

## **NOTICE**

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**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**

**Transcript**

Name: Carolyn Lake

Date Interviewed: 05/04/99 Date Transcribed: 06/21/99 Tape 15

Project Number 20012

**Tape FLHP0029**

05:01:07

Q:

OK. First thing, we ask you a really hard question. If you can give us your name and spell it, just so we know we have it right.

A:

It's Carolyn Lake. L-A-K-E.

05:01:17

Q:

Great. First of all, your family has been in this area for a very long time. Can you give us a little background?

A:

Well, uh, my mother's family has settled, as some of the first families of Crosby Township and one of her ancestors Joab Cromstock???? laid out the village of New Haven with a couple of other men and the township is named Crosby Township after his mother's maiden name. And then, my father's family was also quite early in the area and we're the McClures and Simonsons and Hawks from the late 1800's and early 1900's.

05:02:02

Q:

What was your maiden name?

A:

Hawk.

Q:

And how do you spell that?

A:

H-A-W-K

05:02:07

Q:

OK. Sometimes they stick an e on the end of that.

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A:  
Yes, no e.

05:02:12

Q:  
Uh, tell us about the family's farm.

A:  
Uh, which, there were several of them around in different areas. Which one, if we're referring to the one in Crosby Township where my maternal great-grandmother lived for so many years, that was up on Willey Road that is just across from where the new Township facility is built and, uh, she was especially long lived in the history of Crosby Township because she lived there from 1816-1917. She lived 99 years so that farm was in the Whipple name for many years and then the Hawk farm was over on Dick Road and the Simonsons and McClures were around in different areas of Crosby Township.

05:03:11

Q:  
Great, and what about the property that you um own now.

A:  
Well, this is in Whitewater Township and along State Route 128 and to Harrison Pike. Just a mile north of Miamitown.

05:03:29

Q:  
Great, great. And can you tell us a little bit about um where you lived right before you got married.

A:  
Well, that time we were living on Hamilton-Cleves Road, which is also State Route 128, but in Butler County in Ross Township up just north of the high school facility in Ross Township in the country.

05:03:56

Q:  
Great, great. And, uh, you were in the area when they started building Fernald?

A:  
Oh, yes.

Q:  
Tell us about those years.

A:  
Well, we were fairly newly married at that time. My husband, like so many of the fellows, had come home from the service and we wanted to settle in the country, so we came out to live on the corner part

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of what is now the family farm and ours in Whitewater Township.

05:04:30

Q:

And your husband worked at the plant?

A:

Yes, he did. From the time really that George Fuller, the construction people started until the plant was completed and turned over to National Lead to operate.

05:04:45

Q:

What exactly did he do at the plant?

A:

He was a financial person, accountant and so forth. He started out as the paymaster and timekeeper with badge #7 on the project and then ended up being the accountant in charge of the subcontractors that George Fuller employed and used.

05:05:13

Q:

When he first started working at the plant, was he able to tell you much about it?

A:

Oh yes. It wasn't particularly all that interesting, I guess. It was a place in the country where they were building a new company and a plant. At the same time, he was going to law school at night so he was very, very busy and it was just a routine part of life.

05:05:40

Q:

Wow. Um, as the plant was built, actually, first of all, let me ask you this; why was it so easy for him to get a job there and how did he get his job there?

A:

Well, as I say, we lived out in the country and we had just had a new baby in 1950 so we did need to have an income and it was going to be close. So he applied and, of course, I think one of the reasons there was no delay and that he did get in right away was that he had been a cryptographer in his service years in the South Pacific, so he had all of the FBI clearances and the top security clearances and so forth, and they didn't have to do any more investigative process at all. They just said, well, you're on and you're hired and go to work, so he did.

05:06:40

Q:

Great. And at the time, what did you and your friends and family think the plant, what purpose do you

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think the plant served at the time?

A:

I can't remember that there was a lot of discussion about it. It was the years that they were building a number of plants around here and there, and all that we heard it called was a feeder plant and I think that most people believed that it was going to be some type of an ore process that then sent its manufactured products on to other facilities to be used in government production some time. I can't remember that people really analyzed any degree what it was going to be, but I don't think it was ever that there was ever in the beginning any hesitation to make it a part of the community because no one really thought anything of any type of a hazard or set up like that.

