

Voices from the Past

# Farming in Archer, Idaho

Interviewee: Dewey Schly Niederer

May 13, 1970

## Tape #46a

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

Transcribed by: Theophilus E. Tandoh (April 2005)

Edited by: Erin Cervo (January 2010)

Brigham Young University- Idaho

Harold Forbush: The Upper Snake River Valley Historical Society located on North Center, 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 23<sup>rd</sup> day of April, 1984.

The Date is May the 13<sup>th</sup>, 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.

Dewey Schly Niederer: Dewey Schly Niederer, D-E-W-E-Y S-C-H-L-Y N-I-E-D-E-R-E-R.

HF: Where and when were you born?

DN: In South Cottonwood, Utah; 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1898.

HF: And your occupation in life has been a farmer, hasn't it?

DN: Mostly a farmer.

HF: And what is your present residence?

DN: 146 East 1<sup>st</sup> 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 [inaudible] but my father, he came over here when he was 19 years old. He nearly missed being able to come over because just a short time later he would have had to stay in [inaudible]. He filled his military appliance 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? In 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, but that would be 19...

HF: 1875.

DN: 1875, yeah.

HF: He came to America?

DN: He come 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 come 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 come from there up to Salt Lake; and two sisters come up there and the 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 characteristic that they had? Were they especially tall or short or did they have any particular talent?

DN: Yes, they were mostly short and slim. Father weighed about 145, and I imagine his other brothers were about the same and his sisters too.

HF: How do you count for your size?

DN: My mother's people were large people.

HF: Oh I see. Well, let's go into your mother's people. What was her maiden name?

DN: Her maiden name was Mary Jane Sheppard.

HF: Where did she come from? What can you tell me about her background?

DN: She comes from Cardiff, Wales. And her grandfather on her mother's side worked for the toll Government and he was toll gate keeper. Her grandfather Sheppard, he worked for the government and he was—him and his brother each had a horse and in those days, they didn't have motor boats, so they pulled the boat loads where it got too shallow in the Thames River to run a regular steamer, they pulled that up the river to

where the ports—the freighter had come in and they can pull quite, great loads a lot smaller with two horses and they could pull much more on the water than they could on the land and that's the way they took supplies that'd come in from other countries up the river.

HF: Now they were in Wales?

DN: Yeah. Cardiff, Wales.

HF: In Cardiff, Wales. Had they been contacted by the missionaries, the LDS missionaries?

DN: Yes they had.

HF: And it was the church, it was 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: Well they converted quite early. My grandfather Sheppard, he was made President of a branch and he had filled several years as a Branch President there in [inaudible] where 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 come to Salt Lake, mother was cooking for the men that worked at Hustler's Flour Mill and father come there and he worked the trade of a miller and she fed 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.

DN: Yeah.

HF: 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: Is that right. What induced your parents after they were married to move up here into the Upper Snake River Valley?

DN: Well, cheap ground. Father bought 40 acres of ground for \$300 in Archer, Idaho. And then—

HF: Had he come up to survey and look the place over before he brought his family?

DN: Yeah he did. He come up and he was the first member in the Rexburg Flour Mill. He didn't operate the mill, he worked hard, would grind the flour and wheat and make the flour and much and other products that was 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 is that furnishes the water for the town.

HF: Here in Rexburg?

DN: Here in Rexburg.

HF: It was the first mill that they constructed?

DN: Yeah.

HF: Do you know who operated that mill?

DN: Oh, let's see. It was, I think it was—

HF: Thomas E. Ricks have anything to do with it?

DN: I think he did, but I think it was Grover, 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 come up [inaudible] here, that's when he worked in the flour mill and looked around as much as he could. It was—travel was very slow and he couldn't [inaudible], 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: The patent.

DN: Yeah.

HF: Who was the man?

DN: Oh it was Blackburn, I just can't think of what his first name was.

HF: I see. And who now owns the place?

DN: Stanley Erickson owns the place now.

HF: You mentioned it was a 40 acre piece.

DN: Yes.

