

**Oral History Interview of  
Larry and Karlene Davies**

**Interviewed by: Robert Weaver  
January 10, 2020  
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:**  
*American Agriculture Movement Interviews*

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## Interview Series Background:

The American Agriculture Movement grew out of the populist agrarian protests of the late 1970s. Officially chartered in August of 1977, it remains active. Materials in the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library reflect principally its formation, the tractorcade protests of 1977-1979, and the farm and rural suicide hotline prevention efforts of the 1980s. Materials include oral history interviews, photographs, video and film, and miscellaneous papers.

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Larry and Karlene Davies as they discuss farming and American Agriculture. In this interview, Mr. Davies describes protesting in Chillicothe, Illinois and his involvement with the American Agriculture Movement.

**Length of Interview:** 01:02:46

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### Keywords

Farming, Politics, Trump Administration

**Robert Weaver (RW):**

This is Robert Weaver from the Southwest Collection. I am here conducting oral histories at the American Agriculture Movement reunion in Lubbock, Texas. The date is January 10, 2020. And I have a couple people here with me if you would—you first, give me your full name?

**Larry Davies (LD):**

Larry Davies.

RW:

And what's your date of birth?

LD:

10/15/45.

RW:

And your name?

**Karlene Davies (KD):**

Karlene Davies. I was married to Victor Jones before that. And my birthday is January 5, 1943.

RW:

Forty-three. And that's Karlene—I'm double checking—K-a-r-l-e-n-e.

KD:

Yeah.

RW:

Because we want to get it right. So, where were you born?

LD:

At Dawn, Missouri.

RW:

Dawn, Missouri. And you?

KD:

Chillicothe, Missouri.

RW:

Chillicothe. And where do y'all live now?

LD:

Ludlow, Missouri.

RW:

Ludlow. Okay, so—

LD:

I'm closer to Dawn than I've ever been.

RW:

So you said that—I guess we'll start off, that y'all had just gotten married. So for about four months, what's that story? Let's dive in there and then work backwards and forwards, whatever happens.

LD:

Well, we've grown up in the same area. Knew who each other was all along, and we went to—we'd been in—our first time really together we didn't—and we was friends with their spouses, not real close but good neighbors and friends.

KD:

And he's a distant relative of my deceased husband. And our kids went to the same school, and our youngest ones went to the same college and were roommates. There was like three cousins and—two girls and two boys in a shared apartment with two bedrooms when they were going to Perryville [?][00:02:04]. So we've known each other for a long time. At the same church, and—

RW:

And what was your previous husband's name?

KD:

Victor Jones.

RW:

Victor Jones. And then your spouse?

LD:

Ruthann Davies.

RW:

Ruthann Davies. So let me think. Were y'all born on the farm in the hospital?

KD:

In the hospital for me.

RW:

Hospital for you?

LD:

And at home.

RW:

At home. And is that where—because I'm trying to figure out a way for both of you to answer. So is that the same farm that you then stayed on over the years?

LD:

It was a rented farm that folks lived on at the time. I still own some of the ground, the family ground that we originally had. And then I bought some other than that, and then I bought the place. That was in Carroll County, and I bought a place in Livingston County.

RW:

And then you, did you—what was your family story?

KD:

Well, my parents lived on a farm just two miles south of Dawn. And my dad passed away and then Mother, she moved to Chillicothe and was there a few years before she passed. But Victor and I, his farm had been in the family a hundred years in '74.

RW:

Oh wow.

KD:

So we lived on that farm. And I might tear up with this.

RW:

That's okay, we're talking about old times, and that's what happens.

KD:

Anyway, and he bought his mother's place then, and got it through the Farm Credit Union. They made him take what he owned and pile it in with that. And then we had a lot of cattle. There was three hundred and sixty-five acres total, and then they got the two \_\_\_ [00:04:20], which wasn't big like he has. But in '85 started nursing school and we were in a difficulty because the cattle

market dropped, so he got a job working at a schoolhouse as a part-time janitor driving a school bus. We had two little kids, Victoria and Rebecca, and then a son from a previous marriage living there, and he was—well he was born in '70. The other two were born in '75 and '77. And the little ones he would take to school with him early in the morning while I was going to school, and we made it that way. Well, we couldn't make our payment in '85, we had to file for bankruptcy. They was going to declare banks—so we filed bankruptcy. And we moved, we had a cattle, the cattle we didn't have on the note was twenty-three head and we took it two miles over to my dad's place and hid the amount. And then they sold the farm at the courthouse door in '86. And we just stayed there. We didn't know where to go, what to do. I still had another year of college to do. And so I was working at a nursing home a couple of days a week, and so we just, after the bankruptcy he borrowed some equipment from a cousin next door, and they planted some crops, we brought our cattle home from—that we had over at Dad's, pastured him. So the next year in '87, FHA [**Federal Housing Administration**] bought the farm at the courthouse door. There was neighbors there to buy it. And we drove by, but we didn't stop. And they said that when the auction started, FHA made a bid and they said, "Sold." And the neighbors and others that was there to buy it didn't even get a bid in. There was no chance at all. It went to FHA. They got it. And so they didn't do anything to us, and in '87 I graduated from college, got a job. They come out and ask us if we would like to rent it from them. We'd been there a year, basically. So, so much for the pasture, so much for the cropland. So we did that. And then in '88 they came and asked us if we would be interested in buying it back. And we said yes, and in '89 we bought it back, I think in May. But in March before we got it bought, the neighbor across the road had a big fire, caught our big barn and burned it to the ground. But they didn't—well I mean we couldn't collect, we didn't have it insured, it belonged to them. They didn't care if all the buildings burnt, all they were interested in was the land, so we lost that building. But anyway, we hung in there and got the thing back.