05:07:46

Q:

And in your opinion, how did the plant change the community?

A:

I don't know that there was to us at least a tremendous change. After he didn't work there any longer, we got busy with our own lives and our own family and our own school system and really did not, on any kind of regular basis, we just weren't concerned primarily about it.

05:08:24

Q:

And how about traffic patterns and that kind of thing?

A:

More, more cars on our highways and our particular road was, I suppose, a main route for a lot of the increased number of workers. So in the morning shift and the afternoon shift we'd notice increased traffic, but it never really was that bothersome.

05:08:49

Q:

Good, good. And uh, what other impressions of the plant did you have at the time?

A:

None particularly. There were always a lot of lights at night and we could see those in the sky. And it became a more-or-less routine part of the community. I didn't have any particular feelings about it one way or another.

05:09:23

Q:

How about the economy of the area? Did it change the economy at all?

A:

Well, those were probably pretty good employment days gradually as the economy in general. I think

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that it might have had even more impact for the working people that were coming out of maybe Southern Indiana and more northerly in Ohio and some of the rural communities than it really did around here. I think we're close enough to Cincinnati that I can't say that it had, that we had, very many neighbors working there or anything like that. A few, some in the community, but not a lot.

05:10:14

Q:

Which I guess leads me to my next question. During the process years, did you have any contact with the workers there? I mean, besides your husband obviously worked there but...

A:

Very little. Very little. No. No, we didn't have any close friends or people that we saw regularly that worked there or reported anything at all, no.

05:10:36

Q:

And, uh, let's talk a little bit about the whole, the political situation at the time during the Cold War. Directly after the first World War. Tell us a little bit about how the Cold War, what people's impressions of the Cold War was.

A:

Well, I think that those were in the days that people were very serious. The government was involved in developing plans for underground shelters in case of nuclear attack. We had, we're just beginning to hear the criticism of having used the first nuclear bombs, and I think that there was a lot of uh, worry that this was something that we were going to have to face as a country and a nation.

05:11:32

A:

When it was talked about as a feeder plant and going on and developing nuclear activities. I don't think there was any criticism at the government for having this mind set, because I think we're pretty well into the importance of science and development and thought that particularly as a deterrent, we're going to have to keep on the forefront of scientific things and this was all a part of it.

05:12:09

Q:

Something that, a term that they've been talking about a lot about at work at Fernald is Cold War Warriors. That's something they would call your husband, a Cold War Warrior 'cause he worked at Fernald during the Cold War. How do you feel about that term?

A:

Never heard it before and it doesn't necessarily, I didn't feel like we were warriors. All he did, was doing, was had an accounting job at a new place that was getting him started, I guess, on a career path. Then he went on to other things and was a builder and so forth in the community for a long time and I, there were certain times when a little bit of doubt or community discussion would come in, but it would

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usually pass over very quickly and nobody.

05:13:07

A:

I can't think of us as warriors in any war. I think that since he was in the South Pacific he felt like we were very justified in using, and he still feels we were justified in using, the atomic energy in the war and it meant that a lot of them came home that would not have otherwise without a lot more experiences that they, of course, ended before that happened.

05:13:44

Q:

Great. Um, now when they first, I want to go back just a little bit. When they first were building the plant, you mentioned that you knew several people whose land was involved when the government first began the process of building it and taking the land with eminent domain. Can you tell us a little bit about those people or what you heard at that time?

05:14:09

Q:

Well, they came out and, of course, the government people came in and said we need the land and so forth and so they negotiated and most of the people who were farm people who were replaced, I think at that time, probably got a reasonable amount from their farms. Some of them weren't particularly anxious to do it, and they wouldn't have sold otherwise, but I don't think there was any particular hardships that I know of. Most of them relocated either in slightly western states, Indiana or Illinois or one up in Northern Ohio a little ways. And I don't think that they had any, to my knowledge, any particular hatred of anybody coming in and taking their land. I think they negotiated and sold it and moved on.

