

This interview is for the Barbara Morgan Harvey Center for the Study of Oil Heritage, through Clarion University of Pennsylvania. This interview is with Mr. Bill Huber, whose family has a rich history in Oil City and the production of Oil. Mr. Huber has been a producer of crude oil since he was a teenager. This interview is being conducted in the historic National Transit building, located in Oil City, Pennsylvania, on December 5th, 2008. This interview is being conducted by Neil McElwee.

McElwee- Good Morning. It's December 5th, 2008. We're having a conversation this morning with Mr. Bill Huber. Again, we're in the hallway of the National Transit Building. Mr. Huber is one of those rare breeds of human beings that you read about in the paper, you hear about, but very few of us ever actually get a chance to talk with one of these fella's. He's an actually producer of crude oil, in Pennsylvania. A guy who spends his entire life out in the woods drilling for crude, and brining it up, and he's had his ups and downs. And that's going to be our subject this morning. Thank you, Bill. Thank you, it's a pleasure to have you here. Now, you and I were talking just before we got started on this, course we are now on December 5th, 2008, we're talking about 42 dollar a barrel or so oil. Far cry from where it was just six months ago, certainly a year ago. You've experienced these, these , these highs and lows, these rapid turns in price, and of course the great highs but also the great lows. And this is just déjà vu for you. You've gone through this a number of times in your fifty years in the business. Isn't that right?

Huber- Yeah. We've, we've weathered a lot of ups and downs over the years. Back when I went to work for my dad, which woulda been, well I started pumpin for him when I was twelve years old. But, you know, we were getting \$3.65 a barrel for oil then. And it kind of floated along at \$3.65 to \$4.65, up until umm—probably seventy-three, and then it started to move up. And then from seventy-three it took us into the first high peak. Thirty-five dollars, we thought we, well actually we thought we died and went to heaven right there. But, it, it caught, well it caught me, I'd spent quite a bit of money, had a lot of plans, and all of the sudden in eighty-nine we were at nine dollars a barrel. I spent the next ten years trying to get it back out of debt again. I had drilled some wells, but I borrowed money to do it, and you gotta pay, you gotta pay it back. And then, this last boom, we didn't do anything drastic. Uh, we just figured we had enough wells out there that maybe we just oughta try to get as many— as much old stuff together as we could. You know, rather than borrow money, and spendin money to drill with. You just hate to get caught twice (laughs).

McElwee- Yeah, I recall you saying, oh maybe nine months ago, you were really were considering drilling another well. Totally new well. Did you ever actually do that?

Huber- Well, the guy's supposed to come and get me a couple permit settings, and I still might do that. Especially if we start to, but you've got to do it, well you've got to do it—so the way I'd do it—would do it anymore—I wouldn't, wouldn't go and borrow the money. Let's put it that way. I probably could, but I wouldn't. I'd tried to fandangle enough money, and we were at the point we coulda done that I think. You know, pulled enough

money out, two or three months in a row, and had enough money to drill a well. Right now, that's kinda off the table, but I'm hoping maybe it will come back. And it wouldn't have to come back to hundred dollars either, but.

McElwee- Really, that's a good point. Where would it have to be. What do you consider a good price for crude from the standpoint of a producer making it viable for him to continue.

Huber- Well, I had a discussion with some other producers here about a week ago. We all kinda concluded that what you were talking about earlier, about seventy dollars a barrel we could handle. Eighty, seventy to eighty dollars we could do our drilling programs and make some money.

McElwee- Makes it worth your while.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- It's worth the risk.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- With that kind of money. And that is, I think the general consensus throughout the world, actually from a producer's standpoint, that's the kind of money you need for crude.

Huber- See back, well back in the first, well back in eighty, we could drill a well for twenty-five thousand, and pretty well take care of the well. Now that figure has moved to sixty-five thousand.

McElwee- One well.

