

## **NOTICE**

This transcript contains a Living History Interview conducted and prepared as part of the Fernald Living History Project. The narrations, descriptions, perceptions, opinions and beliefs expressed in this interview are solely those of the interviewee(s) and are not to be attributed directly or indirectly, to the United States Government, to the U.S. Department of Energy, to Fluor Daniel, Inc., to any Fluor Daniel Fernald teaming partner company, to any of their officers or employees, to the Fernald Living History Project or to anyone associated with the Fernald Living History Project.

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

Name: Tony Nieman

Date Interviewed: 8/24/99

Date Transcribed: 12/21/99

Tape: 76

Project Number 20012

---

**Tape FLHP0177**

15:01:01

Q:  
Ready?

A:  
Yes, ma'am.

Q:  
Good.

(Cameraman: Ready to roll)

15:01:05

Q:  
First of all, if you could give me, give me your name and spell it, just to make sure we have it right.

A:  
Ethage John Nieman. N-I-E-M-A-N.

Q:  
Great, if you could give a little bit of background. How long you've been in the area, and um, just a little bit about your schooling, and those types of things.

15:01:24

A:  
I've been here since 1967 and um, I worked at Fernald from '54, right after high school 'til '56. Saved up enough money to buy a new car and go to Ohio State. Majored in landscape horticulture and ah, though working down there I never realized, that I'd be living right next door to them then. Never dreamt that.

15:01:55

Q:  
Tell us a little bit about your job, you worked at the rolling mill?

A:  
In Plant 6, yes.

Q:  
Tell us what your responsibilities were and what a typical day was like?

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

15:02:12

A:

I basically had to keep the ingot furn-, furnace charged. It was 1200 degrees, melted down lithium salt and I had to keep that furnace full all the time. I ran a crane, a small crane, and, and then I was next in line; there was a furnace operator and if he was absent or couldn't take then I was responsible for it. And I knew that ingot furnace forwards and backwards.

15:02:44

Q:

Tell us how that operated, what was it for and um, what exactly was inside?

A:

It, it made it, it made the ingots pliable so they could go up through the blooming mill and rolled into the billets, I guess. And then it went on up to the pre-heat, and then it got re-heated again, and then it went on through the finis-, finishing mill. Down to the size that it, then it could go on machines, machines side of Plant 6.

Q:

And how did you get your job there, um?

15:03:25

A:

Just went down there and applied, three months later, I had it. After ah, Q clearance.

Q:

Tell us about getting a Q clearance, what did they do to get you a Q clearance?

15:03:40

A:

They interrogated all the neighbors, several people told me, you know, they, boy they really put them through the ropes and, and I don't know what as far as relatives or not, I don't recall that. But ah - I still remember ah, the critical parts of my job. The temperatures and Dry Rig-, that or, Fernald rolling mill was a miniature mill. I always called it a miniature mill, because it took us up to ah, tour up to Middletown.

15:04:30

A:

And saw the sights of that, why it's city blocks long. We started out with ingots, you know 10 times or 20 times bigger than we was fooling with. And those ingots were basically 3 foot long, and 7 inches in diameter and they weighed any where from 1000 to 1200 pounds. So ah, that's, that was my job.

Q:

What kind of training did you get before you started your job at Fernald?

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

15:05:07

A:

None. They just put me back there and said, oh, I guess somebody'll show me something, but I learned it all on my own.

Q:

So, were you ever aware of what kind of material you were working with?

15:05:25

A:

Yeah, I was under the impression that it was ah, all we were doing was processing uranium ore. See because Plant 6 was end of the production line and there they put it into the slugs and lead lined boxes and from there it got shipped on out to either Hanford, Washington; Savannah, Georgia or ah, one of those places. Now down there it were they got the energy out of it. So no, I wasn't too concerned.

15:06:00

Q:

What kind of safety measures were in place when you were working there?

A:

Steel-toed shoes and ah, well every once in a while they'd have clean-up. If they were gonna handle a different material, and I'm, I don't know. I never got on one of those details. I'm sure they wore respirators and things like that, but we, we had gloves, rubber gloves.

Q:

Tell us what the conditions were like in Plant 6. Was it dusty, was it dirty (Comment – No) was it clean?

15:06:46

A:

Very, yeah it was very clean. All of us always said you could most probably eat off the floor and it was that clean. So no, I wasn't concerned at all about safety and radiation and, and then we had ah, our name tags had ah, a radioactive badge on 'em. If anything; well I thought well that's safety.

15:07:21

Q:

Could you tell us about the film badges a little bit, what were they supposed to do?