05:15:12

Q:

Great. Um, has the Fernald Plant affected you and your family's life at all?

A:

In no direct ways that I can think of any more than any other large manufacturing facility. I think we live, as I say, I think we live close enough to Cincinnati that we realize that we're going to have some businesses and some commerce even now gradually seeking to move out to grow and through the years the roads have improved and the infrastructure has kept growing. But nothing in particular that Fernald, we're in a different school system with our children and so we weren't close in that respect. I can't say that it's had any big effect on our family.

05:16:24

Q:

OK. And, uh, I see that your husband worked days at Fernald?

A:

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Uh, huh.

Q:

And then went to school at night?

A:

Uh, huh.

Q:

What was he going to school for?

A:

He was in law school.

05:16:33

Q:

Oh, great. What were his hopes when he got out of school?

A:

Oh, just to go on and keep working and raise your family and so forth, and he did 3 or 4 things before he settled into building. Yeah.

05:16:46

Q:

So, that's what he did after, sort of post-Fernald years? He became a builder? (Comment - Yes)  
That's interesting. (Comment - Yes)

05:16:53

Q:

Uh, let's see. And, um, you were on the Southwest Local School Board, from 1963, is that right?

A:

About that, yes, along in there to '72, something like that, or '64 to '73. Somewhere in there.

Q:

Uh huh. And you sort of followed the issues that were going on at Fernald at that point?

A:

Yes, we did to some extent. We were primarily interested, of course, in school issues and all the things that come and go in that. But one of the things, of course, was that we were aware that in return for their taking over quite a lot of the taxable income, real estate, and land, the government had the project of reimbursing the school district for a certain amount for each of the children of a Fernald worker that lived within the district so that any of the people who lived within the Southwest District who had children, each of them would, then the School District would receive an amount of money to



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replace the loss of real estate. So, we were aware of things like that, but we were never primarily involved. We've had very little contact with management, as far as I know.

05:18:23

Q:

Wow. That's interesting. I had not heard that story that that's the way they dealt with familys. That's interesting. (Comment: Uh huh). Um, let's see; I'm sort of jumping around here, but you told me a funny story about, you have to tell us the story about the cold weather, when your husband worked out at the plant.

A:

I said that when he first started, they, the only people that were on site were 2 or 3 crews of fellows who were clearing land by hand mostly. That was even the days before they had heavy equipment in, and they were clearing for the roadways and so forth to come in. I said, he was, at that time, the paymaster. The only structure on the entire project they were using was a little 8x10 wooden frame building with, I think, one window and one door on it.

05:19:27

A:

And on the bitter cold days, he had a little coal stove that he stood pretty close to and one day he came home and I said you really smell like you stood close to the fire today, and he turned around and I saw he had a nice big, had burned a nice big hole in his wool coat, about so big around from standing a little too close to the fire. But they, I think by spring, they had probably outgrown that and the first things that they built were construction offices and some sheds for some of the office people to have a place to put a desk I think after that. (Laughter).

05:20:15

Q:

So he, what company did he work for then?

A:

George Fuller was the construction, had the construction contract on building Fernald.

05:20:24

Q:

That's great. And how long was he there during the beginning?

A:

Uh, something less than 3 years. He left at the time Fuller turned it over to National Lead to operate. He resigned and left.

05:20:37

Q:

So, he was not there too much really during the process years?

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A:

They had started to process some of the materials, but he had no particular contact with that. I think that the two kind of crossed over a little bit. They had already started some of the processing and some work in the buildings before George Fuller left, but he didn't have anything to do directly with that.

05:21:04

Q:

Great. Um, did you ever, did you ever worry about him working on site like that?

A:

No. There was never anything announced at that time that there was any anything that was even a little potential hazard. No.

05:21:26

Q:

And how about your husband. Did he ever worry about working there?

A:

Huh, uh. I don't think so. There were some days that he wasn't particularly inspired nor wanting to continue in that kind of a position, you know. He wasn't that interested in the book work and all of the contract and so forth that he was doing at the time, so, he was, but I don't think he was ever concerned or worried about the surroundings. No. No one ever told them to be.

