Voices from the Past

The Assessor of Madison County

By Dewey S. Niederer

April 23, 1984

Tape #46

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by Theophilus E. Tandoh April 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho
The Upper Snake River Valley Historical Society located on North Center in Rexburg, Idaho is pleased to record from the original reel to reel tape on which the foregoing interview was conducted and placed the same on a C-90 cassette this 23rd day of April 1984.

HF - The Date is May the 13th, 1970, and I’m here at Rexburg and with me today is a man whom I have known for some little while. Mr. Dewey S. Niederer of Rexburg and will you kindly state Mr. Niederer your full name and how you spell your name. State your full name and how you spell your name.


HF – Where and when were you born?

DN – In South Cottonwood, Utah the 20th of July 1898.

HF – And your occupation in life has been a farmer hasn’t it?

DN – Mostly a farmer.

HF – And your present residence?

DN – 146 East 1st North Rexburg, Idaho.

HF – Now Mr. Niederer we’re interested in finding out something about your father and his ancestry, the Niederer name.

DN – The Niederer name was… and my father came over here when he was 19 years old. He nearly missed coming over because a short time later he sold his … for his country.

HF – Did the Latter-day Saint missionaries contact your people?

DN – They did.

HF – And about what year was this and where, which country?

DN – He came from Switzerland. He was born in 1856 and 19 years later, let’s see I would have to stop to figure out, that would be 1875.

HF – He came to America?

DN – He came to America as a convert to the church.

HF – Do you know the names of the missionaries who contacted the family?
DN – No, I don’t remember. One of them was a great genealogy research man there in Switzerland, but I just can’t call these minds right now.

HF – Did your father come with his parents and other brothers and sisters?

DN – He came with his mother and the rest of the family. His father was dead at that time.

HF – Where did they settle upon there arrival here in Zion?

DN – They settled in St. George, Utah.

HF – Can you tell me a little about their lives as they spent it there in St. George prior to coming up here?

DN – No, I don’t know very much about their life in St. George, but father came from there up to Salt Lake and two sisters came up there and their other brother, there was two brothers. One went to Los Angeles, California, and one went to Prescott, Arizona.

HF – What was there about the Niederer family that was rather distinctive? Were there any particular characteristics that they had? Were they especially tall or short or did they have any particular talent?

DN – Yes, they were mostly short and slim. Some of them brothers weighed about 145, I imagine his other brothers were the same and his sisters too.

HF – How do you account for your size?

DN – My mother’s people were large people.

HF – Let’s go into your mother’s people. What was her maiden name?

DN – Her maiden was Mary Jane Shepard.

HF – Where did she come from and what can you tell me about her background?

DN – She comes from Corteth, Wales, and her grandfather on her mother’s side worked for the Government and he was a toll gate keeper. Her grandfather Shepard, he worked for the government and he was, him and his brother each had a horse and in them days, they didn’t have motor boats, so they pulled the boat load where it got to shallow in the Fain River to run the redwood femur, they pulled that up the river to where the fort freighter had come in and they could pull great loads with two horses and they could pull much more on the water than they could on the land and that’s how they took the supplies that came in from other countries up the river.

HF – Now they were in Wales?
DN – Yes, in Corteth, Wales.

HF – In Corteth, Wales. Had they been contacted by the missionaries, the LDS missionaries?

DN – Yes they had.

HF – And it was the church, the call to Zion, that induced them to come to America?

DN – Yes it was.

HF – And do you know about what time this was?

DN – He was converted quite early. My grandfather Shepard, he was made President of a branch and he had filled several years as a Branch President there in wherever he was.

HF – Did your parents then meet in St. George and there?

DN – No they didn’t, they met at Salt Lake.

HF – After they had been to St. George?

DN – After father and his two sisters came to Salt Lake, mother was clerking for men who worked at Hustlers flower mill and father came there and he looked the trade of a miller and she said the workers and he got to be the miller.

HF – Was this in Salt Lake?

DN – This was in Salt Lake.

HF – Then Dewey, what about your mother’s side. You mentioned that they were large people; can you give me an idea as to how large they were?

DN – Well, all of her brothers was over six foot tall and all the children of the family, clothes and all weighed over 200 pounds.

HF – What induced your parents after they were married to move up here into the Upper Snake River Valley?

DN – Well, father bought 40 acres of ground for $300 in Archer, Idaho.

HF – Had he come up to survey and look the place over before he brought his family?
DN – Yeah he did. He came up and he was the first member in the Rexburg Flour Mill. He got an offer at the mill, but his heart was grime and dirt. Wheat could make the flour and other products that were made from wheat.

