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Transcript

Name: Raymond Wuest

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Tape 14

Project Number 20012

Tape FLHP0027

03:10:07

Q:

Well the first question is real hard. What's your name and how do you spell it, just to make sure we have it right.

A:

03:01:14

Raymond Wuest, W U E S T.

Q:

Great. Now if you could just tell give us a little background, how long have you been in the area and what kinds of work did you do in the early years, those kinds of things.

03:01:26

A:

Um, I've been here all my life, born in 1929, born in the house I still live in. And, uh, I've been mechanical most of my life, all but a few years, out of the service. And uh, what, sometimes I learned to be a tool and die maker when I come out of the service and I come back and began doing mechanical work again.

Q:

Good, Good. Um, tell us a little bit about your years in the service?

03:02:11

A:

Uh, I spent, uh not quite 2 years in the service from 51 March to February 1953. And the best part of my time was in Korea. Six months to day in the service I landed in Japan. So they didn't fool too much with me in the States. But it wasn't a bad experience, it was educational.

Q:

Tell us a little bit about the service station your family ran.

03:02:53

A:

My Dad was in the service station business right here in town, um, oh God I don't know when he really started, but he died in 1946. He had a brain tumor and back then nobody could, they didn't even know what was wrong with him, he was sick for about three years, he'd have like epileptic fits and finally

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when he went into a coma and they operated on him they knew what was wrong with him then. But it was too late.

03:03:39

A:

And that's when I quit school, I had two years of high school, I quit and come home and took care of the garage and supported my mother, uh, then in 1951 Uncle Sam wanted me, we had to sell the business in which we sold it to Jim Wilters and I went into the service and when I came out of the service I went to Fernald to try to get a job, but I never got hired. I finally got a job at Fisher Body and I worked up there for about three months and I got called back to Fernald for another interview, I still never got the job. Then I got laid off at Fisher Body and I went under the GI bill learning the tool and die trade.

03:04:54

A:

And in the meantime, uh, before that they started a fire department in New Baltimore, too.

Q:

Where did you go to high school?

03:05:05

A:

Uh, St. John's, Dry Ridge. I was just plain old Catholic boy you know (laughing).

Q:

Now what job were you interviewing for at Fernald?

03:05:21

A:

As a mechanic. And, uh, then I tried to get I tried to tell the interviewer that I'll just take a laborer's job because it's so close to home. But I still didn't get in (laughing).

Q:

So when you left for the service they were just building the site?

03:05:44

A:

They were building Fernald, they were still building Fernald and I'll tell you New Baltimore profited from the Fernald plant, but townships suffered tax money, because the government don't pay nothing, and that's the same way as are our parks. Miami Whitewater Park owns a lot of the township on money, makes the taxes higher to support schools.

Q:

Because there isn't enough property tax coming in?

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03:06:27

A:

That's right. Not enough property tax. And then they put zoning in the township, which I was against totally from the beginning and I'm still say it's got good points, but it's got too many bad points. Keeps the industry down and that's bad news, tax wise.

Q:

And when they built Fernald, what kind of changes in the community did you see.

03:06:57

A:

Uh, it brought in a lot business during the construction site. I mean you had three saloons and eating places that made money. Plus it was three garages in town and that brought a lot of different people in the town and they spent money. But like I said then I missed the first couple of years there, but when I come back from the service, uh, it was all going already then and it never did bother me as far as Fernald, it was just another plant.

Q:

What purpose did you and family and friends think the plant served?

03:07:52

A:

Really at the time I just thought it was another plant. It had a big checkered board square water tower and it had feed material. It looked like a Purina Chow thing for dogs and I just thought of it that way and as the time went on a lot of guys in town did get jobs there, some friends of mine. They had jobs there and they started saying all, uranium and all this, well, I didn't worry, I'm not that educated to know what uranium really meant back then.

03:08:39

A:

But, uh, it turned out to be no hazard to me at all. I really, I'm not disgusted, health wise, I'm still here (laughing) and I don't know of anything wrong with me. So, I can't say much really.

Q:

The people that you knew that worked at Fernald, did they tell you a lot about their jobs or did they discuss their jobs with you.

03:09:10

A:

No, not really, it was more like a hush, hush job. They didn't have much to say. One guy said that all he did was cut up bars all day long with a cutoff saw. But at the time these were uranium bars, I didn't, you know, you don't, never really said while it was really being, I don't know, in the working stages. You heard more about Fernald after it quit processing uranium than you did before. That's the

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name of Fernald.