RW:

Well this is—so this is going on in the eighties? So I guess then the big question is obviously you were involved in the American Agriculture Movement, right? Did this sort of play into—did you get involved with it at all? Or the family?

KD:

No, we had to—we weren't into that, but they came out like the Barron girl.

LD:

Mary.

KD:

Mary helped us. And we had to go on the commodity food lines and get in line. Embarrassing.

RW:

So, but I mean this was happening all over.

LD:

Yes.

KD:

And I know the Catholic Church brought food and gave us a hundred dollars and we got a check from Willie Nelson, a hundred dollars, and we went up there and watched Mellencamp and heard Jesse Jackson. And we didn't park any—

LD:

This was about the same time frame that we was having the protest there at the USDA in Chillicothe.

RW:

Well yeah, and you had mentioned that before we had started recording. So, protest in Chillicothe, how did that come about, first off?

LD:

Just because of things like hers, they had—a group of us that had got together, they was just too many kinds of things, too many deals coming down through FHA basically.

KD:

What we wanted to do was we had forty acres that was separate from the rest of the farm, it was across the blacktop, and my husband wanted to sell that to save the rest of it. And they wouldn't let us break it all apart, it was all done.

LD:

And you started out with a federal land bank.

KD:

Right. They're the ones that wouldn't let us separate it.

LD:

And then they throwed you into FHA.

KD:

The FHA bought—they sold it at the courthouse door. FHA bought it.

LD:

You had a loan with FHA.

KD:

Just working, yeah, that's where we bought the farm back from.

RW:

So, these things were happening to everyone.

LD:

Yes, and we come to find out that they had a list of about thirty people that they were planning on getting rid of. And I haven't—but some of them had seen that list, the more I get to thinking about it. I've heard about it several different ways, real close contacts and from the source that actually did see the list. There was auctioneers at that time was kind of the auctioneer of the community, and FHA was getting them to sell the properties that they was taking back. And his name, one of the auctioneer's name was actually on the list, on the thirty list that they were going to foreclose on.

RW:

Do you remember his name?

LD:

Yeah, at this time I won't give it to you, but—

RW:

Oh no that's fine. By the way that's totally fine.

LD:

Because I haven't got to talk to him, but I've given the name, I don't think it'd be a problem.

KD:

It's probably the same one that I—

LD:

Yes, the same one that give—

KD:

He came out and was taking property from our—you know, to sell. And that was supposedly on the list to go. And we could keep one tractor and they had some stuff. And so he was back in

where he wasn't supposed to be and I went out and asked him. I mean he was a friend of ours, we thought, kids were in FFA [**Future Farmers of America**] together and stuff. And said, I said his name, I said, "Do I need to bring my shot, Charlie."

LD:

Go ahead—

KD:

That's just, yeah, I don't care. I just don't care. Anyway I said "Charlie do I need to bring my shotgun out here?" He said, "No, no, we're not going to—no, we're not taking anything that's on the list." Well later, up at the cattle barn we had a paddle river [?][00:12:40] chute, it wasn't a portable one. And gates and panels and everything, well they took that chute out, that big working chute and took it off, didn't touch any panels or gates and there were just—I mean that chute was in there just the same as another, it wasn't a wheeled one you could move, it was built in there. I was so irritated, but I was going to school, working and I couldn't be there all the time, and my husband was gone and they just went in and raped the place. Well.

RW:

Well, and so what was the date of the protest that we were talking about?

LD:

We moved in on March seventeenth of—

KD:

Seventeenth, it was St. Patrick's Day.

LD:

Saint Patrick's Day, it was of two thousand—or 1976.

KD:

No.

LD:

Or, '86.

RW:

Eighty-six.

LD:

And we were there a hundred and eighty three days.

KD:

Eighty-five, wasn't it? I think it was. Anyway.

LD:

Yeah, a hundred and eighty-five days.

KD:

The farmers would have to go and take their tractors and stuff out to farm with them and bring them back.

RW:

Bring them back, okay.

