

## **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: John Renck

Date Interviewed: 6/10/99

Date Transcribed: 8/23/99

Tape: 34

Project Number 20012

---

**Tape FLHP0070**

23:09:02

Q:

The first question is always the hardest question we just need to know your name and how to spell it?

23:09:05

A:

John O. middle initial R e n c k.

23:09:16

Great. And when did you start your job at Fernald?

23:09:17

It was in 19 and 52, I believe it was. I think that's right.

23:09:27

Q:

And how did you get your job there?

23:09:30

A:

How did I get my job? Well, uh, I'd put in an application and I waited, they was hiring other people, but the other people had gone in, I knew they was hiring and so I went down to see em and didn't hear from them for a while. Well I can't locate your papers, so I'll fill out some more in a day or two then I went to work.

23:10:02

And, uh, I can't think of the big boy, I can't think. Anyhow he interviewed me and was asking me what I was wanting to do looking for and so on. And, uh, I told him I'd been a millwright at Fisher Body for so many years and uh that's what I was looking for millwright work or machinist work of some kind.

23:10:30

And I just happen to have in my pocket, we'd been trying to get skilled trained union at Fisher Body. It wasn't completed yet, but I showed that to him and he said that's good enough for me. And he hired me as a millwright (laughing).

23:10:50

So that's how I got my job and uh, I done good work for them. I know I did. I even broke in a colored boy one Larry as an apprentice, worked with him.

23:11:13

I liked him and he liked me. A lot of helpers, they had helpers that worked with us and got along with all of them, never had no difficulties, I mean with any of the boys that ever worked with me. But it

## FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

### Transcript

seemed like after so many years there was just odd another fella he was a little older than I was, not too much. Dead and gone now, but anyhow, got along together and seemed like we was always in the same building and we worked together.

23:11:42

And uh, we accomplished many things we set out to do, you know.

23:11:51

Q:

What were some of your responsibilities as a millwright?

23:11:53

A:

Well, it just seemed like if anything broke down they, I'm a repairman in other words. If a pump wasn't working, needed repacking, or maybe tear down and fix it. A lot of times tear them down for preventative maintenance and overhaul them and have them ready to go and uh, the machines, screws, feed screws for the different materials did work on them and the drive motors and everything on them and installing what ever needed to be installed and I mean if it was something new, I mean be working on it.

23:12:41

Every place, I mean dust collectors, it doesn't matter where or what building if they called you and needed you that's where you went. You may be stationed in one place for a little while, of course, when I first started there we was stationed more or less in the Boiler-, Pilot Plant.

23:13:06

And worked out of there but then we went to other buildings. Then Plant 4 started up. We made our home there for a while. For the men that was new there, I mean, I was new, I mean, and we had to take care of the things in there all that furnace work and stuff. Which was a new experience right at that time with those kinds of furnaces and everything.

23:13:34

But, uh we put in many hours of work there and those feed materials screws would break or something to get them out of there when they was red hot. And we'd get in with the foremans once in a while, you know they would tell us to do something and we'd want to make sure that it was all locked out ready to go.

23:14:03

But one time it was on one of the furnaces they wanted that screw pulled out that afternoon, I went over and looked at it, it was red hot, and I said no, I ain't going to touch that thing yet, it's too hot and uh, I said I don't think it's shut off. He says, yes it is. So I went back a little bit later it hadn't cooled off yet I look down in there it was red hot. So I happen to see him going down the steps, I met him, by the time he got down the steps, I was down there too.

23:14:41

And I went over and told him, I said, uh, what was his name, Ely Nutter, I said Ely I hate to say this because I got to call you a liar because I know that furnace is not cut off and boy he got hot under the collar and he went and looked at it and he had to apologize to me because it wasn't, because something

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

happened, that it didn't, the breakers didn't shut it off.

23:15:10

But you know you had a little trouble with some of them once in while, but it's nothing, you know nothing serious you might call'em for doing something to a workman-, because as long as you was in the union, I mean, you had your work to do, the foreman he was supposed to take care of his end and if you needed something, he called on whoever he needed whether it was millwrights, electricians, or welders, whatever.

23:15:37

A:

He wasn't supposed to do the work. That was the only – one of the big jobs I had with 'em up there. Had a lot of times, men that worked in the building, they would work on stuff like that they shouldn't have been. They should have left it up to the individual that was supposed to work on it. That was one of drawbacks on it.