HF: How could you describe as to its location?

DN: Well, it was back in off of the road a quarter of a mile when he first took it out, the road went a 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 section line where the road crew surveyed to go. That and they just thought we was off in the road and so we looked that way, but 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 Danish ditch and the river cuts away and forced until this ditch, this water—drew this ditch high and dry, so we had to get another water right. Then the Sunnydell Irrigation Canal and we had the water rights and many of them had a substantial heading, very substantial, 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.

DN: Yes.

HF: And then later on it was the Sunnydell Irrigation Canal?

DN: Well, yes it was the Sunnydell Irrigation Canal, but [inaudible] Sunnydell Irrigation Canal cooperator and they had a better water head and the Danish ditch had the most water rights and so we divided the water right equal, so if the land owned the water, not the individual. Because if you had 40 acres, you had full right for 40 acres; if you had 1000 acres, why, your water rights were for 1000 acres.

HF: One inch of water per acre, I suppose, 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; we had whatever water we needed. And after it went down in the later summer, it was divided up according to the amount of water we had water rights for.

HF: Well 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 it wash out. It couldn't stand the banks that they had on the [inaudible] sand. My father and older brother worked for all of winter long for two or three winters to—and hauled rock along with other members. The father and the ones that were old enough to go to work would go to work on the canal and leave the family to take care of the livestock that they had at 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 canal bank, which was dirt, to stop the wash.

HF: Now was this farm you're talking about on which your father settled, west of the road, the Lyman-Archer road, or east of it today as we know?

DN: Well, the road today, it was mostly the—

HF: You know the oiled road now that they call the—

DN: Yeah, the oiled road was east.

HF: It was east of the oiled road today?

DN: No, the oiled road today—

HF: Oh it was west, I see.

DN: It was east.

HF: I see. It wasn't down in the vicinity of Cheeney's, was it?

DN: It was north of Cheeney's.

HF: It was north of Cheeney's fruit farm down in there? It was north of that?

DN: Yeah.

HF: What did you raise on it as a kid? Do you recall what was raised?

DN: As a kid, it was mostly hay and grain, and milking cows and horses to raise through the year.

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 no 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: I see. Now, 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 to develop a farm, so he could farm.

HF: That area in Archer is quite a fruit area isn't it? Isn't it quite free from frost and therefore caters, pretty much, to small fruits and vegetables like raspberries, strawberries, maybe apples? Is this correct?

DN: Well there is strawberries and raspberries and 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 Sunnydell? This isn't what they call a community of Sunnydell is it?

DN: Well we lived in the Sunnydell School District at first, but they cooperated with the Archer School District and then they divided again; and when they divided again we was in the Archer School District. The school line was a half a mile south of where we lived for Sunnydell 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, there was just one ward that covered Archer and Sunnydell and still does.

HF: How about Lyman?

DN: Well, it was right after moved up from Utah that the Lyman and 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 Erickson family, O.B. Johnson family, and Chris Nielson, and Peter Christensen, James Mueller—and they both have families—and John Bucklen and his family, and those are the people that surrounded us—

HF: Right close neighbors.

DN: —right close neighbors.

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

DN: Yes. The land was a main occupation; the main income of all of them.

HF: And during this period of time, the cultivation of the land was what? Pretty well 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. Grain was seeded with a— they 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—

HF: Broadcast it.

DN: —Broadcast it and then it was harrowed into the ground. That's the way it is pretty well sown by everybody the first few years.

HF: How large acreages would the farmers usually plant in wheat?

DN: Well that varied. Some people would plant most of their land in wheat, while others would go 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 lot 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 at all. It was all sagebrush.

HF: And those were pretty good size sagebrush I guess too.

DN: Anything from two feet high up to four feet.

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

DN: Well, mostly by grubbing with a 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: It has all gotten free. There isn't 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, that was the limit that they could homestead.

HF: Well, 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 and the grain suffered and so did the hay for water, and the rest of the season on until after the Jackson Dam was built. That held the water up later and 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.

HF: Was it earlier than that?