LD:

We switched combines for tractors and stuff like that but we kept the parking lot full for a while. And we done it with the help—there was a guy there that was a plumber, and an electrician and done their work and stuff. And he had a Quonset building that was at the south end of the parking lot that he owned, and so we had his cooperation and if we hadn't of had his cooperation we probably never would have gotten it pulled off. By Don and Katie Donahue was their names, and they more or less turned their office over and building over to us. And anything we needed it was very good about doing, but we—the day that we went into the—we had had a meeting or two before we went to deciding all what we was going to do and after we had found out about this list, and how we needed to handle it. And it was David Stallings that was the FHA supervisor at that time. And he was a cocky bastard that didn't—that he was there for one thing was to get rid of a bunch of us. And the older gentleman that he had taken his place and had several of us that's been involved in it and was involved with the older gentleman that was [inaudible] [?] [00:15:35]. He was a caring type of guy, local guy and the Stallings wasn't anywhere around. And he was local type of guy and he was getting of age that I think he seen what was coming down and maybe they had already tried to force his hand and he just retired and got out of it. And so—

RW:

What was his name?

LD:

Gifford Boswell.

RW:

Gifford Boswell.

LD:

Boswell, Boswell. And so he was gone and was dealing with Stallings and he was a young guy, wasn't from there, he didn't care about anybody but himself, and so we decided we was going to go in to get rid of him. And of course you know how getting a federal employee fired goes, it's pretty hard to do.

RW:

So that was the main thing you hoped was to get him out or replaced with somebody more amenable to everyone.

KD:

They didn't fire him, they just moved him to a different state. Got somebody—

LD:

And after a hundred and eighty-five days we did get him out of that office. It didn't get out of the system. But which was what we wanted him completely out of the system, but we didn't get that, but we did get him out of that office. He was replaced by a somewhat local guy that—Phil Faye, that—

RW:

Is that F-a-y-e?

LD:

F-a-y-e, yeah. And he was—he had been—his family, they was about thirty miles away but his family was also involved with FHA. And a bank, a federal land bank I think in fact, maybe in a bank too, but—and I even went—after he come in as a friend of the farmer, you know, “Well I'm one of you,” and all this stuff, “And I'm going through this.” Well it was a partnership deal and he'd got his name out of the partnership, and he had been in the service and he had worked for FHA a little while before that, so he already kind of had an in, where he had a job, so he got that job, which his name would have still been on the mess that his farm was in, wouldn't have—he wouldn't have been able to—wouldn't have got that job.

RW:

To get—yeah, that makes sense.

LD:

And we even as a group while we was protesting down there they was having trouble with some of their—and there was a bunch of us went to about you know probably seventy-five miles north and west of us to a hearing for supporting them guys. And this Faye had the nerve to tell me that—and at that time I thought he was kind of on the right track and doing what we needed to

do, that he was glad to see a friendly face there that after—the support and support of them, that was one of the worst days of my life as far as I'm concerned as I look back on it if I regret any day of my life, that's the number one. But after saying what he'd done later on mine, but then—

RW:

So while I'm thinking about what did he do then?

LD:

Well after we got Stallings out and he kind of—and we moved the equipment all left the parking lot and everything kind of went back to normal, well then—and they'd brought another territory guy in, or the area guy in and helped get some of this smoothed over, well then we spent—on my property we spent the next—he would've been—Phil was—he was the one that foreclosed on you guys, wasn't he. But then on mine, we worked and I worked with through the Chillicothe area vo-tech school, and the ag program and the state of Missouri has got an adult ag—adult education and farm management group that was about, oh, twenty or more in. It's a group, you pay dues to get in for their expertise and help with farm management and another set of eyes to look over things. And we went to—of course making farm plans and everything and about two or three years down the road all at once—and this Phil Faye, he'd pick on one family at a time. And he'd already picked on one good friend of mine that was also in this protest. And he didn't get them took under, but he did get—they did get out of FHA down to where they was using credit cards to pay things with, the hard way to do it. And they worked their tails off and didn't have much to live on, but they made it through it and he's passed away now, she, his wife was still living, and the son's on the farm, but they wouldn't—because they lived too high on the hog or bought too much expensive machinery or anything that way our department [?] [00:21:36]. Every time we'd make a farm plan and Phil would come up and he'd shoot it down. He'd change it, just change it enough to where wouldn't work. And it wasn't just me making the farm plans, and we was backing it up with records. I had been on—I was on a mail-in record system with the University of Missouri that, at that time, they'd been on over twenty-five years. Well, when we first started—when Phil first started working in there, well, that program wasn't no good. He didn't like that. They'd been in it. Well what did I do [?] [00:22:18] wasn't smart enough to use it. And so it didn't really work for him. It was a program you had to work through, I mean any program you've got to still understand and work through, to make it work. And this Brian Thompson, which Brian happened to be a neighbor of mine was the instructor for adult education side of that, a very talented and a numbers guy and very on top of things. Phil told me, "Well Brian's got a real good program going out there, maybe I ought to think about going into that." So I'd talked to Brian and I'd come to know him and trust him, and felt it probably wasn't a bad deal, not that I was dissatisfied with the MRI record system, but they—I went ahead and went for my MRI record system and all Brian did was took—he used Quickbooks or one of the regular programs that he had twist up and down to get to do what they was wanting to do, and it was a very good program—I wasn't—but it was just the fact that Phil had mentioned this. Well when I