A:

I don't know exactly. I figured those over in ah, in the pay house over there, they could tell right away what, if I ran in, if I was exposed to radioactive material. But no, I don't know what it was supposed to do. Change colors or, or fall off of ya, I don't know.

15:07:56

Q:

So looking back now, knowing what you know now, did you think it was a safe place to work or do you think it was a safe place to work now?

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

A:

Yeah, no, yeah, I think it was a safe place to work. But I didn't realize they were contaminating the ground and the water and the surrounding areas, I didn't realize that at the time, no. Now I wouldn't say I wouldn't work there again. But no, I didn't realize all that was going on. I don't think they did themselves.

15:08:28

Q:

How much did you know about the process while you were there?

A:

Well I know they got, they made the derbies over in Plant 5, then they melted, some how they got the derbies and they put 'em into ingot form. And from Plant 5 we received the ingots. So, ah, course I knew the whole crew, the whole process of the rolling mill though.

Q:

Can you explain that to us a little bit how that worked?

15:09:06

A:

Well, I thought I did.

Q:

Oh, is that, I mean is there further detail that you wanted to share?

A:

No, I'll go, I'll redo it then (Comment – Okay that's fine) but anyway, went to the ingot furnace then into the blooming mill, the rolling mill part. Then up to the crop share, which cut off the ragged ends, he put it in four sections, which were roughly 20 foot in length. Then it went into ah, what was that middle furnace called?

15:09:39

A:

Equaliz-, no it wasn't an equalizer furnace that was up on the other end. Hm, anyway that, they brought it back up to the 1200 degrees is what it did, the next furnace. And then it went on through the finishing mill rolls and come on out and went on up. Then it went through another furnace, some of it did and some of it didn't.

15:10:18

A:

And then they ran it through the straightener which those rods were, from being heat treated and all that, they got all kind of warped and weren't straight any more. So then we, from the straightener, then, then the saws got 'em over there. And they sawed the ends off again, and ah, from there it went on to machining. I don't know what, how they did it then.

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

Q:

Did you have much contact with people in other plants? I mean, did you discuss amongst yourselves what was going on?

A:

No.

Q:

Why not?

15:11:02

Q:

I guess I didn't know anybody, I was too young. I don't know, I was, I was down there when I was 18, I was the youngest in the rolling mill.

Q:

And could you discuss your job with your friends and family, did you talk to your friends and family about your job at all?

15:11:20

A:

Somewhat. What I thought was permissible. The technical part, no I didn't. Temperatures and the time in the furnace and no I didn't. I still don't. I just feel obligated.

Q:

Because of the Q clearance?

A:

Yes, I might want to get another Q clearance some day and they'll say, "Well he, he didn't stick to his word, did he?"

15:12:05

Q:

What kind of officials were on site? I mean, as far as, were they mostly Atomic Energy Commission people that were there when you were there?

A:

No, there were ah, there might have been a few went though, but I didn't even realize it at the time, but no there was plant manager, and a foreman and a people like that. Andy Yucca, he was general foreman over the whole building and Pete, and, Jack Burke and Pete Dougherty, and Bruce uh, Roderick and Dan O'Brien. They were uh, we had four foremen, but ah, that's and, that's the only people I really came in contact with.

15:12:53

Q:

You mentioned to me that you worked pretty hard while you were there with not a whole lot o' days off. Can you tell us about that?

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

A:

Yeah. Well, it must've been a tremendous demand for that product somewhere along the line. And we worked three straight months, twelve hour shifts. The rolling mill was only on two shifts then. So they made us work 24 hours and, we went three straight months without any days off. That was right in my runnin' around days. Had my new car and couldn't go nowhere (laughs).

15:13:30

Q:

I was about to ask you what that was like for a teenager.

A:

Terrible! If I got any, it's automatically fired, but I got caught sleepin' down there already. More than once, but I got, he left me a good foreman, like I did. Just kind o' bump me a little bit and went on then. But yeah, that was hell. Try to get home in time to go to work.

A:

See, and then I was, I was what they call the ingot furnace charger, and I had to be down there an hour earlier than the rest of 'em. And have those ingots charged so the rest o' the mill could work. I had a very responsible job there. So.

15:14:20

Q:

Wow. Did you ever hear the story about the guy who disappeared in the salt furnace?

A:

Yeah, well, I heard about it. Yeah.

Q:

What did you think about that?

A:

They're not so sure they didn't find, they never found him did they? No, they're not so sure that happened. I guess that 1200 degrees would disintegrate bones and everything, wouldn't it? Yeah, I know what's his name, lives out in Indiana, he worked with him. He was a, he was a tradesman, wasn't he? A pipefitter or a, a welder or somethin'?