05:22:05

Q:

And he had a little saying that he used to say. What was that?

A:

Oh. In later years, that was even later when other people began to worry and say that they're, it was a hazardous area. We used to drive past after dark and he'd say, "Well, when Knollman's heifers begin to glow in the dark, then we'll start to worry." So that was, we never did put in any extra time of actual concern about health or environment. I don't think. To a limited degree, whenever it would hit the newspaper but nothing, nothing to cause us to leave the area or to be alarmed.

05:22:53

Q:

Which leads me to my next question. Um, in 1989 you probably read a lot about the, in the media, about the Plant 9 dust collector leak. And, of course, that's where a lot of things came out. And shortly after that, actually I think that actually, actually release that story in '84 or something like that, and I think by 1989 the plant was closed. How did you react to that press at that time in the mid- to late '80's?

05:23:20

A:

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I, um, I think we were probably one of the thoughts that crosses your mind is up until then, the government had been a little less than honest with reporting what was going on because I think that they didn't have very much community contact. I don't think the community inquired very much whether or not whose position it was to have said anything; I don't know. But I don't think there was very much contact back and forth as far as I know. And, um, you're concerned about it, but you hope that the science can keep up with...

### Tape FLHP0030

(Tape cut out - blew a fuse)

06:00:54

A:

...in all the settlement business. I do know some people who said well, which community, I guess drawbacks, if you call it that, is that there really isn't really any one newspaper that covers the local community news of this area at all. Harrison is far enough removed that we don't have a lot of people who take the Harrison paper. (Comment - Oh, so, yeah).

06:01:18

A:

And Cincinnati papers aren't very concerned out here, and we're kind of in a little rural no-man's-land and the communication and, I think that, the government contact and the explanation of what was going to happen in the sequence and the order that it did was really lacking at that time. A lot of people did not understand what was available, or what they should do to participate in the various programs and questionnaires and so forth.

06:01:56

Q:

Yeah, we'll get into that a little bit cause... OK, I'm going to reask that question about the late to mid-'80's, mid- to late '80's, sorry. About the types of media, the media coverage of the things that happened out at Fernald right before the closure of the plant. Uh, what was your reaction to everything that happened out there?

06:02:20

A:

Well, that there was a total, well pretty much a lack of information and a lack of community knowledge of what was going on. We're in an area that isn't primarily covered by any really local paper, and I think that the government started to do certain programs and feel like there was a need to find out, for instance, the health issues and the various concerns of the citizens and then they kind of, to my memory, and there are a lot of people who remember this much more specifically than I, but I think the government kind of started their own projects and then they got into class action lawsuits and community watch groups a little later than that.

06:03:09

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A:

And, as far as the programs, we were informed crossed over one another and I think there were a lot of people who were not informed about what was available by way of health screening; what was involved in the various questionnaires and so forth that were sent in. Out and, at least up closer to Fernald and in Crosby Township, there might have been a little bit better community knowledge.

06:03:38

A:

But we're probably on the periphery of the 3 mile and the 4 mile limits of the programs and there were a lot of people here that either did not pursue or were not informed of the programs and the. They heard what they read of the alarm, but they didn't hear of the individual programs to any real great extent I don't think.

06:04:17

Q:

Yeah, and uh, what was your level of anxiety, I guess, about the aquifer and the water supply where you live here?

A:

Well, we were concerned because we have wells and so forth, but again we're peripheral...

(Tape cut out - blew another fuse)

06:04:37

A:

...Uh, we don't do that very often. I don't know what...

06:04:47

Q:

OK, I'm going to ask that question again since the lights went out in the middle of it. Uh, what was your level of concern about the water supply?

A:

Well, we felt like, I think that they were pretty late in getting to any kind of monitoring that if they were returning this much water to an underground aquifer, it should have been tested and monitored probably many years before it was. And, uh, I, we're again on the peripheral and they had assured us that ours was satisfactory and we had it tested and so forth. So we didn't have any immediate danger but I am concerned for the community as a whole. I think it was an error in management and supervision that really did alarm a lot of people and probably cost a lot of money to try to rectify.