went to having the trouble of getting these farm plans through, Brian and I was working together on—we was working off a number of computer numbers for back twenty-five, thirty years plus and could back up everything we was doing. But if he changed it because this was wrong or that was wrong. And I've lost count now, but I think one year I think we done like seventeen or eighteen farm plan changes before we finally—and that put us way up in the summer. I mean I was having to operate on just what I could—grain sales and what I could finally get kind of out—I wasn't getting any money to borrow at that time. And so this went over—on over a two or three year period. And we finally ended up, got around and I had—that was after farm credit or federal land bank and PCA had joined together and they went into farm financial, farm credit financial. And I had bought a planner and we went through Ford credit, because that was on the one I had bought previous to that, and they—when I went to buy that one, the dealer said, well, they had—was at Cameron, which was in another county, and I had tried to talk to farm credit, different times there in my county, at Livingston County, and this one that I went to was at Cameron in Clinton County, he says we've got a real good lady here that's good—I don't see anything wrong with it, I think she'll take it. And he called her and she come over there and looked the papers over, a matter of half hour we had the money for the planter and they was tickled to death to get it. And if it'd been left up to Phil all that time, I'd been broke for two or three years already then. So we'd done the planter, and then we kept going through this mess and I was getting more fed up with it all the time and I went and talked to her and told her everything we'd been trying to work through with them, and she said—she says, “I don't see anything wrong with it,” said, “We'll take it.” And so that's what we ended up—and they had better terms and you could lock in longer term loans than you could with a bank, and the banks, they wanted FHA to back it up if they took it, and it just didn't work out. And that's where I finally got out of FHA, and—

RW:

So did this work out, were you able to keep going as a result of this?

LD:

Yes. And got to—was paid completely out, I bought some more land since that, but back a little bit now, but not enough that I'm worried about it.

RW:

Well if this—so this protest that y'all put together, so was this Ag Movement members, by the way, that did this? Or just the local community?

LD:

A lot of American Ag Movement neighbors within it, but it was local. It was just local, it wasn't done through American Ag.

RW:

Through that.

LD:

We went—Missouri community-- Missouri Rural Crisis Center was a group that had kind of put together, and they were kind of in that same mode of raising hell and whatever to do whatever you needed to get done. And they kind of moved in with us, and with the help, support to us they had some connections that we didn't have. We had three or four concerts there in the parking lot of the USDA building during the hundred and eighty-five days that we was in there.

KD:

Mellencamp came.

LD:

John Mellencamp came and—

KD:

Jesse Jackson gave his—

LD:

And Willie Nelson was there, and Jesse Jackson was there—no, Willie Nelson wasn't there.

KD:

He's—

LD:

His ex-wife lived in Chillicothe, one of his ex-wives lived in Chillicothe.

RW:

One of them.

LD:

But Willie wasn't there, I'm sorry, I didn't—

KD:

But he helped.

LD:

But he helped us, and through the farm aid, they helped us, and that whole deal.

KD:

I still had the farm and I still farmed it. And when we started dating it was that first April he said something about going to church, and I said, "Well I'm not going to go to church this Sunday because I'm going to start farming" He said, [laughter] he'd come and help me. And I said, "Oh, you don't have to." That evening he come dragging in a disc and asked where to go to and he started helping.

RW:

By the way how long ago was that?

KD:

That was in 2018 probably. Because we started dating in August of '17.

RW:

Okay.

KD:

It was the next spring.

LD:

Yeah.

RW:

So then—I mean obviously now you're here at the Ag Movement reunion so you've been involved with them for a long time. Were you involved with more of the statewide or even the national types of things, like the tractorcade, for example?

LD:

No, I didn't go to the tractorcade. I knew about it, and I knew some of the ones that was in it, and we had some American Ag meetings at that time while we was—at the tractorcade deal and after the tractorcade—

KD:

Did you go Washington D.C. to—

LD:

Yeah, we went to Washington, we took a busload from Chillicothe area to Washington D.C.

RW:

At the time? After it—

LD:

No, it was after—we was there after the tractors had left.

RW:

Okay.

LD:

But we had that. One thing back on their protest at Chillicothe is that—we had petition that everybody signed, or anybody that wanted to could sign to get rid of Stallings. Well, it happened when this thirty list come up that they was going to get rid of him, considerable amount of them people was on that list—

RW:

As a matter of fact.

LD:

That had signed the paper. And so that all kind of had a connection. And then the other odd thing about all of this and during that we kind of found out the truth is through this. One of the members that was there, and there again I'm going to withhold names for a little bit. We may be able to get them to you later on, but—

KD:

He asked permission this morning and they didn't want it.

