

WILBERT GOERING DESCRIBES FARMING IN FOUR COUNTIES

Wilbert "Toby" Goering and his family farmed in McPherson, Harvey, Butler, and Lane counties. Heather Holcomb interviewed him on June 23, 2011.

WG: My dad was a great father and I had a great mother and at one time we farmed in Lane County, which is 200 miles from here, and then in McPherson County, in Harvey County, and Butler County. So we were extremely, extremely busy.

HH: So you were farming all those at once? Oh, wow.

WG: Yes, we farmed all those at once. ...

HH: And how did [your dad] find those farms? How did he get connected with those?

WG: My dad was a very, very good manager and even during the Depression years somehow he had cash on hand, so he bought land in Lane County and some in Harvey ... well, Harvey County, we had that for years already ... and another farm in McPherson County, and then also in Butler County. So he farmed those, in total it was about a section of land that we farmed.

HH: So did you have machinery on every farm or did you have to bring things from Moundridge?

WG: Oh, no. No, we had to move them from place to place, and at that time we didn't have a truck; we had a pickup and a four-wheel trailer. To start with, we always pulled this four-wheel trailer ... Then when we got the first truck. I think it was the '50s maybe, that was really a blessing to have a truck.

HH: When did ... he start buying this land, was it in the Depression kind of?

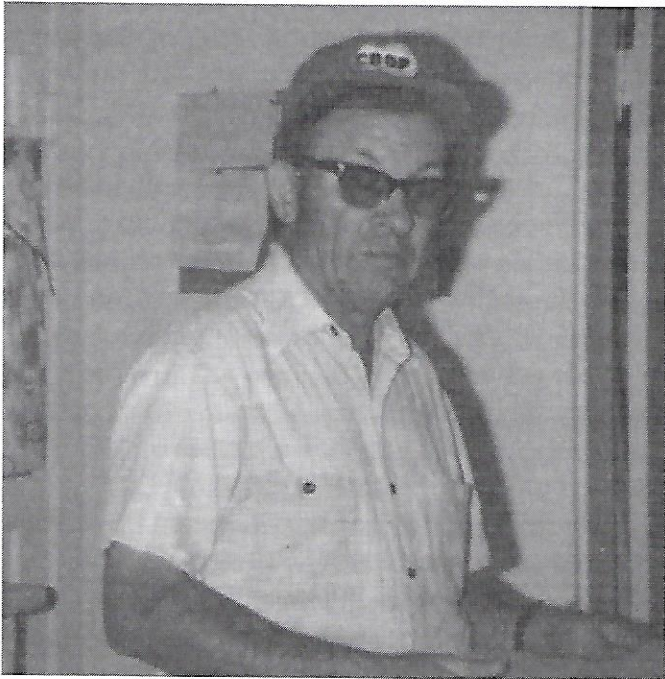
WG: That western Kansas land, yes.

HH: And the rest was later?

WG: Yes. If I remember right, I think we bought the land in Lane County for \$20 an acre, that's the story I remember. ...

One thing, when I was on the farm we lived in a low area next to the Turkey Creek, that was a low area and we had our pasture where the cattle were and so on. Part of it was on our side of the Turkey Creek and part was on the other side of the Turkey Creek, and invariably when it was milking time the cattle were on the other side of the Turkey Creek, which was no problem usually ... I'd go over there and get them so we could milk them ... unless the water was really high, sometimes. So we had to walk way around going on the country road and over the bridge and walk way over there and send the cattle back across the water, which they did, came right across. One time my brother got an idea, he went over there to get the cattle back ... instead of walking back he grabbed ahold of a cow's tail [laughter] and swam across the water, and he made it alright. We usually milked about five, six cows, seven maybe sometimes. Since we were a large family, one thing I'll never forget is my mother would have to bake bread every day, at least two or three loaves, we were so many you know. Dad would very often take us boys out and go fishing, we had Turkey Creek running through our land and very often our dad took us out there to go fishing which all the boys never forget that. My sisters as well as us boys.

One other thing about my dad, it made no difference what the situation was, whether it rained or whether it snowed or whatever he would always find work. When it rained we always thought, "well shoot, here we get to rest a little bit." "Well boys, go fix this or fix that or clean this or clean that" ... that's because he was a good manager, I think. But he always, always had something for us to do, it just never failed. Even



when [we] went to Western Kansas, you know we farmed there. We'd usually go on a Monday morning, we would work over there and then come home, usually Saturday, and when we farmed there, of course, we went day and night, we farmed. We had our Model D John Deere, dad put lights on it, so we farmed day and night.

HH: Were you just raising wheat over there?

WG: And milo, mostly wheat. ...

HH: And then what about at harvest time?

WG: Oh, yeah. We'd harvest here and there, wherever it was ripe first and then go to the other.

HH: Did you have all your own equipment?

WG: Ah ... yeah, except a truck like I said before. My dad had to hire a truck to haul a combine up there for instance ... and the tractor. Yeah, we hired to have the tractor hauled up there, too.