06:06:00

Q:

And what's your water situation right now?

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A:

Well, we now have an extension of the Hamilton County or the Cincinnati Metropolitan water that was put in and started because of the Fernald aquifer and their problems. Our only trouble was that where it was close and where they did have the damages, of course, the government came in and paid for it. Our trouble is that on our frontage, Hamilton County gave us no choice then to extend that particular aquifer; we had to be personally responsible for putting in the water lines and for a number of people along our road on 128, there are about 3 or 4 large holding landowners, and it really has been a bad situation.

06:06:56

A:

Very, very costly for people who are paying for water, which would be all right if their land was developable, but it is not, so there are private land owners left with tremendous bills that kind of originated from the Fernald situation. The landowners weren't responsible for, but have had to go back and pick up the payment for and it has not been fair.

06:07:26

Q:

How much did it cost your family for that?

A:

Well, uh, we sold a lot of our frontage to the Hamilton County Park District who then, in turn, had to pay for all of the water frontage. A lot of people don't believe they did, that the park districts and places have to pay, but they did. And it has cost us well over \$70,000 so far, and we have another about \$25,000 bill still to go in Harrison Pike, if it goes up. So it's been costly.

06:08:04

Q:

How involved are you in some of the community meetings and any of the community groups?

A:

Uh, very little any more. We had attended some and, particularly in the water area, this was our primary concern. With more than atmosphere or the powder and the radiation leakage, we were concerned with water so when they first had some we did attend a number of them. We have not been in recent years. We are retired and try not to worry.

06:08:43

Q:

What's your impression of the cleanup efforts that are going on right now?

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A:

Um, that it's costly. That I don't think, I have, don't have enough personal knowledge to really have an opinion or a scientific opinion of the problems nor the solutions, so I really can't comment on it. I know that there have been concerns. One of our major concerns is that when we used to go to the meetings, every time that we'd have a meeting, I think that the management changed so fast that no one ever really got a handle on those early years of what the problems were, let alone the solutions. So I think it's been a long term thing, and probably longer than it should have been and I think it's been costly and probably more costly than it should have been.

06:09:51

Q:

OK. Good. Uh, let's talk a little bit about the monetary settlements, uh, were you part of a class action suit at all or...?

A:

We had filled out some questionnaires, and I think that we were. We were not again; it was on a peripheral basis so that we were at the edges of it. We have participated in the health monitoring program. My husband and I.

06:10:40

Q:

And what's your impression of the monetary settlements that have happened in recent years?

A:

I really don't have any particular opinion. I don't know enough about the ones who were close and what the settlements were and so forth to have an opinion really, I don't think.

06:11:04

Q:

Tell us a little bit about the medical monitoring program. How did you get involved in that?

A:

Well, again, I'm not sure whether, I can't even tell you that, whether we saw it in the newspaper and where they were asking or requesting people that had lived in the area at certain specific distances to apply, and I do remember, I think, we made out an application for it and then were notified to participate.

06:11:35

Q:

And how does that all work? What do you have to do?

A:

Well, we have had the Mercy Hospital North, over on Mack Road, kind of coordinates it at their offices. We have gone over at least twice, maybe three times, on medical examinations on alternate years, and then at the year when you don't have an examination, we fill out a questionnaire about any

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health problems or any um, anything that you know has happened or where we've been so that they can statistically figure the dangers and so forth.

06:12:26

Q:

Great. And, uh, how do you feel about the medical monitoring? You've had a couple of examinations; how do you feel like it's handled?

A:

Uh, very professionally. Very well. I'm sure, again, it's very costly and I think that probably in terms of the community concern at that time, it was probably the best thing, type of thing, that they could have set up that would uh, more or less satisfy the close populations, because I think it did give people a feeling that um, they mattered and that an effort was being made to see that the health problems were met straight on rather than swept away.

06:13:22

Q:

Good, good. And uh, something else about the water to, uh, you owned a corporate farm close by (Comment - yes). Were your wells affected there? (Comment - yes). Could you tell us about that?

