

Rueben P. Taralseth

Reuben P. Taralseth (born: October 16, 1901) was born at Niagara, North Dakota, but moved with his parents to a homestead near Landa in 1902. R.P. has been the Eicksvold Township clerk for 18 years, served on the township school board for six years, and has been a member of the Landa Cooperative Elevator's Board of Directors for six years. A farmer, he was interviewed by Larry J. Sprunk on the family's place in Bottineau County on October 5, 1976, and spoke about early farming improvements, the flu epidemic of 1918, and the impact of the Depression on his home area. R.P. presently lives near Lake Metigoshe.



LARRY: How were those early years? Did it take your dad a few years to get rolling as a farmer or were the crops pretty good?⁴⁸

48. Bottineau County history has been published in the following sources: Bottineau County Historical Society, *Highlights of Bottineau County History* (Bismarck, N.D.: *Bismarck Tribune*, 1977); Alexander George Burr, "The Organization of Bottineau County," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, IX-1 (October, 1941), 3-20; "The Sinclair Family in Bottineau County," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, X-4 (October, 1943), 217-243; "Some Highlights of Bottineau County History," *North Dakota History*, 14-3 (July, 1947), 242-264; "Some Highlights of Bottineau County History," *North Dakota History*, 16-4 (October, 1949), 211-263; Bottineau County Diamond Anniversary Publication Committee, *Bottineau County Diamond Jubilee, 1884-1959* (Bottineau, N.D.: np, 1959); *Bottineau Courant*, Diamond Jubilee Edition, June 24, 1959; *Bottineau Courant*, June 16, 1954 (50th Anniversary Celebration at Landa).

R.P.: Well, I 'spose he was probably a little luckier than a lot of them. He'd made money and had money. I 'spose it probably didn't take him as long as others at the same time. I knew a lot of 'em that didn't have anything a' tall. Money was scarce and it was hard puttin' a crop in and then they had to drag it all the way to Bottineau and further sometimes. And then dad built a blacksmith shop out here and he done all the blacksmith work for the neighbors, sharpened plow lays. That was his life. He built another granary, moved that house in, and then he got an elevator in here. And he had a windmill that run all this stuff, a big high windmill, one of these power windmills, and then he had a feed grinder; so it was just like a town here. They'd come here and grind their feed, you know. He

monkeyed with that. He never did do any real farming himself. He always had a hired man to do it.

LARRY: So he had a windcharger-powered grinder?

R.P.: Mill. Windmill. Power mill, they called it, with a big, big beam. They didn't have to have hardly any wind. It run anyhow. An eight-inch burr mill, you see.

LARRY: I see. Was that for grinding feed for the livestock?

R.P.: For the livestock. Yeah. Oh, yeah, he had to grind feed.

LARRY: Did he ever try grinding flour?

R.P.: No. Not here. They never did. If I remember right, they tried it out once in awhile and made some cracked wheat, you know, but flour, no.

LARRY: So he had a feed grinder here and a blacksmith shop (laughs)?

R.P.: Yeah. Yeah. And he had a man to watch the feed grinder in the wintertime. He could sit in the house and the guy was standing there grinding feed (laughs).

LARRY: What kind of a social life did this area have when you were a boy, eight, 10, 12 years old?

R.P.: Well, they'd have get-togethers. Course, I didn't go to any of 'em. They had a hall there, you know, and they'd have dances and in about 1912 there was a town hall here. I think, it was a few miles straight east here. My dad helped build that, a big one. So they had all their entertainment there and then later years they organized kind of a community club. Then we had our club meetings twice a month. And after that we had a dance. We had a accordin player and a guitar. Every two weeks we operated that way for about 20 years. Yeah. We took turns cleanin' the hall and things like that. And we served lunch and we charged ten cents for admission.

LARRY: That's pretty reasonable (laughs).

R.P.: Yeah (laughs). We made expenses. I guess, there was a little money in the treasury when they quit finally in the 40s, I guess.

LARRY: Was that a country hall then?

R.P.: Township hall. That's where we done the voting and stuff like that. It still stands. But it hasn't been used for voting the last two years because we vote in town now.

