have to be decided at the time. Uh, but again, that would be my thought, that I would feel confident, not that I expect to be around thirty years from now, but if the plant and animal life was restored, if animals came back, and you could take an animal and capture it and and test it and found it free from contamination, I think that would pretty well relieve the stigma.

17:04:03

A:

But I believe, most of all, what it would, in my mind, if animals decided to come back here that would pretty well convince me it was free of contamination.

Q:

Great. (Off-camera: we need to stop) Do you wantta pause? Just two more questions actually for you so go ahead. You had mentioned to me previously about mock raids.

17:04:25

A:

Oh yes. I would, this was quite a long time ago, I would say 19, the late 50's, early 60's, somewhere in that period of time. My children were small at that time and uh, they're in their forties now so you know it was a long time ago.

17:04:46

A:

But we were uh, my wife and two children and I were out just taking a ride one late one summer evening and we happened to drive Willey Road right past the Fernald plant. And we saw oh some nine I believe airplanes in V formation flying over, it was still daylight enough that I could look up and see the insignia on the wings and identify it as our own U.S. Army planes, as they were I believe, U.S. Air Force, they were, I, friendly planes anyway.

17:05:19

A:

But they uh, flew over the plant and they swooped down over the plant, and like they were doing a low level bombing, and uh, uh we concluded that that's what they were, having a practice run on the plant. Uh, I think uh, a day or two later I happened to see a person that I worked with at the time and he was in the Air Force Reserves as a pilot, and uh at that time he flew out of Wright-Pat uh, and he uh, I asked him about it and he said oh yes, we come down quite frequently and make mock raids on Fernald.

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17:05:58

A:

And then we have to go back and write out written reports on how much damage we did, and this type of thing, you know, all mock raids. And uh, it got to the point where uh, he told me uh, a few weeks later that oh I flew over your house Saturday night and I bombed your house, you know.

17:06:19

A:

And uh, it would, he told me he was often involved in these mock raids that uh, that, that they would occur and they would use the Fernald plant as one of their targets.

Q:

Did you ever know how Fernald had reacted to that or was that something that Fernald and Wright-Pat worked in conjunction.

17:06:38

A:

They apparently worked in conjunction, I, I never knew their reaction to it. I, I will have to say I wondered if they even knew it was happening, but uh, uh, and I asked him that question, this gentleman that I worked with and uh, he honestly didn't know if Fernald people knew it and approved of it at all.

17:06:58

A:

He said I really don't have any link to the communications, I just, they tell me to go down there a bomb Fernald and I do that.

Q:

Well considering it was restricted air space, I'm sure they knew.

A:

I would think so.

17:07:12

Q:

I would think, yea. Since it was restricted, I mean you couldn't fly over Fernald unless, I mean, they would, they were very adamant about that and there would be a big investigation if there was an airplane or whatever over Fernald.

A:

Yea, right.

Q:

That wasn't suppose to be over Fernald.

A:

I would assume so.

17:07:23

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Q:

Yea, (off-camera: they'd be shooting themselves down) They'd be shooting themselves down, yea, that's right. (Laughter) Oh, my gosh. Um, let's see, seems like there was. I think we've covered everything. Umm, actually there was something that should be notes on here that I thought was kinda interesting. Um, there are a lot of people in Crosby, in the Crosby Township area, that would like to see Fernald cleaned up a lot quicker. And uh, what's your reaction when they say those kinds of things?

17:08:08

A:

I, I too would like to see it cleaned up a lot quicker. Uh, I, I just really don't know if its feasible or not, I don't know that much about it to say, I am, again, I'm not a scientist, I've never worked at the plant, I really don't know that much about it to, I mean it would be presumptuous of me to say it should be cleaned up quicker.

17:08:33

A:

But I can see where these people are coming from, I'm often asked do you think these people are milking it over there and then they might be I have no way of discussing it. Again, going back to the relationship I had with them as a trustee when I retired, and that goes back to the beginning of 1990.

17:08:54

A:

Uh, I felt that for the most part they were working in good faith, and so uh, I, I uh, don't know that I could really justly criticize the pace at which they're working. They may be milking it, I don't know, I'm not in a position to say, but uh, uh, if they get out of there in the early part of the next century I think that will be satisfactory.

17:09:21

A:

I would rather them be a little slower and safer in getting the material out than to speed it up and have an accident happen with it.

Q:

Good. And uh, (off camera: alright, we are rolling again) Okay. Uh, with your dealings with Fernald, especially in the late 80's and early 90's, umm, do you know anything about the On-Site Disposal Facility?

17:09:50

A:

No, I'm really not familiar with that. That became an issue after I left the board of trustees. I, I've heard of it, but I can't say that I know that much about it.

Q:

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Well, they are gonna be planning on storing waste on site, and it's (Comment: I had heard that) mostly demolition rubble and low-level contaminated soil. How do you feel about keeping some of that waste within the community and putting it in a On-Site Disposal Facility?

17:10:18

A:

Oh, I suppose if I had my druthers, I'd rather see it moved elsewhere. Uh, again, I don't know how feasible that is, uh, I'm in no position to say that they're wrong for putting it there. Maybe that's the best way to dispose of it.

17:10:38

A:

Uh, if it presents a safety hazard moving it elsewhere, then, uh, I think that would justify keeping it here. Although I would like to see everything gone. Period. Really. But again, you get down to feasibilities, in which I'm not competent, confident to comment on.

Q:

And how do you feel about this particular effort to preserve the history of Fernald and the surrounding communities?

17:11:06

A:

Well, I think that's great. I'm, I'm, I think that that, I fully support that, I think it should be done, I think it would be a wonderful thing. Uh, because it is historical fact, and uh, oh 30, 40, 50 years down the road our great-great grandchildren will uh, look back and this and they'll have uh, historical archives to refer to.

17:11:33

A:

And uh, I think it's very good. I think it's something that uh, could possible make good subject matter to be taught in high school in some future date. At least part of a course in high school. I, I, I think it's very positive, I'm very much for it.

Q:

Great. Now is there anything that we didn't cover that you wanted to cover? Anything that you want to add?

A:

I think I've done all the blabbing I can think of. No, no I really can't think of anything else.

17:12:05

Q:

Okay, great. We're gonna do now what we can natural sound. And that's just getting a little bit of room, well room tone, outside, so if we can just have quiet on the set for about thirty seconds and we'll go ahead and do this. It's natural sound.