23:16:03

A:

I got along fine most of the time; with everything – worked in every building that was up there; from the lowest point in the ground to the highest on.

Q:

Tell us some of the most interesting places you worked.

23:16:20

A:

Well, (pauses) I enjoyed working in the four. There were a lot of times the material would get in your nose, (laughing) you didn't like it very good, but you know, it was all right. I mean, ah. And yet, today, if I'm around the tank farm, and stuff where the ammonia was, or if somebody filled the Clorox around the house or something, it just about gets me,

A:

because it's almost the same thing you know. Because I've had my nose full of it a time or two. (laughs) But ah, really where I ended up mostly in the last few years I worked there were most enjoyable I thought was the Boiler House, working on pumps and the furnaces, the forced – the fas – fast, the big fans and everything in there and turbines and air compressors; we'd tear them down from top to bottom.

23:17:27

A:

And, and replace them, and overhauling the valves and stuff in them and get them back to working again. (pauses) Now there was one time, like I told you, there was one fella that I worked with all the time, working up there with me, and they had a, big air compressor, the motor, the bearing had went out in it.

A:

And they just had to shut it down and couldn't use it. So, they didn't know just what they ought to do, they tried to get parts and stuff and couldn't find what they needed. And I told my buddy, I said, I got an idea and I think we can make this thing work. So we talked it over and we went over to talk to the

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

foreman and supervisor about it.

23:18:20

A:

They said, we're gonna let you try. So we made us up, it was ah, I don't remember what kind of a motor you call it, but anyhow, a big flywheel that went around, and the motor was right in the middle of this thing, like – but anyhow, the bearing had went out in that thing and got real rough.

23:18:46

A:

And they couldn't find the bearing for it. So I said, I think, I told Don, I think we can turn that thing over and make a crank and put on that so we can turn that. So we took those bearing plates off on each sides. And we made it so we could fit some emery paper in there, and we turned that until we smoothed those bearings down,

23:19:20

A:

'til they wouldn't be rough. And we put it back together and that thing run for hours and hours after that. And without any trouble. That's just one of the things you know, that come up to be done right there in the Boiler House. And they'd come around and say, Charlie, what's the matter with the compressor?

23:19:48

A:

Well, I don't know, let's listen at it. And it'd be poundin' away you know, and I'd take my screwdriver and pick it up and listen (holding his right fist to his right ear) to this valve, and pick it up and listen to the next valve. I said it sounds like you got some busted springs in there. So they'd close her down,

A:

Take it apart, a little bit, find some broken springs, put 'em back in, start 'em back up again. But ah, you know, (pauses) I had no college education, I had no ah, uh, background a extra good mechanic or anything like that. That was always my ambition ever since a boy, I mean I wanted to be a mechanic of some kind. And that was the nearest I come to it I guess (laughs).

23:20:38

A:

So ah, but um, the time the Boiler House had their fire in the bunker. It burned out everything upstairs, floors and all the conveyers their belts was burnt off. The, trunions they call 'em, that runs the belts and keeps 'em in line. The bavot melted right outa them. And they'd call us in early, I think it was in – and that night went up there and work on it.

A:

Still smoke comin' up outa there, we was tryin' to work; the floor was hot (ha!) and the windows all broke out. Anyhow, we done what we could, got a little air now and then. None of us got hurt, but it was surprising that there was only several of us working on it that got that thing back in operation. In the weekend, we worked pretty near 24 hours a day to do it.

23:21:55

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

Q:  
After the fire.

A:  
Yeah. And the head man come around and said thank you. And that was about it.

23:22:03

Q:  
And what year was that?

A:  
I couldn't tell you just what year it was, let's see (pauses) I'll bet, I'd say it would be about '76. Along in there. '76, '78. I think it was a couple o' years before I left up there.

Q:  
Wow. That happened a couple of times. (laughs)

A:  
Yeah, I know it happened after that; and I thought my goodness, I could hear 'em on the radio about this, they can't have no heat in the furnaces for this long and that long. I thought to myself, they musta really melted the whole building down, ah (pauses) I couldn't see how it was any worse than the one we had, but, maybe it was, I don't know.

23:22:56

Q:  
Now, you got there pretty much when the plant was ah, new.

A:  
Yeah.

Q:  
Can you tell us about those early years when you first worked there, what it was like to go in every day, and it was a brand new place?