HF – Now he commenced working for the mill here, up here at Mill Hollow I guess, is this correct? Where was the mill located?

DN – It was on the hill close to where the well lives and he furnishes the water for the town.

HF – Here in Rexburg?

DN – Here in Rexburg.

HF – It was the first mill that they had constructed?

DN – Yeah.

HF – Do you know who operated that mill? Did Thomas E. Ricks have anything to do with it?

DN – Well, I think he did, but I think a man by the name of Grover operated it.

HF – What time are we talking about? Was this prior to 1900?

DN – Yes, this was prior to 1900.

HF – When did your father actually move his family to Archer?

DN – It was in March of 1901.

HF – Well, had he worked in the Rexburg Mill, prior to coming with his family?

DN – Yes he had, when he came up to look in [goldbrook] here, but when he worked in the flour mill and looked around as much as he could. It wasn’t terrible, it was very full and he couldn’t defend his trust looking around very full, but he found what he thought he wanted for a home in the Archer area.

HF – Had it been filed on, Dewey?

DN – Yes, it had been filed on and he bought it from the man who had taken the patent.

HF – Who was the man?

DN – Blackburn, I just can’t think of what his first name was.
HF – Who now owns the place?

DN – Family owns the place now.

HF – You mentioned it was a 40 acre piece. How could you describe as to its location?

DN – Well, it was back in off the road a quarter of a mile when he first took it out, the road went caddy-cornered through the field. People would say on both sides of him, would cut the road off and we cut a road from our place out to the line were the road crew surveyed to go. That and they just were off the road and lived that way by getting a private road from our place out to the main road.

HF – Did it have a water right on it and what was the source of the water?

DN – It was the water, it had a water right and the water right at first was in what was known as the Dangation Ditch and the river cuts away and forced until this cliff was drew high and dry, so we had to get another water right. The Sunnydale Irrigation Canal and we had the water rights and many of them had a substantial heading […] it took a lot of work. We fought the river there for several years before we had a permanent head.

HF – Now we are talking about the South Fork of the Snake River aren’t we?

DN – Yes, the South Fork of the Snake River.

HF – And the diversion was made directly. The original water right was a diversion made right out of the river and then later on it was the Sunnydale Irrigation Canal?

DN – Well it was the Sunnydale Irrigation Canal, but Danny Stichem from the irrigation canal cooperated and they had a better water head and we had the most water rights and so we divided the water right equal. If you got a land going to water, not an individual. If you had 40 acres, you had full right for 40 acres. If you had 1000 acres, why your water rights was for 1000 acres.

HF – One inch of water per acre or one half share or one share per acre or something like this?

DN – It was so many inches, just whatever the beginning of the season our water was plentiful and we had all the water we needed and after it went down in later summer, it was divided up according to what we had water rights for.

HF – Now Dewey, did you assist in the construction of this canal?

DN – Oh no!

HF – It was already in when you arrived?
DN – It was in but it made a wash out and it wouldn’t stand so my father and older brother worked for all of winter long for two or three winters to haul rock along with other members. When you were old enough to go to work, you would go to work on the canal and leave the family to take care of the livestock if they had a home and keep the wood chopped for what the women need for making fires and keeping the house warm.

HF – Was the rock used to line the canal to stop the wash?

DN – Yes, it was lined between the river and canoe bank, which was dirt, to stop the wash.

HF – Now was this farm you’re talking about and which your father settled, west of the road, the Lyman-Archer road or east of it today?

DN – Well, it was mostly east.

HF – It wasn’t down in the vicinity of Chinney’s?

DN – It was north of Chinney’s.

HF – It was north of Chinney’s fruit farm down in there, it was north of that?

DN – Yeah.

HF – What did you raise on it as a kid?

DN – As a kid, it was mostly hay and grain, and milking cows and horses to raise.

HF – Did you take the original farm and have you operated the original farm?

DN – I operated the original farm.

HF – And you had other land too, I suppose?

DN – No, I didn’t have any other land. When father and mother got old and couldn’t work, I took care of them and operated the farm and lived with them and took care of them.

HF – Did your father, after coming here with his family and establishing his family, then go to work for the Rexburg Milling Company?

DN – He worked in the winter time, a winter or two, but most of the time after that he started into developing a farm so that he can farm it.

HF – That area in Archer is quite a fruit area isn’t it? Isn’t it quite free from frost and caters to small fruits and vegetables like raspberries, strawberries, maybe apples?
DN – Well there is strawberries, raspberries, apples, and rhubarb and things like that but it is mostly just for home use, there isn’t much market for it.