Q:

That makes sense. Um, what kind of myths or legends have you heard about the plant?

03:10:02

A:

Well, (laughing) some guys would say boy there's a flock of birds that flew over and they went through this smoke and they just all fell dead. Laying all over the tops of buildings and they had to go pick em up, and I don't know you just heard rumors. I heard a guy fell in a vat and it dissolved bones and everything and they couldn't find him. He disappeared completely. And, like I said friends of mine hunted rabbits right next door to it and they ate the rabbits, but then I heard one guy say that his dog contacted tumors and he thinks that's where he got them from, but that's more hearsay again.

03:10:57

A:

You don't know nothing for sure, you can't blame it on anything, in my book.

Q:

O.K., and uh, let's go into a little bit about the problems with your well. Tell us what happened with that?

03:11:13

A:

Well, the, I didn't really have a well problem, I was drinking my water doing just normal and all of a sudden, uh, Formica was dumping chemicals up there above Fort Scott. Fort Scott got well problems so contamination in the well so then they started coming and testing the wells. But what aggravated me more than anything on the well testing there was three wells between here and Fort Scott they only tested one of them. And the one right next door they tested and they tested mine and two other wells they never tested. And they said mine was contaminated with formaldehyde and don't drink the water.

03:12:10

A:

And as the time went on they kept pushing it back and this is when I was interviewed with Channel 12 on the well deal, they kept pushing it back and I called Dayton and said what are you going to do, tell me, can I, what's going on and they just left it ride and finally they come and dumped concrete in Fort Scott's well and all of a sudden I get a report from the Board of Health that I can go ahead and use my water and that they found out that the formaldehyde in my water was put in the well sample to protect it, preserve it more or less.

03:12:57

A:

So you're one EPA boy didn't know too much either. I'm, I don't like the EPA, that's why I don't like Vice President Gore, I'll tell you that right now on camera. All it does is cost taxpayers money and the

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government tries to protect everybody and you can't do it. People's have got to protect their self.

Q:

Good, Good. And, um, what was the day you finally found out, you'd tried for a number of weeks to get an answer and when did you finally get an answer from the EPA.

03:13:39

A:

I got an answer on the EPA the day we was getting married. That the water was go ahead but don't water your garden out of your well, now why, I couldn't understand this one. And I never had a garden at the time, we never had a garden. And that's been 14 years ago, 13 years ago now that answer came through.

Q:

So you could drink the water but you weren't supposed to eat the vegetables if you watered your garden?

03:14:17

A:

Yeah, that's really what it amounts too.

Q:

No, um, you probably remember hearing some things in the media around 1984 through 1989 when they closed the Fernald Plant, and I've just been asking everybody this, when that all happened what were your impressions of what was going on when they decided to shut the plant down?

03:14:41

A:

Well, when they shut the plant down I thought they don't need no more uranium. This is one reason why it happened the way it did. They didn't really need the plant, it was getting obsolete, this is what my own opinion is on it, that the equipment's getting outdated and this is way big companies do things. Just like shopping centers they tear them down, they build them and run them for so many years, tear them down and build new ones.

03:15:17

A:

And that's what was going on at Fernald but when their doing the transporting the uranium or the contamination I can't understand it yet today why they want to haul it when one area is contaminated, why haul it to another area and contaminate it. This is a bad situation but that's the way they do things. Your filling stations when the gas tanks are seeping in the ground they got to dig all the gravel and dirt all out and they haul it somewhere else. It's bad news, this is EPA again.

Q:

Have you heard much about how they're doing right things now, they're talking about shipping out a

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lot of the waste by rail. Have you attended any of the public meetings about any of that?

03:16:17

A:

I've heard a lot of it going by rail and that and it's all new type containers now and they're shipping it out but why did they put in a big high pressured sewer system aggravates me and why did they test the river water every day, every morning, every night if they're not dumping something in the Great Miami River, I can't understand it and they test the water up at Ross, above and below the plant. So there's something going on there, so some of the contamination had to go to the river but then you look at it this way, we've got beavers in the river, we got all different types of fish, perch, bass, everything and years ago when I was a kid all that was in there was carp, yellow bellies and sun fish.

03:17:28

A:

So, whatever they put in the river, helped I guess (laughing).

Q:

Yeah, they monitor the wildlife, I know they do that, that's kind of interesting. Um, what's your understanding of, of course most people that live in the area know that Fernald sits right on a aquifer, what's your understanding of the aquifer and how it relates to this area?