23:23:07

A:  
Yeah, it was. (pauses) Like I say, the Pilot House was, ah, where I was working most of the time, and Plant 5 was in the making, Plant 5 was. They went around we learned the operations pretty well, or what would be going on. Like the dust collectors and jolters, and everything was in there. Anyhow, if something broke on 'em, how to repair 'em.

A:  
You know, and learned the operations of it pretty well that way. Of course, we wasn't operatin' it, but I mean we knew what was goin' on, and then we was kinda from one plant to another whenever they needed somethin' to go on. Then Plant 4, it was new too. It come after Plant 5 yet.

A:  
Then we was up there; kinda interview – I mean not interviewin', but gettin' acquainted with the

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

building and everything that was in it before the operations come in. You just learned the place you know, from one time to the next.

23:24:28

Q:

How much did you know about the process itself when you started working there?

A:

Very little. Very little. We knew there was danger in some of the stuff. Ah, there in Plant 4 when they had the hex gas, you knew when the alarm went off, somethin' got a leak in that, you got outta the road of it, headed the right direction. And acids around, you learned the smell of 'em, and you know, you leave when things like that happen.

A:

I know in Plant 4 there, once in a while, something would break, and you got the gas fuse – fumes and HF fumes come off. Well, when you first smell it, you think, well, I'll head down these steps. Well, you run down that way and you're runnin' the wrong way. (Ha, ha) So we headed out the other way. If you didn't make it, you run to a window and stick your head and get a little air.

23:25:40

A:

And, ah, you know. Things like that happen, but ah. The dust collectors, I'll tell ya, it was a dirty, dusty job. You go in them and you'd come out as green as grass. You go take a shower, (pauses) and maybe you'd – you'd have a respirator on, but sometimes it would be an airline respirator, and sometimes it wouldn't. 'Cause I hear 'em say today, you don't move nothin' without a respirator, or something along those lines.

23:26:18

Q:

OK, how do you feel about that, in those same plants that you worked with no protection, ah, the workers move around now with anti-c's, with full-faced respirators on, how does that make you feel now?

A:

It, it makes me feel like what they're doin', it's a big waste of money. Government money. Because, the way I feel about it, a retiree come outta there, ah, the time that I come out, I couldn't get the insurance that George's got. (pointing at the camera man) He's got good insurance. But ah, it's costin' me like everything for supplement insurance, and it has since I quit.

23:27:04

A:

But ah, ain't gonna bug me about it. You know, we shoulda got a whole lot more out of it than we did, when ya think the, outsiders got, lived around there never entered the plant. I know I've worked out there, well, Boiler House, the Water Plant, out at this Fogel Plant, I'd talk to my neighbor, or the neighbor up there, mister ah, (pauses) my mind went blank on that.

Q:

Knollman?

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



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

23:27:44

A:

Knollman. I knew him real well, and talked to him over the fence, you know. His cattle was doin' real fine up there. And he died out there in the field, but it wasn't from that, he had a heart attack. And ah, but ah, you know, those little cows, gave milk and everybody drank it for years and years. Nothin'. Nothin' would hurt that at all.

23:28:16

A:

Ah, I've always said that if they'd a just closed the doors and got outta there and left it alone, everything'd been all right. (chuckles) I may not know that much. But, you know, the way I look at it, from what we worked in and everything, and didn't get sick, and wasn't hurt that much, that I don't think it was ah, they have done the right thing.

A:

I mean y' probably might've, but they sure didn't give it to the guys that worked there. That's the way I feel about it.

23:29:00

Q:

OK, we're gonna take a little break here, we need to switch tapes here.

**FLHP0071**

01:01:00

(Microphones don't seem to be on, and the question wasn't recorded)

01:01:16

A:

Oh, I, (pauses) maybe I'm not thinkin' what you're tryin' to get across to me, but I got, I could work any place they was in the plant.

Q:

Did the FBI do a background check on you before you started working there?

01:01:37

A:

I don't remember that they did.

Q:

Tell us a little bit about security on the plant grounds while you were there. The security department in particular.

(a plane rumbles by overhead)

A:

I ah, can't hear.

Q:

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

I know, a plane is goin' over. Hang on. (laughs)

01:01:54

Q:

Tell us a little bit about the security on the plant.