HH: When did he get a combine?

WG: As far as I know we had a combine as soon as I could be involved in the farming. ... Yes, dad had one. He was one of the first ones. Then the self-propelled combine, I envied everyone that had one [laughter]. ... Until we finally got one. ... I don't remember the year. And then the first time we got a truck I thought, that's fantastic, now I can farm!

HH: And you said you got a truck in the '50s, is that right?

WG: I think so, I think in the '50s. ... [My dad] built the first truck we ever had. That was an old Dodge [body] ... and then he put [on] a Model A Ford rear end, and that's a story there, too. My dad's hired hand had to haul the tractor on that truck he built to western Kansas, about 200 miles. And the bed was too short to where he couldn't get the front wheels to go down, so what he did, he took off the front wheels so it just brought back the front axle far enough so it was on the back end of the bed. ...

HH: Where did your dad get the idea to build the truck, or why did he do that?

WG: I don't know, I guess he wanted something bigger than a pickup. No one took a picture of the dumb thing, I wish we would have. But anyhow, it had a wide bed and it was very short. I don't know, he wanted something bigger than a pickup and it was bigger.

HH: Did you always combine your own or did you ever use custom harvesters?

WG: We usually did our own.

HH: Do you remember when they were binding and threshing?

WG: Oh, yes, I had to do a lot of shocking, of the oats.

HH: What about wheat, did you ever shock wheat?

WG: No.

HH: Why was that ... that you did oats but not wheat?

WG: I really can't answer that ... I think oats usually you cut a little greener ... I don't know why they did that, but they cut it a little greener, put it in shocks and let it dry and then they thrashed it. I remember the threshing bees, too.

HH: Who did the work? Did people come in from away to work or was it all in the community ... to do the threshing work?

WG: Yeah, there were a number of families in the area that had threshing machines.

HH: So you kind of just cooperated within the community to get the ...

WG: Right, no outsiders came. ... A lot of people [looking for work] would come to town and stand in the street waiting for someone to hire them. A number of years my dad hired outsiders from Missouri to help us harvest.

HH: And they usually were from Missouri?

WG: I think every time dad hired it was from Missouri.

HH: Did he ever hire the same ones year after year?

WG: Yes, yes, two or three. ...

HH: What did you think about when you were a kid going out to western Kansas? Was that exciting?

WG: [laughs] You shouldn't ask that. Well, OK, ... when my dad was going to go out west, I was of the age I could drive the tractor, but not quite responsible enough to do the work that needed to be done at home, so my brother stayed at home to take care of that and I used to go out west with my dad. I didn't like it

at all, because we went day and night, I didn't know no girls there *[laughter]* ... No, I didn't like it, the day-and-night business I didn't like, but it had to be done and I did it. And we never worked Sundays, throughout our farming. Harvesting out west or to home, we never worked Sundays. One day ... we were cutting wheat at home, and I said before, we lived close to Turkey Creek, and it's low, if you get big rains it overflows. And one year my dad says, "We're going to finish this ground over here because they are predicting rain and I got a feeling that creek is going to come out." So we didn't have lights on the combine ... we had two combines, no lights ... we're going to cut as long as we possibly can. We just had a little moon shine so we could see. Ten after 12 we were in the house and we finished and we got a big rain and the Turkey Creek overflowed.

HH: So that was Saturday night?

WG: That was Saturday night ... so dad just had an inkling.

HH: Was that an expectation from the church, that you would not work on Sunday?

WG: Yeah, it was unheard of, working on Sundays.

HH: Has that changed, do you think?

WG: There are very few from Eden that work Sundays ... some do, but not very many. If any, actually, I don't know of any. And I was on the Co-op board and that was the biggest issue ... if the elevator should stay open Sunday or not. ...

Oh, one more thing. One year we didn't know how to get a combine out to western Kansas because we only had one truck. We always took two machines out there. And my dad says, we're just going to pull the one combine ... about 200 miles, just about exactly 200 miles ... by tractor. And I said, "What!? We'll never make it in one day." He said, "Oh, yes, we will. Oh, yeah, we'll make it in one day." So the one combine we hauled out there with the truck, and I was hoping I would get to drive the tractor on the way out there, but my brother took it. But anyhow he started out by sunup ... he got there in plenty of time. 200 miles!

HH: Wow. ... Was there a house on the place out west?

WG: A shack. Yes, we had a shack to live in. And then my dad built a small enough building ... we had on old tractor on steel at that time that we stored there.

HH: On steel wheels?

WG: Yeah, that one we stored out there in the little shed for awhile and then later on we got another tractor and hauled back and forth. But at first one little building with a tractor and then the little shack. It was so open -- the bedroom and the kitchen and everything was all one room.

HH: So you had to have a tractor to pull the combine ... and then ... what did you put the wheat in?

WG: We'd usually haul it to town. We had one other building, later on, that we built to store wheat in, but most of the time we'd haul it to town after that.