

CONVERSATION

with LESTER STORIE

Conversation September 11, 1977 with Lester Storie of Pyrites. Doug Jones and Alan Casline for Rootdrinker.

Lester: There's not much you can say. We did alot of hard work. Now days - this machine - they let the machine do the work and that machine - you can do alot of work just maintaining machinery. You ever notice that? Because everytime you go out something is pretty nearly apt to break before you get through that field. Back years ago you took the horses out and the horses didn't break down. I know you did it the hard way but ...

Rootdrinker: Did anyone around here use oxen at all or was that pretty rare?

Lester: No, there was a man who used to always have oxen. He used to take them to the Gouverneur Fair every year. When the parade was run, he'd lead the parade with the oxen. You know they move very slow. Horses are easier to work with. I never could understand oxen - you don't even have a line on oxen. You take a team of horses... you've seen 'em drive those big.. where they have eith, ten horses - you have the line. There's quite a trick to that though. You steer your horses- course they know what's expected of them. A horse has alot of horse sense. I wish they'd go back to horses.

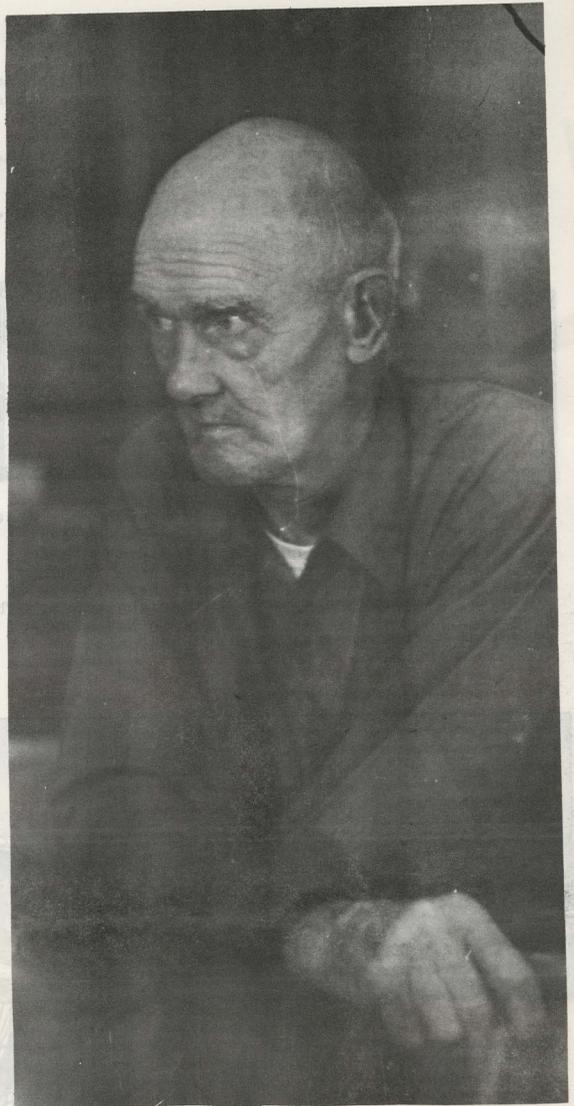
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It's an awful job to try and break a colt. You know what I mean - train 'em. You can give them all the love and care you want but you still have to teach them to obey orders, and that's quite a hard thing to do. When they get - well they're usually a year and a half old when you start to train them. What they call breaking horses - alot of them do it by riding them first. That's alot of fun!

Rootdrinker: What did you feed back then? Did you buy alot of grain?

Lester: Quite abit, but we did raise more. Oats was the big crop here, and corn - well, for those that had silos. I didn't have a silo here. I raised quite abit of corn and I'd take the ears off, dry 'em - yeah - just go through, pick 'em, throw 'em on the wagon and you had to husk them. You couldn't pile them too deep or they'd just mold. You know how corn is. You have to kind of dry it. This year, they've got a grade acreage of corn and it's a good crop. Last year, ha! Corn was that high. They'd be a little bit down, up - that was terrible, catastrophe. I'd just as soon they didn't have too good a corn crop this year because I sell my hay... ha hah. Social Security they don't pay you an awful lot - they don't pay your expenses.

At the time I came here from Gouverneur, the Gouverneur Milk Plant was a large milk plant, but down here it was all touted up as the largest milk plant in the world. Sheffield Farms in Canton at that time, well in about 1930, had a million dollar plant. A million dollars in 1930 was an awful lot of money. You know today it's nothing - it'd be like a billion today. They shipped the milk out. They always made us get our milk in before 9 O'clock. You drew your own milk in milk cans at that time. When I come here you didn't have to have coolers. We just pumped water out of the well. The well



drunk cold, about 40 degrees and that was cold enough. You pumped the water on a big concrete vat and you'd set the milkcan down in it. If it warmed up - you know the water would warm up - you'd go out and check it and, well, I'll turn the water. We did it with a gasoline engine, a pump - crank it up.