01:02:01

A:

Ah, well, I think the security was good. (pauses) They, ah, the guards was around, you know, every so often, and you'd talk to 'em, and the one, ah. I couldn't have no fault with the security. I thought it was good. I don't. I wasn't afraid to work, I mean I thought the security was good. There wasn't nothin' to be afraid of, Really. (chuckles)

Q:

So did they have ah, guards around the outside of the plant, or just inside, or how did that work?

01:02:40

A:

Well, ah, I think they was mostly around there together; they, they made their rounds I think, at night. And maybe on some of the back roads, and checkin' 'em out. I don't know just how often, but I'm sure that they did.

Q:

What was your favorite part of your job there?

01:03:09

A:

(long pause while rubbing the sides of his mouth)

My favorite job? I don't know, workin' over at the Boiler House, I guess and, and doin' what I could to help those that, when they had a breakdown, try to get it fixed for 'em. That, it was the thing that I enjoyed doin'. (pauses) And didn't have too much back talk, ah, back talk from anybody sayin' you didn't do it right, or somethin' like that, you know. (laughs) Yeah. I tried to do my work good and always did.

Q:

Tell me about some of your friends that you worked with out there. People you made friends with while you were there.

01:03:52

A:

Well, from one place at the Boiler House, I had friends with the coal operator. He was a good buddy of mine; he's dead and gone now, poor soul. And ah, and the welders, we worked with the welders a lot. Ah, because, if somethin' broke, you took it to the welder to get it welded or whatever.

A:

Or over around the ah, (pauses to think) ah, acid area, they had things there that you had to help the welder, you put it in place and so on, and they welded it and go on. You just acquainted with all the maintenance men seemed like.

## FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

### Transcript

01:04:42

A:

And 'specially the ones on your shift, of course you got to, in 28 years, you got to know a lot o' people around there you know, and one not that much better 'n the other, I think. And ah, you just enjoyed workin' for people like that. And the foremen, usually got along with most of 'em, ah, some of 'em was, you didn't like quite as well as the other one maybe, because they give you a little back talk once in a while or somethin' (laughs).

01:05:21

A:

But as a whole, I really enjoyed workin' at Fernald. But like some of our foremen, ah, they'd give you a job, and that's the last you'd see of them all the day. Because I always felt if I done a good job, they wasn't gonna bother me. If I didn't, they was gonna come back and find out why it wasn't done right, and I never had that trouble.

01:05:59

A:

The only one piece of machinery, like I told ya on the interview, if it broke down, I had a little trouble then because I thought I could do as good a work as any man in the building at that time. And I finally got to work on it because they was havin' difficulty. And I worked on it with a helper and we fixed it, and it broke down again.

A:

And I knew what my trouble was, it hit me that quick, I knew what it was, I told the foreman, I'll tear it down one more time I said I'll fix it this time. And I did. I knew what it was. But, I don't know, maybe it's just the way I looked at things at that time.

01:06:48

A:

It's hard to believe that ah, I think, I've had things happen right here at home that'd break down and I'd, couldn't think what the trouble was. Come to me in the middle of the night what the trouble was. Sure enough, fixed it. That's what it needed, what it needed and (snaps fingers) it worked.

A:

And it, that's the way it, and often times, I mean, thinkin' 'bout the Boiler House, you'd get to workin' on somethin', and it just gets to the point where you just don't know what hardly what the trouble really is until you maybe sleep on it, or somethin' like that, and it comes to ya then just what ya need to do. Maybe pray a little about it, too.

01:07:45

A:

So ah, I don't know, I just enjoyed workin' with a lot o' the boys up there that way, you know, if you had some little ol' thing broke maybe at home, just some little ol' thing you could just stick it in your pocket, take it and say, heck, can ya take and weld this up for me? (laughing)

## FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

### Transcript

01:08:09

A:

Or maybe, a lot of 'em, I tell ya, you know, this one boy that lives out Oldenberg, I'd go out there, he was a good welder, I knew it, and I'd take anything I needed fixin' here at home, I'd take it out there to his place. He'd weld it for me. (laughs) Get to knowin' people.

Q:

Now during, during your years at Fernald, um, how did you tell your friends and family about your job? What did you tell them about your job?

01:08:40

A:

Well, I told 'em the good, it was a good job, a good place to work. I really did. I ah, I couldn't see nothin' the matter with it. We was allowed to take a good shower at night; water can clean up. And in the day time if ya got extra dirty, go and take a shower, put on clean clothes and go back to work again. I never had no difficult, to tell ya, it was pretty good, I thought.