LARRY: But that was built by the farmers . . .

R.P.: Oh, yeah. The township. Yeah. And they got together and helped build it, you see. My dad was a good carpenter and there was a few others that was just as good, probably better, and then they had a barn there to put our horses in in the wintertime and then we had our township meetings. I was a clerk there for about 20 years, 25 years.

LARRY: Was township government a lot more active in those years?

R.P.: Oh, yeah, We always had a full house there 'cuz I was clerk for 20 years, 25 years, and I didn't want it any longer because I wasn't around here so much anymore.

LARRY: Were there some tough years here in the teens, 20s or 30s?

R.P.: Tough? Geez. Yeah. They were tough. We had seven years we didn't have a crop here. Right in through here I

had an extra failure in 1930. I got hailed out slick and clean. It was just ready t' cut, good crop. There wasn't a spear an inch long left in the field. You couldn't even find anything there. It was ripe, you know. Me and a few of my neighbors. It was just a narrow strip about two miles wide so we got an extra failure. And then right around in '31 up until 1936 we never had anything, but in '37 we started gettin' a crop and we had big crops ever since. Even this year we don't have t' worry. 35 bushels is the average.

LARRY: Did you have a lot of people pack up and leave in the 30s?

R.P.: Well, I wouldn't say right around here. This is pretty good territory. There was a few, not many. No, there wasn't too many that'd leave on us. Oh, there was a few farms that we lost through the Federal Land Bank, but with a lot of 'em their kids could buy 'em back with very little investment. In fact, no investment at all. My brother worked for the federal land bank.⁴⁹ They had an arrangement at that federal land bank that if a farmer owed on his farm a son or someone from his family could go to the bank and they had the first chance to buy it back. They got some awful reasonable terms. If I don't remember wrong, why, they made a deal. They bought the land back. That happened two, three places right around here. I think, for instance, the bank furnished them seed the first year and they got half the crop. In two, three different places around here in two years they had their farm paid. They got enough out of their half shares of crop, you know. I imagine, the next year they had to furnish their own seed, but in two, three years they had their farms paid for. Yeah. So they got 'em back. They stayed in the family.

We were a little more fortunate there. We didn't have any loans on our farm or anything. It got so bad, though, that after seven years we weren't able to pay our taxes; so we had that to contend wit' (laughs). I drove all the way down to Bismarck to the state bank there to loan on a quarter of land so we could pay off our taxes. It's in the reserve now and we loaned on that thing. It was our poorest quarter. It was where we got all our hay for our stock, you know. We used to run about 150 head of cattle then, so we borrowed on that. All they'd loan us, the state bank, was \$800 on a quarter of land. Then there was something with the abstract and the transfer that wasn't quite right so we had to have a lawyer. So we didn't get more than \$400 out of the deal. The lawyers and expenses and that. All we got out of it was \$400. At that time we didn't pay more than \$35 an acre, you know. Now its \$235. So that's all we owed on our land was the taxes and we got that straightened out.

LARRY: At this time you had five quarters, R.P.?

R.P.: No. We had four quarters.

LARRY: Were you able to keep them all through the 30s with the exception of that quarter you had to get a loan on?

R.P.: Yeah. Yeah. We had a lot o' cattle that kept us going.

49. Federal land banks are extensions of the Federal Farm Credit Board that make loans and provide credit to farmers.

We had a lot o' milk cows even though we didn't get a heck of a lot for cream and stuff. But we butchered. We had all our meat, we had our chickens, we had milk, cream, and butter and everything. All we had t' buy was sugar, coffee, and stuff like that. You know, those dirty 30s they called 'em. We had more darn fun then. We were all in the same boat. We were all broke. We had house parties and some made homemade beer (laughs). They'd have a party in the house and dance and everything was fun. You know, everybody was alike then. Now people got a lot o' money and it kind of went to their heads and stuff like that. They got independent. And then they got that seven, eight dollars a bushel for their grain and, my gosh, they went wild. Most of those fellas didn't have a dime before and now you couldn't reach 'em with a ten-foot pole. (laughs)

LARRY: Do you think that the feeling that you describe about the 30s, where the people had fun, was characteristic of the whole area?