03:17:52

A:

Well, really the way they talk it misses New Baltimore, so the aquifer, we're out of the aquifer area. We're not listed or this brings in the water situation right now that's where Fernald cost me \$4,000 for water going past my house in which uh I didn't even want and I never had a say so that I did want it go past of didn't, they pushed it down our throats in New Baltimore and people in the aquifer area got it free so why don't we get it free. At least past your house but now they say there is money, something, they've run out of money, the county had to start charging. Well, they should have stopped the project before it got to that point.

Q:

And you aren't even tapped into the water system?

03:19:05

A:

I am not tapped into the water system I'm still using my well in which everything is still fine and I'm still living, I drink the water.

Q:

So why do you have to pay money when you're not tapped into the water system?

03:19:19

A:

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That's your going past my property, \$26 a foot and that's the money I think Fernald's handing out to all kinds of people for stress, uh, I don't know of any stress from Fernald, why should there be stress? It's there, you can't do nothing about it, so why worry about it?

Q:

Now you served some time in the service and um as far as Fernald goes it was part of the national defense. How do you feel about that whole issue?

03:20:03

A:

You needed it at the time, we needed Fernald, now we don't need it. This is what's going on that's why I said it never bothered me when it was there in operation. Now it don't bother me now because I keep saying to myself one day there will be houses built all over that ground. And that's what will happen, it's just a matter of years and they'll say oh everything's clear, put up the houses.

Q:

O.K., lets talk a little bit about um your experiences with the fire station here, tell us about starting up a fire station in New Baltimore.

03:20:53

A:

I think it was around 1954 or 1955 I think it really started. In 1956 we bought a pumper for a \$1000 down, I think it was about a \$12,000 pumper. Ordered it and the day the pumper was delivered we did accumulate \$1000 but the bill was \$1004 and the treasurer had thrown in the \$4, I'll never forget it and uh, they voted me in as fire chief and I served I think, I don't know, about five years something like that and we decided we needed a new fire house in which no money available but we run carnivals. I think the first carnival we had, we grossed around \$4500 which was really good for a little community.

03:22:07

A:

But it was a lot of work involved, running around, 'cause when we first started there was no money in the fire department, everybody donated their cars, trucks, time and it just went that way and towards last when I decided to get out of the fire department everybody wanted gas money and they was all getting tired of it too, I guess and that's when it was turned over to the township and that's when the township, they did come to me and ask me if I wanted the job and I said no, because I'd done got away from it and I didn't want to go back.

03:22:56

A:

That's when Mr. Miller got the job, in which I'm glad he's got it, cause I don't want it even for pay I don't want it (laughing).

Q:

How did you all get the money for that first pumper?

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03:23:18

A:

Go around taking up donations. And it was kind of nasty, 'cause the people that really had money in the community never donated their fair share and even after it was going they never donated their fair share but they did some profit by the fire department. I mean they never hesitated when something was wrong in the '59 flood. I mean we pumped out a lot of basements, did a lot of work for a lot of people that never did much for the fire department.

03:24:04

A:

And they come up with this, one guy comes up and what did so and so give and you stand there and say well he give \$25 and boom! That's all he'd give and I mean millionaire that's all they give and you got people that uh didn't really have that kind of money why they'd donate \$50, \$100 and then we'd get a lot of selling raffle tickets, I mean raffling televisions and whatever.

03:24:40

A:

So then monthly and there was one girl that was a wonderful seller of raffle tickets at the bar she was a barmaid up there at the saloon, every month she sold a bunch of raffle tickets for the fire department and that's where we kept the fire truck for a good while behind the saloon in the garage when Bill and Bob Gums had the saloon they'd give the garage back there and we had to fix it up to put the pumper in. But then we finally got a building going and run out of money. And I don't want to brag but I put a bunch of money in the hat out of interest, I didn't donate it to get some of the people paid off for helping on the building.

03:25:45

A:

And after I got out as fire chief they paid me back, they went and borrowed the money somewhere else and paid me back.

Q:

And what was the first big fire that this fire department dealt with?

03:26:02

A:

I think the first worst fire was up in Ross with the tractor trailer truck because we had two way radio in our truck and we wasn't really hooked up with the county yet and wasn't allowed to really use it but they said that under them circumstances we could have used it, but the people of Ross called down here for help, so we'd go to help, everybody'd come to help on that one.

03:26:32

A:

And that was the first really big fire because we even went up the next when it rekindled and put out.