Q:

And how did you explain to your friends and family that you were working at a uranium processing plant? I mean did you tell them about that part of it, or -

01:09:26

A:

Oh, yeah. They all knew. But I couldn't see any more danger in that, 'en anything else, because there's a danger in anything you do now-a days. I believe today, I actually do. That you could go out most any o' these fields around here and roll around, and dig. You'd find little traces of uranium. It's in the ground. I actually believe it.

A:

Of course, they had it shipped in there. You know, and ah. And processed and poured it out there in those big silos, which I'd a been out there and sellin' an' doin' - a lot o' times. (laughs) you know.

01:10:16

Q:

The silos?

A:

The silos. I opened every manhole there was on them big tanks out there, the big concrete silos. One day, then one looked down in there see what was down in it, maybe take a few samples, you know. Sun was shinin' like it is today. And I went out there, 'course if the nuts and bolts didn't come off, you'd twist 'em in two. Put in new ones when they got ready to close it up.

01:10:48

A:

It was just one o' those jobs we had out there, you know. Like them ol' dirty ah, pits out there. They was dirty, yeah. We were out there. Work on a pump, maybe a hose or somethin' would break, maybe

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

you'd get drowned, but (laughs) then you'd get washed up later on.

A:

And sit out there and patch that rubber lining and stuff on 'em at water level. All that kinda stuff. There wasn't a thing that went out at that plant I wasn't in. I don't feel. Now I never worked in that thorium much when they had that goin' over in Plant 9. I never worked in that very much. I worked some in around there.

01:11:35

A:

In Plant 6, yeah, I'd been over there and worked on machines over there in the mill and stuff like that. But, not so much because there was certain boys stationed like over there and they got accustomed to it, and liked it real well. I'd be called in on weekends or somethin' like that, and work over there a lot. But, there wasn't anything that, they wanted me to do that I couldn't do.

Q:

Now how do you feel about some of the surrounding communities, a lot of them claim that Fernald has ah, disrupted their lives because of certain health effects with uranium and those types of things?

01:12:23

A:

I just don't believe that. (laughs) I just don't. Because ah, I know they got paid extra well for livin' around that community, but they, they musta liked it or they woulda moved out. Now you can't tell me different, because that's the way I feel about it.

A:

It ah, no more danger out there than there was in the plant, and we were in there where the dirt was. And that far away I mean, yeah, the air and stuff travels some, they, it wasn't nothin' like it was in there. (shaking his head) My goodness, you can get in a cloud o' smoke and before you can get out of it, yeah, your lungs are full of it, and but you went ahead and it cleared up and whatever.

01:13:21

Q:

So how do you feel about the settlement that a lot of the community members got?

A:

I don't think they should've. I don't think they should've. The people that worked there is the ones should've got the settlement. But we didn't. The settlement we got didn't compare to what *they* got. And, that's the only hard feelin' I got about Fernald. They really, the retirees, they really sold us down the drain, really. To my noticin', in a lot o' things.

01:14:04

Q:

Now are you on the medical monitoring program?

A:

(pauses) Ah, yeah. You mean at Drake Hospital?

## FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

### Transcript

Q:

Tell us a little bit about that.

01:14:15

A:

I think it's a good physical. I'm supposed to call in now and make my appointment for July. I think it's a good physical. And ah, I ah, I can't have a bit o' drawback on that place. I mean, ah, I never come up with anything that I know of. I mean they said I had a little cataract on one eye, and I had it tested, they said it was nothin' to worry about (laughs), so ah, I'm still goin'.

A:

I had a, a little pneumonia one time before I had my physical, they checked it, too and they had a little cloudiness there, but it's cleared up and nothin' any more. And they checked for asbestos, and couldn't find no traces. And I'd worked around it. We, we had it up around the Boiler House; we had a lot of asbestos up there. But ah.

01:15:20

Q:

How did you get involved in the Medical Monitoring Program? Did they contact you, or how did that work?

A:

Well, yeah. They told the retirees. I mean it would be there for us, so we was all entitled to that. That's one o' the things we was entitled to. And ah, I've had it every year and still do. And last year, I had ah, well, I don't know what ya call it, a rectal examination again to make sure, but everything's OK. I think it's a good thing.