15:14:58

A:

And he, they said it doesn't sound like him, you know. Yeah, I heard about that. It was in the ingot furnace, too. Yeah, I heard that story, couple of times.

Q:

Do you think it was possible? That he could've gotten in there by himself, or?

A:

Yeah. I, yeah, that furnace was an open-top furnace. It was very possible. They didn't have much protection around that.

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

15:15:31

Q:

So after you left Fernald, you lived on this farm right here where you can still pretty much see the site.

15:15:38

A:

Yes.

Q:

Very, very close to it. Um, and uh, what was your impression of the work that was going on there after you left? Like in the '70s or so, like you know, like maybe about '81 or '80.

15:15:50

A:

Well, see, I didn't go from there to here. I went from here, I room and boarded up in Ohio State in Columbus. So I was gone for four years there. And then I went to the military for two years – Air Force. So there's 6 years I wasn't, even in the area.

Q:

So what was your impression of the plant when you uh, when you came back?

15:16:20

A:

Same old thing. Just, just didn't changed that much. I haven't been back down there since either. They have these uh, visitor days and, I don't know, I just always got somethin' else to do.

Q:

So in the mid '80s, there was a lot of media attention. And um, you were living on the farm since 1967, so it was almost twenty years later, that you heard that there were some dust collector releases in Plant 9. How did you and your family react to that particular news?

A:

Didn't, didn't phase me. I thought, "Well, when the media gets a hold of it, they usually explode it, and make uh, more out of it than it really is. They usually don't tell the truth all the time, either. So I just, no I didn't pay any attention. I wasn't concerned about it too much.

15:17:23

Q:

How about now, looking back?

A:

Yeah, looking back now. I, I should've been concerned. But there wasn't much I could do anyway though, as an individual.

Q:

So have you seen any photos of the cleanup, of what's going on at Fernald at all?



**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

A:  
(Shakes his head negatively) Hmm-mm.

15:17:45

Q:  
Um, a lot of the areas that you probably worked in, people have to wear full anti-Cs and respirators to go into that, you probably know that. How does that make you feel now, looking back, having worked there?

A:  
Makes me look like a damn fool. I should of had one on, too then.

Q:  
And so how do you feel about uh, having, having worked for the government at that point in time? How do you feel about the government um, and how it, how it all happened that you worked at Fernald?

15:18:23

A:  
I look at it as a godsend. They paid uh, I think their wages were, exceptionally well, or good. And I got enough money out of it to go through college. So yeah, I think it was sort of a godsend (clears his throat). Just so this, these health problems I have aren't re-, related, I don't know. Nobody's gonna know the answer to that.

15:18:55

Q:  
Can you tell us a little bit about some o' the health problems that you've had in recent years?

A:  
Well, the worst one, I guess, was this brain tumor I had, August, or uh, April 25<sup>th</sup> they took it out. The neural surgeon says the biggest one he ever removed. It left a void up there in fact. I got a void in my head in this area right here (indicates with his right hand, center of his forehead) where it was at.

15:19:20

A:  
But he said it had the brain compressed into two thirds of its normal area. And uh, he said, "The brain'll expand. It'll go back to where it belongs." But it never did. So, in fact I got a M.R.I. and a, um, and I'm supposed to see him too, the 27<sup>th</sup> of this month. That's Friday, isn't it? Yes. Then I had um,

15:19:58

A:  
Oh, yeah. I ran into that woman doctor down there at the Fernald medical. And I had a thing stickin' out on my elbow, it was a, like the end of a pencil, about that long. Stickin' straight out. And I asked her, just happened a little prior of me seein' her. And I said, "What is that?" And she rattled off some medical term.

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

15:20:23

A:

And she says, "Don't worry about it. It'll just dry up and fall off." Well, then in a few days or a week, my elbow started hurtin'. And you know, I said, "There's somethin' wrong here." So Dottie's made a appointment with the dermatologist. Shoot, he had that whacked off of there before I, I even situated in my chair and he says well that's cancer.

15:20:52

A:

So he's says you gonna have to, I'll make a 45 minute appointment next time and I'll have to cut all that out of there. So, he did and I guess he took a pretty good chunk out of there I couldn't see and I wasn't paying any attention, but it must have been about that wide and about that long, you know. And ah, so he sewed it back up and it's fine now. I get a little numbness once in a while, but.