DN: It was around between 1910 and 1915.

HF: Is that right?

DN: Yeah.

HF: Well that's interesting.

DN: It was filled before I went to military service and I went in 1917.

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

DN: Well, let's see. There 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 was 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: And was it—Did they find that the soil and the climate and other conditions were quite satisfactory to good productivity of sugar beets?

DN: Yes, they found it fairly good that way. The sugar beets could be planted earlier than anything else in the spring. They could be harvested later than anything else in the fall. It made work for the young people that was too young to go out 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 all had to be done by hand.

HF: In those days.

DN: Yeah.

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

DN: Yes, the potatoes wasn't grown extensively before I went into military service and come back.

HF: That would have been in—

DN: 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 had began to produce the potatoes commercially. Right from the beginning of potatoes growth 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 the time there.

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

DN: No, they didn't. It was mostly for home use and then for a little for the butter that was turned by hand and the butter was sold by the 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 approximately?

DN: Oh let's see, it was from about 19—somewhere around, between 1915 and 1920 and that would make it 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 the business was done through him.

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

DN: Yes, they supported it pretty well.

HF: Well now, just changing the pace here a bit Dewey, 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 on you, or an influence for good, to whom would you give this tribute?

DN: First, I would contribute to—it would be my mother and father. And then a man who joined us on the North and that is Herman Erickson. He is one of the most honest men I...I wouldn't say he was honestest, but he was one of the honestest men I ever knew. And then next to him would be Jim Byrne, 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 Byrne more than I did Herman, but well we changed work. I never worked for wages Herman 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: Well, they were at first. Herman was loyal to the church all through his life, but Jim Byrne—

HF: How did Mr. Byrne spell his name?

DN: B-Y-R-N-E. He apostatized and left the church, but he still was 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. Most of the programs and amusement of the locality was either through the school or the church. The Mutual furnished a lot of the entertainment which goes from dances and shows and the school also furnished entertainment for people of all ages and education for the young children. While I'm talking of the church there is something that I would like to give the people some advice on right now and that is not to 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 will 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 be plenty of food for ourselves and for our vineyards and also plenty of feed for our livestock, and also for the wild birds and the wild animals in our area. —More plenty the wild animals will become more gentle—

HF: Side two; continuing the interview with Dewey S. Niederer, and the same will be completed.

DN: —In Rexburg at that time, and in the early days, the earliest days after I begin to have a recollection of things happening other than home was that almost unbearably every spring the high water 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. And most of the things was marketed right here and there was very little money [inaudible]. 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—they took script for their pay.

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

DN: Butter and eggs and garden things was taken to town and traded for things that they didn't happen to have or insufficient of. And 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 from 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?

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—well all products are sold—to companies and then get cash and go to town and buy what we need by cash. The first twenty years that the stores run, there was not a 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 store was built here in town and was run for over twenty years and never sold as much one loaf of bread.

HF: I suppose that would be so. Well now Dewey, what were some of the typical foods or dishes that our mothers prepared? Say the time you were a little boy up through the time and of the time of the First World War, what were some of the typical dishes?

DN: Well, there was all local grown fruit. After they begin to raise fruit, there was the local grown fruit and vegetables. If the family had had a few bottles of fruit and a little pile of carrots and parsnips and cabbage and, well, 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 when you were a kid, when you were a youngster?

DN: We'd have them when we went to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, or 24<sup>th</sup>, they generally had orangeade or lemonade for refreshments, and hardtack candy. Of course most of it was locally grown. I remember well the first orange that I've ever seen, it so happened that the man who was eating the orange, we'd come to a store to get our groceries and he was standing out in front of the store eating an orange and it really impressed me mostly to watch him peel the orange. He only had his little finger and thumb on one hand and see him try to hold the orange with that hand, while he peeled it with other one. I was just a small kid and it was real impressive to me to see that.

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

(The following portion of the interview was previously transcribed by Theophilus E. Tandoh, but the audio cannot be found.)

DN: —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 advice 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 Sundays.



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; huckleberries 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 area 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 that 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.