01:16:06

A:

I'll go over to get my appointment again though (laughs). I shoulda had it made before now, but I had a lot o' things goin' on.

Q:

Good, good. (pauses) and let's see. (pauses again). I got that. How do you feel about the work that's going on at Fernald right now?

01:16:41

Q:

Well, I don't know everything that's going on out there yet, but then, it might be all right. I don't know. I can't see that there's that much contamination in some o' that ground. Ah, (pauses) like they claim they is that would hurt anybody. I think if they just got rid o' the buildings and, they was the bad places.

Q:

Maybe those pits and stuff out there, yeah, they had bunches out there, stored out there like. I know they had one pit full and covered it up with ash and dirt and stuff like that, but ah, the driven wells are right there in the front proper- we drank the water off of it for years. They say it was as good a water as it ever was, and I believe it. Ah, I don't think there was any illness comin' from it.

01:17:58

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

Q:  
What did they put in the pits while you were there?

A:  
Well, pretty near all that slurry that come outta the (pauses to think, looking up) Plant- 5, Plant 3. Was it Plant 3? Anyhow, that stuff that they ah, I know it, the liquid and stuff went out there to it. And ah, was dumped out there in those pits, dumped out there. A lot of it was from the ah, Pilot House, too went out there.

01:18:49

A:  
It was the out-fall water and stuff like that come outa the drains went out to the pits.

Q:  
Now how do, well, I know you weren't exactly there when they were doing the cleanup, quite yet, but ah, how do, in your estimation, I know you had a son that did a little bit o' work out there let's wait for this plane, it sounds like a loud one. (laughs) Hang on.

A:  
(Laughs as well)

(tape is paused for the plane to pass by)

01:19:18

Q:  
OK. Um, how, how did the process years and the cleanup years differ?

(interviewee looks blankly at the interviewer)

Q:  
I know you had a son that did some work out there during cleanup.

A:  
Oh. Well, they, he'd been workin' down next to Willey Creek ah in the back. They had put the road in there one time down there someplace. And they had dug out I think, maybe they got a load o' rock or somethin' and to go in, and they said "Hey, that wasn't supposed to be ah, wasn't supposed to be ah, shouldn't-a dug it out."

01:19:59

A:  
And then they, ha, they'd wait until they got some more paperwork, and they said, well, that's not it, we gotta have some more paperwork on this before we can do that. And finally ended up that they didn't do it.

A:  
And then they was diggin' ah, over there near the Pilot House for another little building. I think that's when they was gonna try meltin' this down to make glass, pellets of some kind. I wasn't too familiar with it, but I think they was buildin' a building there or something, and they was in- They had to go and

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

get special training to be around, in the plant there. So they could go ahead and operate there.



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

01:20:54

Q:

And you didn't get any training when you started?

A:

No. No, they ah, they had to have, like if they was diggin' ditches, they had to make sure that it was all shored up and fixed just so, that nobody would get hurt. Now the operat- that's the operator is supposed to make sure that nothin' else and that's the way it should be today as far as that's concerned.

01:21:22

A:

But ah, there's a lotta times you'd hear of different jobs where cave-in or some kind like that, the operator didn't make sure things was fixed just right. I got two sons, I mean they take care of, make sure things was right for 'em. One of 'em works for Cincy; workin' on everything around Cincinnati water lines, breaks, sewer line, gas lines, what have ya.

A:

The other one has been workin', he's worked on the stadium, he's worked up ah, way up in Ohio on a drill rig. And things of that kind. And he has to get on the ocean once in a while, and "Hey. We can't operate in this building with that power on." You know, "Oh, it's turned off." He says, "It's turned off?" He says "How come that crane's a-runnin' down at the other end then?"

01:22:28

A:

He wouldn't move his until- (laughs) they shut her off. He says, That crane o' mine stickin' up there in the air right around them high lines. He says, "Huh-uh. No way." So. They're good boys, and they operate the way it should be.

Q:

Like father, like son, right? You had-

A:

Right.

Q:

The thing with the furnace. You were like, "That furnace is still on."

A:

Yeah.

A:

That's great.

01:22:54

Q:

Um, Now in 1984, there was a lot of media attention on Fernald and how it may have um, put uranium into the atmosphere and those types of things. And you were still working there at that time.

A:

## FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

### Transcript

I come out in '82.