A:

That's much closer and one of the plumes of the radiation problems does go down underneath it and, um, it has been a concern. We still own the farm, so it still remains to be seen whether or not the future value, whether or not construction or development or even farming itself is limited because of it. Up until now, um, I think it's been monitored fairly regularly. The government has put in their monitoring wells and so nothing up until now.

06:14:20

A:

I think that land values have pretty much followed the general land values in this area. They have fallen at certain times when, perhaps the concern was the, at it's height, but I think they have reasonably well recovered for most of the places except where, on farms and things like this, there is a potential I think for future problems unless the testing and the monitoring can go on, you know, to erase them. There is concern.

06:15:00

Q:

When did you first find out that there is a problem with the water on your corporate farm?

A:

I have no idea. My catalog of years is not that accurate, but probably 10 years ago or close to it.

06:15:19

Q:

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And how did they notify you?

A:

I have no idea. I have no idea, other than they, I think what we heard in the papers and so forth and then there was a direct contact when they did put in wells of course and got easements to do that and all. But I have no idea how we first heard about it necessarily.

06:15:49

Q:

And where exactly is that property in relation to the site?

A:

That is at the corner of New Haven Road and State Route 128. What's known as Century Farms.

Q:

That big red barn?

A:

Uh, huh.

06:16:03

Q:

OK. I've always admired that barn. OK. Let's see. I just want to see if I've covered everything. OK. Got that. OK um, talked about water. Talked about that. OK um, a couple of years ago, there were some Enquirer articles that came out about some safety issues at the Fernald site. Do you remember reading anything?

A:

Well, yes, I suppose; we do get the Enquirer. We read of the leakage of some of the deteriorating barrels and pits and so forth, and that they were trying to control and contain them. We followed a little bit, the proposal to encase in glass, and that kind of thing. I mean, not primarily, yeah, we were aware of some things.

06:17:39

Q:

Yeah, I was just wondering how people react to that. You're actually the first person that I've asked that of. (Comment - Oh, yeah). 'Cause you know I think of what happened in the '80's, and it's just recent years which made a lot of news about Fernald, and I like to see how people react to that. Um, is there anything that you'd like to add? Anything that we didn't cover that you think we should have covered?



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A:

Not that I can think of. I think that coming into a rural community, my only comment would be in the 1950's and so forth, the community climate was really one of trust and faith in government and companies and processes and so forth, and I think that not only with Fernald, but a lot of big companies and a lot of big problems, that in the ensuing 45 or 50 years, a lot of that faith in bigness of government and corporations and so forth has slipped away, and it's kind of a sad commentary, but I think that that's one of the things that happened up there.

06:18:49

A:

When it came in, people were enthusiastic about building and business and jobs and progress, quote, and that the climate for this kind of a project would be entirely different if it were to be started now than it was back in 1950. That's about, I can see the big community changes.

06:19:26

Q:

You mentioned something that I thought was interesting. If you could just sort of recap for me. The idea that technology gets away from you.

A:

Well, uh, yes. I think that, and another part of starting, I think, that at that time we had no idea that this was going to be primarily an area that would be a source of radiation, and that far into the technologies and so forth. I think that most of the people were supportive of having ended a war by atomic explosion, even though it was devastating. I think most people considered it very, very necessary and a kind of a pride in our scientific achievements, if you will.

06:20:20

A:

And um, that um, we believed in the science of things and, in a way, I think now that we have learned that it was an area where a science of manufacturing and producing and creating got ahead of the science of what to do with what we were manufacturing and producing and creating. I don't, I really guess I can be a little lenient in forgiving the government, because I think that they were doing things to a certain extent where they didn't even have the technology and the knowledge to manage it.

06:21:02

A:

I say now it's been expensive to clean up and expensive to try to go back and try to reassess a situation that should have been taken care of at the time. And still, it's probably a case of there wasn't even sufficient technology and knowledge to take care of it at the time, so kind of got science ahead of the ability to manage it. That was my thought of it.

06:21:36

Q:

Great. Is there anything else you want to cover?

A:

I can't think of a thing. I started out saying I didn't know much and now I've proved it.

Q:

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**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**

**Transcript**

No. You've proved that you know a whole lot more than you think you know. Thank you so much.