Rootdrinker: One of the things that I think is true and I'd like to check out with you is that it's alot harder now days for us to be self-sufficient or nearly self-sufficient because the village structure isn't the same as it used to be. There aren't as many people who have skills that would aid you.

Lester: Sinclair Lewis' Mainstreet, that's gone. The mainstreet America was the same - it didn't matter. You had all those different people that had their trade on mainstreet. Mainstreet was mainstreet. What's mainstreet now? Bars, banks, insurance companies - insurance offices - that sums it up doesn't it? All these trades are gone practically. You have all shopping centers. The shopping centers don't give you what you used to have. If you had horses now - your harnesses are a very important part - where could you find anyone who does any work on harnesses - repairs them or anything? You'd have to do it all yourself.

Herman was always what they call a rural settlement and they had the old fly spray. The first fly spray that was ever invented was in Herman. Ever hear of it? That "See 'em Die". That was long before I was born. Morgan & Company in Herman. He started it. It was worldwide.

It didn't contain D.D.T. or Lindane - those are the ones they object to now. During World War II they used that alot. I know when they used to whitewash the barn.. "Say, you want to put Lindane in?" I said, "What's that?" "Well", he says, "It's something like D.D.T. We'll put it right in the whitewash." "Well", I says, "I don't care." I guess it was a dollar or two extra to mix that in. He says, "It'll keep the spiders down." "Well", I says, "If ther's spiders there they keep the flies down. You know one thing balances the other." "Yeah", he says, "But the cobage. You can't have cobage in the barn. They'll object." They do object.

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Now I've got a big manure pile out here. It's all growed up with weeds but I saved it the last few years. I said I'm not going to spread that out. Keep that there cause that'll come in handy. It's all rotted - humus. No, can't have that. If you don't move that you'll be out of the plant. The last time he told me that - it was in November - I said I didn't care - I'd just as soon quit.



Rootdrinker: How did they collect the milk for the Sheffield plant?

Lester: Milk trucks - big milk trucks. The one that picked mine up had all the route around there then. He'd go up to Miller's and get his and come back here. In the flesh of the season they'd be double decked - two high - you know, inside the racks there and so I'd tote the milk out to there from the milk cooler and throw it on.

Rootdrinker: Have the corporations taken over? Do farmers have any real cooperative ownership anymore?

Lester: Well, they urge all farmers cooperative, but it's just a good way of controlling the farmers. You take what we give you and we skim the cream off. And they do - they do. Back when I come here, all milk that was delivered in villages and the city, the butterfat was 3.5 percent, and now it's only, by law - they only have to have 3 percent. You know what these local milk dealers do? And of course they do the same thing for milk deliveries down the city. They bring it in in big bulk tanks into big vats. Then they do what they call standardization. Well that - you cut it down to 3 percent. First thing they do is they have another vat there and they dump all this powdered milk and they get it by big loads - dump that in. Then they run the water and the steam hose - of course that warms it up so it's the same temperature. The milk that just came in is warm, you see. They mix that together till they get it standardized up 3 percent. You're getting about half the milk - you get powdered milk.

You see in the thirties we had a big upheaval in the milk industry, well, seventy and eighty cents a hundred, ha, for milk. You have no idea about the prices. I think I've got slips somewhere. I could show you the price. In 1933 there was a big strike - a milk strike down in Boonville - that didn't quite - they tried to get 'em started up here, but they didn't. Then in 1937 they had the big milk strike in Canton. The farmers went on strike, but of course alot of the farmers didn't believe in striking cause you've got a perishable

product and what are you gonnd do, dump it? If they caught a truck on the road the cars would swarm around, they'd stop, they'd dump that milk. You know how when they have anything like that they say, yeah they're a bunch of hoodlems. Well, they get hot under the collar because if they dump their own milk and then they see somebody else sending it in and getting paid it's cutting their throat. They get sore. Of course one thing leads to another and there was a man shot over in Heuvelton one night at the milk plant over there. There was alot of violence done. They put up barricades in front of where they'd drive into the plant down here. They'd come down there with their trucks and they'd break right through. Well, people would get hurt, and they'd arrest the drived and they'd arrest the different ones, but it didn't do much good. They'd throw it ou cause judges know people. Strikes always bring out - just like war - it brings out the worst.

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