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But we've had a couple of other fires while I was fire chief, uh, when the kids was throwing bombs, throwing cocktails on house roofs and barns. We had over here on Lankins' Farm just across the river the Coon Dog Association and Dunlap and Groesbeck called in New Baltimore that time. Yeah, and there was lightning hit a house at Fernald, an old house and we tapped into Mobile Chemicals water supplies to fight that fire in which they donated a whole bunch of water that time.

03:27:40

A:

But generally the fires was minor, small camp fire and as far as the life squad situation I got out before the life squad was developed.

Q:

And what kind of involvement did Fernald have in the New Baltimore Fire Department?

03:28:07

A:

At that time they had none when I was in there. Later on they came in and they start, because at that time you wasn't even allowed to into Fernald to help fight a fire, you wasn't. But in '9 flood they let people drive right past the buildings because it was the only way to get from here to Ross or 126. You couldn't get in or out of Baltimore. Baltimore was isolated on all the roads and it just, it's now cleaned up enough where their fire department all works together and which is a good thing.

Q:

So during the '59 flood, 128 was completely under water is that right? (Response: Right) Wow, so people would actually go through the plant?

03:29:16

A:

Drove through the plant. You got on Willey Road went in and come out on 126. Fire trucks whatever. We had a fire truck up in Ross in the '59 flood and I called them and they said they got to come back man the water is coming up down here and we're getting in trouble and they had to come through Fernald to get back to Baltimore and right above Fort Scott there was an automobile stalled in the middle of the road in about 2½ feet of water and they just took the bumper of the fire truck and pushed him right on through here to get on back here at the same time because that was kind of hectic day and night because my boss called up and (fanned the products) at the time and said aye you coming to work, I said if you got a helicopter, I'll be there.

03:30:15

A:

That was the only way we could get there, and that went on for three days before we could get out of town. The intersection at 128 was under 15 or 20 feet of water and New Haven Road, Jasper Stevens and my brother got in a boat to get the Pottinger's out of the house back on Paddy's Run Creek and the motor of the boat caught on the telephone lines and almost sunk the boat but they made it.

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Q:

Um, let's talk a little more about the '59 flood, you were just telling me a story about the fire department dropping ropes off the bridge; tell us a little about that.

04:01:20

A:

Well they called up and said they're missing in Ross, two or three firemen in a boat they can't get a hold of them they never came back. And they said the river, the current got them and they're coming down the river. So we took our fire truck and pulled it out on the bridge and we dropped ropes down off the bridge and we did this and we sat there all night and it was cold, I mean cold. The brakes froze up on the fire truck. One of the firemen was a construction mechanic and he had torches on his truck, he thawed out the brakes because the trees was starting to hit the bottom of the bridge and we had to pull off the bridge.

04:02:11

A:

So we left the ropes tied there and that was it, the boat never did show up and later on we got word that (laughing) the boys that was in the boat got to the house they was going to get the people out. But they never left because they was scared to come back, the current was too swift for them. I called for a helicopter to pick up two people up above Fort Scott and they went in the house and they got their television set out and the water come up so fast that they couldn't come back out but they'd hung onto a case of beer they carried and hanging onto a tree and we got an army duck, I couldn't get a helicopter, we got an army duck come in and when he pulled out the current just took him down the stream. He couldn't do nothing.

04:03:20

A:

So, uh finally Mr. Scholtice up in Okeana I believe or somewhere Shandon up in there, he put his boat in up at Ross and come down and across along the side of the current all the way down and about 4 o'clock in the morning we got these two guys in the boat and I called one guy's wife and told her we'd got 'em and that they were all right and here's another deal I missed a, I lost a fireman and didn't know where he went, whether he went with the county, what engineer, superintendent and they went through Fernald and they went all the way to Hamilton to get him back him up to Dry Ridge for him to get home, but this is what I said they run right through Fernald through Willey Road. They couldn't get back to Baltimore so they went that direction.

Q:

How did the folks at the plant react to the flood, I mean did things go on as usual?

04:04:42

A:

A lot of the my old, we had a deal, Fernald really never really reacted about the flood. They just went about their business because a lot of their people from Indiana could still come to work and people coming in 126 could come to work, but uh we had two, what do you call them poachers or what, went

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out in a boat and tried to get, catch a fuel oil drum and when they reached for the drum they fell out of the boat and the boat got away from them and their hanging on tree down here above the Fort Scott again and a lot of people from Fernald stopped and took pictures of the rescue.