15:21:28

A:

Well, and I had double hernia operation, when was that – last fall? Yeah, I got prostate cancer now, that I haven't dealt with yet. I'm thinking about, they want to use those ah, radioactive pellets. It makes me think of Fernald down there, but ah, I guess I'm gonna go that route verses surgery. Must be relatively new because he – when did I see him? I saw him, I don't know, early spring.

15:22:08

A:

The radiologist, urologist (coughs) he said I've got two options, surgery or radiation. The more I talked to people and everybody and my brother, he had it and he says take the operation. So I said that's what I'm gonna do. Then Dottie, my wife, was reading *Reader's Digest*, and she, there's an article in there about these radioactive pellets.

15:22:36

A:

They just insert them in there and appar-, apparently it's just, just as effective. So I guess that's what I'm gonna do now. She said the surgeon didn't recommend that because he doesn't get anything out of it. There's no surgery anymore. So, I guess that's the route I'm gonna take.

15:23:07

Q:

So you've been ah, living in the area for an extending period of time, were you part of the class action suit?

A:

Yes.

Q:

Can you tell us about that?

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

15:23:17

A:

(Chuckles) Yeah, I think I got ripped off. I told ya, I was, I thought that was for the general public, the general residence and ah, they said the workers, the past workers or prior workers were gonna have their own class action suit.

15:23:08

A:

And I thought well, I guess that's when I'll get my settlement, but it never materialized. That's about all I can tell ya, Dottie already, cause I just wasn't involved in that first one and I didn't. So I turned around and put a lawyer on it. And he says, well he says well heck yeah you're liable for a settlement, so he's the same lawyer that got Knollman's all that money down there. They closed the dairy after all that money, he's also the one that handled Dougle's Steel.

15:24:20

A:

What's his name, it's been so long since I've talked too him – Do you know Dottie? We get a Christmas card from him every year. What the heck? Anyway he said he'll pursue the thing and the reason I took him too is because he got them a tremendous settlement. Both, either, both of 'em. And ah, he was also familiar with Fernald operation. So I thought he'd just, he'd be just a good man to, to try. So I haven't heard from him for a while.

15:25:07

A:

Apparently he isn't, he isn't getting too far.

Q:

So was that for ah, ah worker's settlement or for a community resident?

A:

No, a worker ah, worker's settlement.

Q:

How about the class action suit for ah, living so close to Fernald. Did you receive any settlement for that?

15:25:32

A:

No, no I didn't get anything out of that.

Q:

And how close do you live to Fernald? How far away is it from here?

A:

Oh, the fence is right back here (points behind him) right here behind us – couple hundred feet. See ah, that fence line goes from the North Access Road straight as an arrow all the way through Morgan

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

Ross Road. But we pick up our acreage because 126 curves on out. That's where we got the 100 and something acres. We don't have much of it on this end.

15:26:19

Q:

Now ah, you run a nursery?

A:

Yes.

Q:

Did you work within the land a lot, close to Fernald?

A:

Every day.

Q:

Did they ever test your soil?

15:26:33

A:

Yes, they've tested our, our vegetable, Dottie had a vegetable garden down there, and they use to take some of her vegetables and some of the soil and yes. But they never, apparently they never found anything. Wasn't contaminated. So I've just felt that the rest of the place wasn't either then. They say we're on the wrong side for that contamination. For the wind and the water and everything, it's north to south or ah, yeah, it'd be north to south.

15:27:12

Q:

Then how do you feel about um, the plant now that it's being cleaned up?

A:

Wonderful. Glad to hear it. I just wonder what the future holds for it.

Q:

And do you remember when you heard that they were gonna stop production?

15:27:32

A

Yeah, I do, yeah that was back about late '80s wasn't it? Yeah, I, but then, see I wasn't too, too emotionally involved with it in the first place so there was no relief for me, no.

Q:

And ah, you know they're tearing buildings down, you guys can probably see that from your house that they're tearing buildings down, and you've probably heard the implosions and those kinds of things. What would you like to see done with that land when it's, all those buildings are gone?

**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Transcript**

15:28:12

A:

Ford Motor Company buy it. Some big company but it and leave it the way it is. I'd rather have a company backed up to me rather than rural subdivision houses. They ran mom out up there on Stool Road. They got, the people next door subdivided and all those backyards and their kids. That was a haven for 'em. No, I, I hope some big company buys it, or they give it too 'em or something.

15:28:53

Q:

Is there anything that we didn't cover that you wanted to cover? Anything that I didn't ask that.

A:

No you pretty well got me cleaned out (laughing).

Q:

Do we need to get to nat sound?

(Cameraman: Yeah)

Q:

Okay, we're gonna get nat sound, so ah, if we could just have 30 seconds of quiet for a second, for a second. This is nat sound.