LD:

He got one of the FHA supervisors, and the bar, they happened to be in the same bar in Columbia. And the FHA supervisor began to get a little more than they needed in that. So my friend helped him out a little bit and paid the bar bill and got him to talking, and it seems as though that for every one they got out of and got rid of, it added to their retirement and to their—they had a financial benefit to getting us out of it. And it seemed—we've not been able to put it exactly all together, but it was from what he was getting, it was a percentage added to their retirement.

RW:

For every farmer that that they ran through this and foreclosed?

LD:

For every dollar or hundred dollars thousand dollars that they returned.

RW:

That they returned.

LD:

That they got out of the system, well, it counted to their retirement, which was a real—you know, that could have ended up with big money. And this Phil Faye, when he retired, of course that's all public information, and his—he's got quite a retirement done. I didn't add to it apparently, but unless it was some for just getting them out of the system, even if they didn't foreclose on them, I don't know about that.

RW:

So where did, when they foreclosed on these people, and got this land, where did they—what did they do with it? Who wound up getting it? Predominantly.

LD:

Well—

KD:

Mine was sold at the courthouse door.

LD:

But FHA, there had to be a [REDACTED] in the woodpile somewhere on that, excuse the language, but—

KD:

Because they didn't even— [REDACTED] didn't even get—because there was two [REDACTED] [inaudible] [?] [00:33:23], because our cousin was the one that bid on that, Louis Nelson, across the road was. And I think maybe Mervin Jenkins was there.

RW:

So locally then.

KD:

Local people never even got a chance. They just said, "It's done." One bid and it was done. Sold.

RW:

And then you don't know in what hands it wound up later? That's what I was curious about.

KD:

FHA?

RW:

FHA and then—

LD:

FHA and then they turned around and sold it back, tried to offer it back to them—

KD:

In '89.

LD:

After and between her and her husband working at the school, which was kind of a minor job but at least it was bringing in something and taking care of the kids.

KD:

I graduated in '87 and took a job at St. Joe at the hospital and then I worked there until—

LD:

Got her nurses degree before she had a—

KD:

A couple years I went to Canton [?] [00:34:13]

LD:

And if they had waited about another year before they foreclosed, she'd of had her nurses degree where she'd been—you know, could have made things work.

RW:

Well let me ask you something. First off, where there any things about that you could think of—because I'm about to start asking about how sort of farming changed over those years. Did a long old time. But before you do that, anything else about that protest, or the AAM or—that you could think of that we need to know about?

LD:

Well the AAM was the kind of a back support to—and our tractorcade being an earlier than we was with this, I think it gives us a little bit of—well let's see what they've done with the tractors, we could do the same thing on a smaller scale here.

RW:

And it worked.

KD:

We had the—all the newspapers come out and interviewed us at the time, and I had that paper and I gave it to my youngest daughter. We talked about it right around Christmas time, the weekend before Christmas they were at our house and she said she had it, and then we went up there for Christmas—plum forgot about it. And now they're in Singapore right now, so we couldn't get it.

RW:

Well if you come across it, even if you just happen to know the date of the issue, if you could somehow let us know that. But if you had a copy of it too that you could get placed into the archives, that'd be good. But I mean, do what you can.

LD:

We've got—there's a CD out that was put together from happenings at the time and then a guy that had done a bunch of filming of those happenings, then he's also went back and archived the news stories and stuff like that went along with it and put that all on a CD. It's quite a lengthy CD.

RW:

Oh, that's good stuff.

KD:

But we can get that.

LD:

And right now I don't have one. We've got one of the guys that I talked to this morning does have. He'd gone to see about getting some more copies of it, and we'll get you a copy, if you'll give me your information to get it, I think I've still got it from last year, but—

RW:

Yeah, but I'll get another one. While I'm thinking about I'll get a card. Or if all else fails you could always get it to David and that, I mean, it'll wind up here.

LD:

Yeah, well I think I've got your—didn't you speak to us at—

RW:

I did. But I've got plenty of it, so.

LD:  
Yeah.

RW:  
Go ahead.

LD:  
But we'll try to get you a copy of that. That'll back it up. And the one I talked to this morning said he had a bunch of stuff if he could ever find it that he'd be glad for you to have. And my stuff, and that is one of—I just of course I found out about it a year ago when we was here. When I finally got out, and then the—Brian Thompson, the one that worked with me through the adult education of the tax school, he retired, he said, “What do you want me to do with them? I'm not leaving them at the school.” And so he brought him, they sat there a couple years and I had my folder. I had one of the a to z spandex [?] [00:37:50] folders completely stuffed and starting on the second one, plus a whole bunch of loose stuff that I ended up—I got to every time I'd see them I'd think more how I'd like to kick Phil Faye's ass. I finally just took them and burned them. And I'd have loved to have just boxed them up and sent them down there—

RW:  
You didn't know, but God, I wish you had.