04:05:44

A:

I think Ted Barry and Les Flick was in the boat maybe Joe Winterman went in a boat and got these two guys out of the trees, they should have left them, no not really, I shouldn't say that I guess on tape (laughing) but they had no business to be there to start with.

Q:

Wow. That's amazing. I should ask more people about that because I know that was a big thing around then. Um, let's see, tell us about your impressions of living so close to Fernald all your life.

04:06:26

A:

Well, my impression of living so close to it was just another big factory to me. I'll be perfectly honest, it never really bothered me, my mother was never bothered about it, she never did complain about Fernald. I never did, I don't know why until it hit the fan later in the years and then you say oh that's what they was doing and its just, I don't know, since its cleaned up I don't feel a bit better now than I did years ago about it. Still the same if it was there or it wasn't there, it don't bother me.

04:07:10

A:

But they are, like I said they are helping the community since they're getting older like the fire department and that, they'd bring their pumper out. At first they wasn't allowed to go off the property but then they got that all straightened out. So they really, it did kind of help the community in a sense but in another sense it helped a lot of people this time with the free handout of the taxpayer's money.

Q:

Tell us a little bit about your impression of the settlements?

04:07:53

A:

It's really totally unfair in my book. They started on the right track they had a map drawn up, so many mile radius I say once you lived in the area the closer you lived to Fernald with all this money that they did end up getting and which I don't know what it is, pacifying money's all it does, trying to pacify people and you never pacify people cause I could stand on a street corner and give a \$100 bill away to everybody that goes pass by me and when I run out of \$100 bills I'm a no good guy right there.

04:08:40

A:

And that's what happens, a money situation. But the property settlement is really bad, stress settlements bad. The closer you are the more you should have got as you moved out the area, every

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person in the area should have got the same amount within one mile, everybody at two miles should have got the same amount. Not the way they did it here, just because some people, I don't know, college graduates got more money out of a stress settlement than his brother living in the house got a high school graduate.

04:09:35

A:

Now the psychiatrist they don't know the people around here, this was bad, all they do is whatever you answered on paper. And a lot of people, I think a lot of people got money from Fernald that wasn't even here at the time they should have been. It's really a bad settlement, bad situation and of the lawyers, they should have seen it. But there's another thing they offered everybody a free medical examination and a lot of people went and had it done. But I said I'm not a Fernald guinea pig. If something's wrong with me I'll go to my doctor.

04:10:21

A:

And I think this is what Fernald was using these people for, guinea pigs, give them a free medical exam and they did tell a friend of mine that he's got to lose weight and it wasn't about three months later he died with cancer after his examination by Fernald. So I don't know what they was examining you for.

Q:

So did you get an invitation to be part of the medical monitoring (response: did I have what), did you have some kind of invitation that came in the mail to be part of the medical monitoring program or how did ...

04:11:05

A:

Yes, I could have did that but I didn't, said I'm not a guinea pig. And as far as the property devaluation settlement I don't know, the taxes kept going up on my property and, uh, I got the paper and applications for property settlement, devaluation, and the first question on the chart is how much money do you make in a year and it is none of Fernald's business. IRS is the only one that's got to know, not Fernald. I never filled out the papers so that's why I never got no property settlement and I never got no stress, I never filled out no stress papers, all I got is \$109.10 plus I got the \$500 when you first signed up.

04:12:11

A:

And there's people getting thousands and they live further away from there than what I do which is totally unfair. (Response: It doesn't make sense)

Q:

We mentioned a little while ago what would happen with the future land use. In your opinion what should happen to the land that Fernald is sitting on right now once it's cleaned up.

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04:12:38

A:

Hey, it should be an industry, but I'm afraid it will be homes because it is nice level property and its out of the flood district really, its up on top of the hill more or less and I'm afraid it will be homes more than industry because the zoning around here is atrocious, bad and they don't want too much industry and I think they should have industry because taxes go up all the time just like I said the only thing that Fernald did for me was raise my taxes \$182 every 6 months for the water assessment. Right there's totally unfair

04:13:36

A:

Some people suffer, some don't.

Q:

Is there anything you want to add?

04:13:47

A:

Not really, I just, I think I've said my peace (laughing), got it off my chest anyway.

Q:

Is there anything we didn't cover that you wanted to cover?

04:14:01

A:

Oh, not really that I can think of off hand right now. I can't think of anything right now. Probably after you's leave I can, that's the way it always happens, I wished I'd said that (laughing)

Response: And I'll be thinking to myself I should have asked him that.