Q:

Oh, did you leave in '82? But did you hear the part, about media?

A:

Yeah.

Q:

How did you react to that, you and your family?

A:

I didn't think there was that much goin' out, really I didn't. I mean, ah. Yeah, there was, we know that some was goin' out, you know. Uranium, acid fumes, and everything at that time. You can see it. You'd see the clouds. But, hey, this is a big ol' country, it just spreads out and so on. I don't think it's gonna hurt anybody that much.

01:23:59

Q:

Now we're tearing down the plant, and ah, we've got quite a few buildings down, and ah, what would you personally like to see that land used for when it's all done?

A:

(pauses and smiles) Well, I don't know. I never heard 'em talk too much of, what, you know. It could be used I suppose for a lot o' things really. Well, you take Knollman's there, them people had dairy cows and stuff all around on the plant.

A:

On one side, there was people that had beef cattle over on the other side there. And I don't think that pasture land was hurt. So I think it could be used for somethin' like that. I don't think farm, I mean, corn stuff like that, I don't think it'd don't pick up stuff like that. I really don't.

01:25:06

Q:

Now, something that they've been referring to, someone like you, who worked there from 1952 to 1982. That's 30 years you were there. They refer to somebody like you as a Cold War Warrior.

A:

Hm (laughing)

Q:

How do you react to being called a Cold War Warrior?

01:25:26

A:

(laughs out loud, mumbling something under his hand as he laughs)

Well, I haven't worried about any o' that stuff up there, really. 'Cause I, I can't see that ah, it is gonna hurt nothin' but-. Nah. It's like shippin' this stuff out, if a train goes down the road there, I don't think

## FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

### Transcript

it's gonna hurt anything. Ah, and even if he spills some of it, why, clean it up and go on.

A:

You know. I don't think it's gonna go on and contaminate the whole country. And if it is, you, if they move it from here out there some place, what's the difference? It's gonna be someplace.

01:26:25

Q:

That makes sense. So the final product at Fernald, while you guys were purifying uranium there, um, were you aware of what those slugs and the different types of products they made at Fernald, did you know what they were gonna be used for?

01:26:49

A:

No, not really. Now, some o' the stuff we knew went to ah, these atomic power plants. Ah, and I still think that it could be used for that if the research is done right, and use it. I mean ah, 'cause it is a good material for the world to have. Now, your atomic bomb, that's a different thing. It proved a point I guess when they used it. (laughs)

A:

But I hope they're not usin' 'em any more today, I mean ah, it's that ah, Fernald ain't the only place around that's got the know-how of uranium.

Q:

Now how did Fernald's role in, I guess the Cold War, how did it further America's mission?

01:27:59

A:

Hmm. Well, I think that they made a lot o' use out of it, but they've cut back now, I don't know what they have done with all the material that they made. Whether they're still usin' any of it in different things, I don't know.

Q:

OK, great. Is there anything that you wanted to talk about that we didn't talk about that you wanna add?

01:28:33

A:

No, that sounds like about all I knew. I enjoyed it, and it seems like I'm in pretty good health yet. (pauses) I don't think, ah, there was ah, I was in and outta the hospital a few times, but it wasn't from the work that Fernald that much.

A:

I had two operations in back surgery and things like that, that, and they kinda gave me a rough time when I had my back surgery. I was off, I don't know, three to three weeks whatever. And ah, doctor said you can go back at light work. Well, I went in, I told 'em, You can go back to work at light work.

01:29:22

A:

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

Well, what's light work? I said, Hey! You're a smarter man than I am. Tell me what light work is. Doctor said I should be on light work. And if it's too heavy for me, I wouldn't do it. (laughs)

Q:

Well, great. Thanks for your time. We appreciate you giving an interview with us.

A:

I enjoyed it. I really have. I enjoyed it. And I hope you get a lot more in with your interviews.

01:29:55

Q:

Oh, yeah. We've got plenty of 'em planned. (laughs)

A:

I called Lucy sittin' down there a while ago, and she was dead as all get out, so she said I just ain't got time to come up there this afternoon, but I'd come up there and see what was goin' on.

(Everyone laughs)

Q:

Great, well now, we need to get a little bit of what we call nat sound, so if we could just sit quietly on the set here for a second. Greg'll pick up some nat sound. Are we rolling?

091:30:16

(off camera: yes we are)

Q:

This is nat sound.