LD:  
I would have loved to, because I would have liked to have seen him make something out of it. We went to—I don't know how many fields we'd done at the state level on that stuff.

RW:  
Well did you ever contact or work with U.S. congressmen, senators, representatives?

LD:  
Well, at the same time that this was going on, one of our local guys was running for a good friend of mine at the time, was running for six district congressmen. And he didn't, and against Tom Coleman. And he didn't end up making it, but he didn't run and we tried to work through Coleman, tried to work through all the—and while the protest was going on, we had went ahead of this protest, when we went up there. But we went and with more or less with this Mortin Hamm [?] [00:39:19] was running for congress. But when we went up there then they went, they'd done a lot of going to see the congressmen and all that stuff.

KD:  
Didn't you say our sixth district had more bankruptcies, and Midland, Texas was the second, or these two was—

LD:

there's a map somewhere, or was a map, whether it's still or not, I'd forgotten about it until this morning when I was talking to the other guys, but when Doug was running—Douggie was the one that was running for sixth district congress against Tom Coleman, and he had a map that they had all put together over—done a lot of research, and the most bankruptcies and bank failures was in the sixth district of Missouri, and around the Midland, Texas area. And that was oil, where we wouldn't had any oil and oil and agriculture both around Midland. And ours would have been all agriculture, no oil involved in it.

RW:

This was all that mid-eighties, when the bottom dropped out of the oil market here.

LD:

Yeah. At about the same time bottom fell out of the land prices.

KD:

[inaudible] [00:40:42] we lost it a lot of cattle. [inaudible] [00:40:44]

LD:

But—

KD:

And then we couldn't even give them away.

LD:

I think that's about the—but that—adding to the retirement. And I know the guy that had that list, and I don't know whether we can actually come up with the list or not. Him and his partner both seen it, both have told different ones about it at different—that they wasn't together, so were pretty assured the list and actually it's not a fixing of one person that list, but that—and then the deal of adding benefit, financial benefit to those supervisors on top of what they was already getting paid just to put somebody else on there.

RW:

So before all this came to a head, and you were—because I'm thinking born in '45, so probably for a good fifteen, twenty years you'd been working already, not counting childhood, going through school and everything. So what—

LD:

I graduated in school in '63 and started farming full-time and working out—working for another farmer after we got done.

RW:

So what were times like then, compared to what happened later? Were there similar problems, is what I'm asking, or [inaudible] [00:42:33]

LD:

Not as bad. It didn't take as much money. And after we got into the eighties I had a friend, a real good friend, old gentleman, older gentleman that had done well and went through the thirties. And my folks had went through the thirties, and my grandparents. And we farmed in the hills. They farmed at the family farm in the hills. Some of my land has been in the—is [inaudible] [00:43:02] land also. But they went about thirty miles south of us and rented in Missouri river bottom, some old what they called ripgut. And it was a grass that grew in the gumbo, real tough type gumbo and they farmed that with old tractors at that time, two bottom plows. And they farmed that, put it in wheat, plowed out all that ripgut and put it in wheat two years in a row. And it worked real good [?] [00:43:37]. And Charles Chalmer [?] [00:43:39] dealer families there in Norburn, and that's what got them through. That and their granddad had bought a new D John Deere, and he, the first year when it went to make time to make a payment, well they told him that he went to the dealer and told them that they just as well come get it, because he couldn't make the payment on it. The dealer says, "Nobody else can either. I know whenever it gets to where you can make it, you will. You keep the tractor and try to make it. I can't use it here, and nobody else can buy it, so you just take it and make the best out of it and pay me when you can," and that's what they done, and he paid it off and bought more equipment off of him as far as that goes, so.

RW:

Well when do you think that kind of—because I've always been curious about this—when did that kind of relationship start to change? Because everybody's got some stories of a time when they'd cut you some slack. You could try to make it back up, but when did that really start to change? Fifties, sixties, or did it—obviously came to head in the eighties?

LD:

Yeah, in the seventies.

RW:

In the seventies, with Carter.

LD:

I would say. I've done business with a small bank there. I told everybody ever since I could see over the counter, I said—well even before that, because the counter was one of them big high ones that stood up at the counter, as kids we'd always done business with that bank and her family's has always done business there too. And it was one of them deals that you'd go do

something and call and tell them what you had done that you need so much money and they'll come in, sign a note, and you'd done it and they have enough trust in your business that you knew what you was doing.

KD:

In the seventies I know Vic would say, "Well go tell them I need a thousand dollars [inaudible] and just have to sign it for it. And then it kind of—a few years later, ten years later, it's down the tubes.