HF – How about the production of apples in Sunnydale? This isn’t what they call a community of Sunnydale is it?

DN – Well we lived in the Sunnydale School District at first, but then they cooperated with the Archer School District and then they divided again. When they divided again we were in the Archer School District. The school line was a half a mile south of where we lived and that left us in the Archer School.

HF – When you first moved to Archer, was there just the one ward covering the entire area?

DN – Yes, it was just one ward that covered Archer and Sunnydale and still does.

HF – How about Lyman?

DN – Well, it was right after moved up from Utah, the Lyman-Archer Ward was divided and we was in the Archer Ward and the Lyman Ward was north of where we lived.

HF – Dewey, will you name some of the neighbors that you as a family associated with after coming up here. Say between 1901 and 1920.

DN – Well yes I can. There was Herman Erickson family, Carter Lenox and family, Opie Johnson’s family, and Chris Nelson, and Peter Christensen, James Mueler, and John Bucklen and his family, and those are the people that surrounded us right close neighbors.

HF – And you as neighbors were all pretty much involved with the same problems. Trying to get your crops in and harvest them, that is cultivate them and harvest them. You were all working on the land.

DN – The land was a main occupation.

HF – And during this period of time, the cultivation of the land was done with a plow and harrow and that’s about all wasn’t it?

DN - It was pretty well done with a hand plow and harrow. The grain was seeded with a… the put the grain in the wagon and one man or boy drove the team while the father spread the grain by hand by throwing this, broadcast it and then it was harrowed into the ground. That is pretty much how it was sown by everybody the first few years.

HF – How large of acreage would the farmers usually plant in wheat?
DN – Well that varied, some people were planting most of their land in wheat. While others went more to livestock and hay.

HF – Would 20 acres of grain be quite a sizable plot of grain?

DN – Yes it was, because the land had to be prepared by scraping and leveling at first. That way it would take several years before they would get it all under cultivation.

HF – Was there quite a bit of vegetation to be grubbed out in those farms?

DN – Yes there was.

HF – What type of vegetation was it?

DN – Sagebrush.

HF – Just a lot of sagebrush.

DN – Yes.

HF – How about willows?

DN – Not much willows.

HF – Quakers?

DN – No, there is no Quakers or anything that could, all sagebrush.

HF – Those were pretty good size sage brush I guess too?

DN – Anything from two feet high to four feet.

HF – How would they get the sagebrush out of the ground?

DN – Well, mostly by grubbing with grubbing pole.

HF – Then they would burn the sage, pile it and burn it?

DN – They’d pile it and burn it.

HF – In other words, a farmer would maybe clear five or ten acres one year, then plant that, seed that down and then he would work on another five or ten acres.

DN – Yes he would.

HF – Until he eventually got his ground pretty well free from sagebrush.
DN – There isn’t any sagebrush on any field anymore.

HF – The average farmer down there in the early teens would own approximately how many acres?

DN – Oh it was anything from 160 down, even down to two or three.

HF – The typical homestead then was 160?

DN – Some of them, that’s what they owned 160, but it was the woman that they homesteaded.

HF – Now was water rather abundant?

DN – Well, the water was abundant until July and after July, the water went low in the river and sometimes there was lots of irrigating to finish the crop off. Run short, the grain suffered and so did the hay for water the rest of the season on until at last there was a Jackson Dam was built. That held the water up and raised it not quite so much water in the spring.

HF – I imagine that was a real fine thing to have done?

DN – Yes it was.

HF – I can’t remember right off hand when that Jackson Dam was built, but I’m going to guess that it was around 19—between ’25 and ’35.

DN – Oh it was earlier than that. It was around between 1910 and 1915.

HF – Well that’s interesting.

DN – It was filled before I went to military serviced and I went in 1917.

HF – About when did they commence to produce sugar beets down in your area?

DN – It was not much sugar beets raised before about 1918 or 1920. The ground had to be leveled up so it could be watered in rows before there were much sugar beets.

HF – Did the farmers eventually grow quite a few sugar beets?

DN – Yes, they did, quite a lot of sugar beets.

HF – Did they find that the soil and climate and other conditions were quite satisfactory to good productivity?
DN – Yes, they found that the sugar beets could be planted earlier than anything else in the spring. They could be harvested later than anything else in the fall. Of course the young people to young to take a job anywhere else.

HF – In other words, you are saying that all the thinning and hoeing had to be done by hand.

DN – All the thinning and hoeing and topping had to be done by hand.