R.P.: Oh, yes. Yes. It was. We got together.

LARRY: People didn't get depressed or down in the mouth?

R.P.: No, if we had enough gasoline to get there, that was all, you know.

LARRY: Could you keep a sense o' humor?

R.P. Oh, yeah, I think, there was more of a sense of humor then than there is now. Yes. I think so. A lot more. Yeah. Yeah, everybody had a good time there.

R.P.: We got caught in the flu here, you know, in 1918. And that was terrible. They were dying like flies all around here. I was out threshing, hauling bundles, me and a hired man. He had just come from the old country. He was my cousin. We finished up with one rig. It wasn't too much of a crop that year, so we finished up with one rig up north here around Landa and then we come home. We had our new racks, two each, and nice teams and then south here they had quite a bit of threshing left and a neighbor wanted us to help there. I was only about 14 years old. 15, I think it was, and he was two years older than me, about 17 or 18 or somethin' like that. We were working down there and all of a sudden that flu struck and everybody got sick. Oh, were we ever sick! So we unhooked our team. We had a steady team and a wild team so we hooked the wild team on the back, made a bed on the front rack and we started the teams home and he just laid there on the bed in the rack.

We got home then. Dad was up then. The rest of the family was all in bed sick, so we went to bed. Dad took care of the horses, put 'em in the barn, and Ole and I went upstairs and laid down. We laid there for several days. Dad was up and around then. He was tending the whole house. They were all sick. They all were in bed, pretty sick, and the doctor was here. There was a doctor in Landa at that time by the name of [D.D.] Rystad. And he was out here several times every day and I got pretty well. Ole, my partner, got feeling pretty good and he says, "I

think, I'll go out" — it was a nice sunny day. He thought he'd go out and walk around. I suppose he had to go to the toilet. We had out toilets then. He was out a little while and he come back and went back to bed and then he got sick again. But I didn't get up; I just laid in there. Then the doctor came out there. He was out there for the next two, three days, you know. He [Ole] got pneumonia then, see, and, by golly, one morning I woke up and he laid dead long side of me. Then afterwards when we all got well then my dad got sick and that's when the TB took a hold of him, see. He was up and around for about five years, from '18 to '23, til finally he passed away too. Yeah, that's the way it goes sometimes.

LARRY: Did that flu hit that fast, R.P., that you guys were out threshing and all of a sudden . . .

R.P.: Threshing the day before and then in the morning we got sick, prett'i' near the whole crew, I guess, as far as I can remember. It's been many years ago now, you know. And my one sister got so sick. I was up and around. And then we had this old Dr. Landau. He wasn't so old either. He got sick and, I guess, he went to bed himself so we got different doctors in Westhope. Dr. [Charles] Durnin and he was a good man. There's no doubt about it. And that one girl. She was 14 years old and . . .

LARRY: A sister?

R.P.: Yeah. A sister. And so Doc come out in the yard. I was kind o' handy with the Model T's at that time, see, because we had a couple of them. We had a 1913 model and a 1917, so I was kind o' handy with them and the doctor was driving one. I always had to change coil points and plugs for him when he had trouble, you know, trying to take care of all the patients he had around there. So I was out there monkeying with his car and he was check-in up on this girl. She wasn't gettin' very good, wasn't very good, and he says, "That girl's goin' t' die if we don't operate," he said. So then he said, "You go into town and get some new lumber and you make a operating table and I'll get a doctor." There was a Dr. Russell [?] over here by Newburg that was good. "I'll go get him and we'll be here in the morning, 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning, and we'll operate cuz she's goin' t' die unless we cut a hole in there and take out a rib. Cut a hole in there and take out a rib about that long," he said, "and put a tube in there cuz she's fillin' up with fluid."

So I hurried up and went to town. I got the lumber, the right stuff, new lumber, and I made that operating table and I still got it over in the shed over there. Yeah. So I had it so high, you know. And in the morning that table was ready and the doctors were here and they operated on her. They cut out this bone in her side and drained the fluid. That was right here on this spot, right in the house here. There was no masks or nothing.

LARRY: Did she pull through?

R.P.: Oh, she pulled through. Yeah.