LD:

And I'd say pretty much up until thing started to go south in the late seventies, '79, I bought a farm in '80. Worst time I could've ever bought it. And I didn't borrow through—didn't get a bank that I felt comfortable with and I borrowed through John Hancock loan company on a variable rate interest, and all the banks had variable rate too, you couldn't get any locked in money. And of course when you borrowed from the insurance company you had to provide tax receipts and a financial plan and all this. And FHA had always had that to some point. They hadn't used it as much, and it wasn't a workable plan that they always come up with, but when I bought that farm, I hadn't had it but about six months, and we'd done a bunch of cleaning up and went to fertilizing it and building it up. And the interest rates jumped up from I think it was like 6 something when I bought it, jumped to 14 percent interest. And I hadn't paid the going price for land at that time even for that. But I'd paid a pretty good price for it but wasn't what a lot of it was selling for. And then that's when I got in FHA with—in order to get the lower interest rates, well I got into FHA and I paid every bit of the lower interest rates. It got me through the point that not without its headaches, and the cost wasn't—I wouldn't recommend anybody going to FHA because of cheaper interest because it'll bite you in the ass before it's over.

RW:

Yeah, as it turned out. Well then—so after once you got up into the 1990s, how did it change then? I mean did things—

LD:

Just got continually worse as far as your—you got to have everything documented and duplicated and whatever your—and then—and I'd done, always done a farm plan every year, and a budget you know, and of course the budget always changed, and done that and I still did even—we had to fill the forms, FHA called them a farm plan. We had to fill a farm plan out for FHA, but I also kept my budget that I'd done for myself and basically it was two sets of books because you couldn't borrow from FHA the way they wanted to do it and make money. That's all—you was doomed, you had to know what you was doing other than what they were telling you. This older gentleman that was with—farmer with FHA that got out before that all this stuff went down, he had—my wife was in there one time, and he said, "I think you guys ought to go in

the hog business.” And all the lenders was as guilty, and all through the eighties and into the nineties, or and then starting back in mid—early to mid-seventies, land started going up. Every year when you went to fill out a new plan, well you were supposed to list your assets. Well, all the banks and the FHA wanted you to—well it’s a hundred dollars higher this year, your lands worth a hundred dollars more this year than it was last year, so they wanted you to jump that up. On my plan that I worked off of, I kept it at my cost, what I purchased it for plus whatever expenses I’d done building it up. But the bank was all—well you had collateral, because this was all jumping up every year. Well this year it jumped a hundred and next year it may be a hundred and fifty and the next year two hundred. If you’re getting paper there, dollars, but you haven’t got everything to pay us with, where if you used your—went back, you had your real net worth when you went back into your cost plus your improvement. And the banks and the FHA was all guilty of that, and loaning money, loaning big money. Loaning money that had not ever been loaned, I think. But then when 1980, about ’81 come, and everything tanked, and the land values dropped about half, well when you took your same one that FHA and the banks was working on, you took that plan in, it didn’t work all of a sudden. Well, wonder why. Well because you guys has jumped it up here. Now I could still make mine barely work by taking—by using the cost plus improvements schedule. And we worked with minimal equipment, wasn’t big on—I run some—I bought a new tractor in ’69 and the equipment to go with it, but we didn’t—I didn’t use a lot of equipment, wasn’t but one time about fifteen hundred acres. And you had cattle herds and still raised some hogs, and I got out of the hog business, because I was taking and—then I was doing some trucking, I’d bought a tractor trailer for my own use, and went to do some trucking to make extra dollars, and still do that today to some—not as much but I still got it for my own use. And it just—that just snowballed, and when the fire hit the snowball, well everything disappeared. And then it was all your fault, there wasn’t—you know they encouraged you, “Oh yeah, you can do that, we’ll support this and all this,” but then when it goes bad it’s your fault.

RW:

Yeah, “Why’d you do that?”

LD:

Yeah. And that’s what they had got into.

KD:

You know, buying the property of Mom’s and he’d rented it for years and she was going to live with her daughter and leave the farm, and just sell it to him and—

RW:

Well I’ve got one question because I’ve been thinking about how these things go up and down. Not a political question, just objectively. A lot of people I interview now, especially if they’re

younger, talk about tariffs, which is a recent development right now. And again, not politically, but do you see an effect on people? Is it good or bad? Does it remind you of anything else? Just trying to get the scope of history because y'all have seen a bunch—

LD:

Come again?

RW:

With the tariffs that are affecting farmers right now. Have you seen the effect of those? Is it good or bad?

LD:

I think, in my opinion, this is my personal opinion, he's doing what he's got to do. It ought to have been done a long time ago. Yes, some of the tariffs that they—and the Pic [?] [00:53:45] program that they had years ago didn't do the farms any good. And of course they went through basically the same thing that he was doing with China with Japan, because Japan was one of our big buyers of farm products. And—

RW:

And they did this when? So you're saying that in a previous time they did this same deal with Japan, I see.

LD:

Yeah.

RW:

Go ahead, I'm sorry.

LD:

So this has kind of been done. And it's—the Japan deal has come back, and the China thing, there's two or three things working against the China thing coming back because they've had that Swine Flu over there, well a lot of our soybean meal and corn was going over to feed them hogs so that's going to take—that's going to be slower to recover. And we're needing to have that. But I think he's on track.