HF – Now was it some years later that they commenced to grow potatoes down in that area?

DN – Yes, the potatoes was grown expensively before I went into military service and come back. I went in 1917 and came back in 1919.

HF – And by that time they had commenced to produce a few potatoes?

DN – Well, they began to produce potatoes commercially right from the beginning of potatoes grown, but it was mostly for home use.

HF – In a garden or something like this?

DN – Yeah.

HF – Now was Dairying rather important?

DN – Dairying has been rather important all of the time there.

HF – Did the farmers early get together and organize a factory, a milk-cheese factory where they could dispose of the milk?

DN – No, they didn’t. It was mostly for home use […] the butter was sold by nearby stores.

HF – Did Archer ever get a cheese factory?

DN – Yes, they had a cheese factory and it was run there for just 20 years to the day before they closed it up.

HF – What years would that cover?

DN – It was from about 19… somewhere around between 1915 and 1920 and that would make from 1935 to 1940 it run.

HF – Who operated the milk factory?
DN – Dave Manwaring, he didn’t operate himself, but he owned it and all of business was done through him.

HF – Did the local Dairyman support the factory pretty well?

DN – Yes, they supported it pretty well.

HF – If you were to pay tribute to some one individual in your early life, in the Archer area, as one who contributed to your life and was a good influence to you, to whom would you give this tribute?

DN – First, it would be my mother and father. Then a man who joined us on the North and that is Harman Erickson. He is one of the most honest men that…, I wouldn’t say he was the most honest, but he was one of the most honest men I ever knew. Then next to him would be James Burns who operated a big farm about two miles east of where we were.

HF – Did you work for these men?

DN – Yes, I worked for both of them. I worked for Jim Burns more than I did Harman, but well we changed work. I never worked for wages for him and Erickson, but I’ve worked for him so much that I did thrashing and harvesting and then him or one of his boys would work here for me as change.

HF – They were very well respected in the community then?

DN – Very well.

HF – Were they both church men?

DN – They were at first. Herman was loyal to the church all through his life, but Jim Byrne apostatized and left the church, but he was still a good honorable man.

HF – Was the church rather important in the community life in the early days of Archer?

DN – Yes, it was very important in the community in the early days and also all of the time. Church was very important in the early days, because most of programs and amusement of locality was either through the school or the church. The mutual furnished a lot of the entertainment which was dances and shows and the school also furnished entertainment and there were people of all ages and education for the young children. The was one thing with the church that I would like to give the people advise on right now and that is not try to make God and the Holy Ghost and his Son, Jesus Christ thought as lawyers. Follow their advice and not follow the trends of the world of today. They promise us if we’ll be honest with our neighbors and work to build up Zion that there will be plenty of everything for the people of this nation. There will plenty of food for ourselves and for our vineyards and also plenty of feed for our livestock, and the wild
birds and the wild animals in our area. There is more plenty that the wild animals willecome more gentle and easier to get along with and if you do not honest with a
neighbor, whether it is our neighbor that joins them, us, or the neighbor across the road,
or the neighbor across the ocean, but things will be plentiful and not follow this trend of
what some of the evil people are trying to pull over. That is women committing abortion
because we did. There is a lot of people like myself that had never had been in existence
here because I was the seventh child of a family of nine and I was just reading
Improvement Era, the last man who was taken into the Quorum of the Twelve, he was the
tenth child of a family of eleven. So, there were a lot of us who would not exist. People
who have been very important to the world as a whole. I would like to give this advise to
all people, do not try to follow the fashions of evil and controlling men except for the
women of ill fain, but our girls and wives should pull of these and we shouldn’t follow
the advertising. Especially false advertising, which is so prevalent at this time, but deal
honestly with whoever we have to deal with. I will turn time over to Mr. Forbush to ask
questions.

HF – That was quite a little sermon there Dewey, but I can tell from your statement that
you do have some real sincere feelings about these matters and I think they’re very
important matters, and we should follow the counsel of the church in these matters and
I’m sure you feel the same. In the early days of your youth, I suppose that Archer was
quite typical as with other small communities on a Sunday afternoon. The boys would
get together on horses and just really raise NED and have a lot of fun is this right?

DN – No, it wasn’t.

HF – Didn’t you ever do that?

DN – Not too much on Sunday’s.

HF – Sunday afternoon?

DN – Sunday afternoon, mostly the time was pretty much taken up going to our regular
meetings and tending the livestock. Sometimes we had to irrigate on Sundays because
the water run all the time.

HF – Would you boys get together other times on horses and go out for maybe a day’s
trip or visit each other back and forth on horseback?