RW:

Okay.

LD:

We've just got the—and I know at the time that somebody's going to have to pay for it.

Somebody's going to have to suffer. We're all going to have to suffer, we all need to suffer in order to make what he's doing work. And I don't think the previous administration was—the several previous administrations, especially the last one, if somebody wants something they give it to them. And the way I can see it, and all these foreign countries we give them money and give them this and give them that, and didn't protect the United States. And I think Trump is trying to come back and straighten that up. Well some people don't like it when you're not giving them anything and wanting them to kind of come up to their end of the bargain, and see the—and going to hurt them in the pocketbook a little bit instead of just getting everything handed to them more or less, at their rate, just like if I went to buy something off of you and you thought it was worth a thousand and I didn't think it was, well they give it to you and whatever at the cheap price.

RW:

Yeah, because I figured since y'all had seen a lot of these ups and downs it's good to know—people are going to listen to these types of oral histories, they need to know your perspective right now, the same as earlier. Well I know we've been talking for an hour, and I'm not trying to wrap it up, but I was—did we miss anything? Is there anything else you'd share about the—we've been all over the map here, but is there anything else that you intended to share that we've forgotten about? Or another story to tell? I mean because it's not just—

LD:

Oh we could sit here all day and tell stories, but—

RW:

Well then do it. [Laughter]

LD:

And I'll be glad to meet any time with you, any other time before—I think we're probably running out of time now, but—

RW:

Sure. I'm going to pause recording for a moment.

[Pause in recording]

RW:

Well it looks like we're running out of time. So if you think of other things, you have my card. Or if you find things to donate, but I just want to thank you for sitting down and talking, I wish we'd had more time. Because stories about regular old life and not just financial crisis and other things, we want those too if you think of them.

LD:

One of the things, and I appreciate your doing this, and we're also have got a young man that is writing a story, in fact I just—I seen Patrick—well I'll let you read that. He responded to a text I had just sent him. I'll get you back. This is not part of it.

RW:

Yeah.

LD:

That's the report that just came out.

RW:

So Roger Allison and—

LD:

No.

RW:

Or—

LD:

This is what I wrote to the Saint Patrick—I'll get you his name.

RW:

Okay, okay, good deal.

LD:

And he met with us. They was a family—

KD:

You've got his number?

LD:

Yeah. I encouraged him to—

RW:

And so he's sort of writing up a history, a narrative about these things.

LD:

Yeah, he got into—

KD:

Where's his number?

LD:

A hand fishing issue with the State of—look it's under "Seen". I didn't actually call him this morning. And he got associated with the Chillicothe community over the—they had a guy that was real big in hand fishing. And—it's under S.

KD:

You said C.

LD:

Huh? Under *Seen*. Sean Patrick Cooper. That's off his card.

KD:

Sean Patrick.

RW:

Sean Patrick Cooper

KD:

Sean is how you pronounce it.

LD:

And that was a story for quite a while and then they fought that for a long time. Well then in doing that then he—there in the Chillicothe area there was two families that had moved in here together farming together. And things was kind of going—had went south for them as well as everybody else. And the wife of one of the partners got shot. And they was blaming it onto the son of the other farmer. And I think it was a trumped up deal, and they convicted him of murder, and this young man, seventeen, eighteen years old I think when—and they fought that, and he finally got out, got it reversed and got out. Was out once and they ended up putting him back and over the same thing. This guy had picked up on that story. Well when he got to hearing about the farm protest we had, so he was picking up on that. Now I haven't read any of his book, but he's writing a book. I haven't read any of his book. One of the guys I talked to his morning had read it on the internet, said he seems to be really coming out with the right side of the story. And both sides of the stories, and true to fact. That's the thing we found when we was in the protest.

That—

KD:

He said if you wanted to take his number.

RW:

Oh yeah, I got it. Especially the—

LD:

And I encouraged him, I told him what you all was doing and that he could get a lot of information from you and from—whatever, share information or whatever, so—

RW:

Oh definitely, I mean he could do research here, or he maybe have found something that's worth us knowing about.

LD:

Yeah. And he's going to meet with us again sometimes before spring planting. And he's from back east in Philadelphia.

RW:

Philadelphia.

LD:

And you know, Philadelphia, young man, to be out here—he's probably about your age to be out here writing true stories. And that's the thing we found with a lot of the news. When we'd have the concerts or Jesse Jackson or any of them guys coming in, well the news was all showed up, three television stations out of Kansas City and one out of Saint Joe, and radio, the local radio stations promoted us all the way through it, they backed us and give us the right information. But we found so much of it that we was getting our information well when they was putting our story together it wasn't coming out to be—

RW:

As accurate as you'd hoped.

LD:

As accurate as we'd hoped, there you go.

RW:

Well here, I'll thank y'all again, and go ahead and end the recording.

*[End of recording]*