DN – Yes, we had done that some, but most entertainment came through when the early
days and the canals would fail, we threw our chores … we would dig for food and
huckleberries and other wild fruits and sometimes we made quite a party out of that,
Huckleberrying and things in the hills and Chokecherries.

HF – Where would you go to get most of your Huckleberries?
DN – Up in the forest land that is where it grows. The chokecherries would grow on the lower hills.

HF – Kelly’s Canyon, would you ever go up there hunting?

DN – Yes, Kelly’s Canyon, up on Canyon Creek and Spring Creek and all through that area.

HF – Around Heise?

DN – Yes, it was up above Heise.

HF – Have you been all through those mountains on horseback?

DN – Not much, we went up with a team and wagon and took our bedding and stayed a day or two and just picked berries.

HF – Where would you get your root?

DN – Well the wood was cut and there was no timber that grew along the river and then we got it from Quaking Aspen that grew up on the mountain side. It grew all over the Rexburg bench up to the Bonneville heights there on the upper hills.

HF – And this would be all up on the east side let’s see the north side of the river?

DN – Yes.

HF – On the North side of the river?

DN – North side of the South Fork and the South side of the North Fork.

HF – Where would you get pinewood?

DN – Well we would get pinewood up in that same area. Most of the buildings were made up of pine wood and logs. Then some kind of lining for the houses and barns was full of cow manure was very prevalent of the barn to keep wind from blowing through.

HF – In the very early days I suppose you would see a few dugouts or houses with dirt roofs?

DN – When we moved to Archer, about 95% of the homes with all dirt roofs.

HF – Dewey, what were some of your early impressions of Rexburg?

DN – Well, Rexburg was a very small town and pretty much all the homes over here kept a cow, a pig, and a few chickens.
DN – In Rexburg at that time, and then the early days that I begin to have a recollection of things happening other than home was unbearably every spring, the high water was washed the railroad bridge and the wagon bridge out and the people were pretty well cut off from outside world. Most of things were marketed right here and very little money changed hands. Most of the things that we got from the stores were got by script. We got script for the things we produced and then they sold. They gave us script for the pain.

HF – Also, wouldn’t there be an exchange of commodities for example, butter would be taken to town and traded for flour, salt and pepper, and other commodities?

DN – Butter and eggs and garden things was taken to town and traded for things that they had to have at the fishing hub. Also, grain was taken to town and traded for flour and mush and groceries.

HF – How long would it take from your range, to go to Rexburg and back home again?

DN – Well, it would take around an hour to an hour and a half each way plus the time it took to do business in town.

HF – And that’s by a team of horses and a wagon?

DN – No, when they had to drive wagons, it was from an hour and a half to two hours.

HF – When you rode a horse it was a little shorter huh?

DN – A little shorter, and then when the people began to get buggies, why they could go in a shorter time in the buggies.

HF – A great change has taken place over the years. Homes have been improved and better systems of Agriculture. They have commenced to use farming utensils and machinery and equipment and all in all things have greatly changed over the years.

DN – Yes, they have greatly changed. Milk mostly is homemade and sold to companies and gets cash and goes to town and buys what we need by cash. The first twenty years the stores ran, there wasn’t any cake or pudding or any finished product hardly at all ever sold in stores. The people bought the raw materials and then made their own. The first stores that was built here in town was run for over twenty years and never sold as much one loaf of bread.

HF – Now Dewey, what were some of the old typical foods or dishes that our mothers prepared? Say the time you were a little boy up through the time of the First World War, what were some of the typical dishes?

DN – Well, there was all local grown fruit. After they began to raise fruit, the local grown fruit and vegetables. The family had a few bottles of fruit and a little pile of
carrots and parsnips and cabbage and all kinds of vegetables and potatoes. They were well off and I was about ten or eleven [years] old before I would see any peaches or pears or fruits from other…

HF – Did you ever see lemons, oranges, grapes as a youngster?

DN – When we went to celebrate the 4th of July, a gentleman had ordered lemonade for refreshments and hardtack candy that was locally grown. I remember well the first orange that I’ve ever seen, it so happens that the man who was eating the orange, we went to the store to get our groceries and he was standing out in front of the store eating an orange and our desire was to watch him peel the orange. He only had his little finger and thumb and one hand and see him try to hold that orange with that hand, while he peeled it with other one. I was just a small kid and it was real impressive to me that he did that.

HF – I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon of having you come to the office, Mr. Dewey Niederer to share with us some the experiences, some of impressions that you recall as a youngster in the Archer community here in Madison County, thank you so much.