Huber- One well, so you know. It's a pretty good investment when you think about it, you know, sixty-five thousand. Now there's another route some of them have went, and that's get investors. I get a group of guys together, and they wanna, we wanna put in ten, and ten, and ten. You know, and maybe, or more, or you get another group that's a little bigger than that, and when you get enough money, which you're all shareholders in that well, so. But you hate to do, well I know in the early boom, there were a lot of investors that never seen their money back. Never seen it back. I, I'm one that if, if I am gonna take in a group of fellas to—with me, I wanna make money, but I want them to make money. So, you know some of them were purely out there just to get that invested money. They didn't care, they didn't even care if the well got drilled, some of them so (laughs). As long as they got your money you.

McElwee- Well, that might be your approach

Huber- Maybe that's the difference between a promoter and a producer. I don't know (laughs).

McElwee- (laughs) Bill, Bill, for those who don't have an idea at all what your lease is like. Why don't you kind of tell us where it is, or at least the one you're, you're currently running anyhow. And um, and how you, physically describe it, and also the equipment you use, and the history of some of some of that great old equipment you have out there. That kind of thing. Why don't, Bill, we can't take it for granted that this audience will know really what you're doing out there.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- So why don't you just set the scene if you will, for your operation.

Huber- Well, I have actually thirty pieces of property out there. All within a mile of each other, the biggest piece has five hundred and seventy-one acres in it. Uhh, there are probably a hundred and ten or fifteen wells on that property. Most of them are the old rod-line power, that goes back to the nineteen hundreds; where they run them with a shackle line or a rod line we call them. Maybe one unit will run twenty wells at a time. The property, the second property has about twenty-six wells on it, but most of them are on jacks. There's no power there, it's all

McElwee- Electric motor.

Huber- Individual jacks. Then the third property is a small property, it's only twenty acres, but there's nine wells on it. And they're rod line wells, there is one new Frack well on it, and the rest of them are—when I say new, it was new in the eighties, we drilled it. And it's a fifteen horse reed, which we've built here in Oil City. We started, I think the patent says 1898 on most of them.

McElwee- You're big central power, is that um, off of a gas engine, or is it

Huber- Yeah, that had, that had a fifteen horse reed on it. Uhh, we didn't have enough gas to run the engine anymore, so I converted it to an electric motor. There's an electric motor sets there, with a set of e-belts on the wheel ; it spins the fly-wheel, and of course everything else is the same. It's got the big ten inch belt, that goes out to an oil well supply power built here in Oil City. Most of these equipment was built here in Oil City.

McElwee- Yeah.

Huber- It was part of the, you know, what are they talking about with GM, all the satellite companies? Well, when the oil was back in—you know we had all the satellite companies here, they built equipment. Designed, and built this equipment, specifically for here.

McElwee- Yes. Yeah. Right. Alright, in fact lets kind of focus on that just a little more. The kinds of drilling you do is with cable tools. Your well, your wells were originally drilled with that.

An up and down motion, literally with a cable with a string of tools, at the end of it was a big heavy piece that had a chiseled

Huber- Bit on it.

McElwee- Bit on it. People outside of Pennsylvania, and even in Pennsylvania, they don't realize that's the kind of drilling you do, and that's the kind of drilling we do here in Pennsylvania. They see in the movies, and on TV, the big rotary drills that are associated with Texas and Oklahoma. We don't do that, you don't do that. You use the, the uhh tool.

Huber- Well, yeah. Everyting I built up until 1980, was with cable tools. The first rigs were wooden. In fact, the first rig I went to work on was a wooden machine, with a temper screw. I say the Colonel Drake thing, you know (laughs).

McElwee- Right.

Huber- I was sixteen years old, and I dressed tools on that rig all summer. Uhh, then that time or a little earlier than that, the Sputter come in, and they were an all steel machine with no walking beam. They had a, they did have beam, but you didn't have a temper screw. Your line come up through the beam like this, and over the derrick. And to let out the line all you had to do was lift the break a little bit, and that give you whatever amount of line you were looking for. I went to work for Ron Brown in 1967, and he had three rigs. Three ?? series Sputters and we met at Peaches Restaurant in Pleasantville and I usually left my vehicle there—and I never knew what rig was mine for the day. He'd take you out there and drop you off and you either drilled or you set there and watch the birds all day, but (laughs) you were there. And I literally had been around that all my life, but I literally never actually learned to drill until I, you know I had no choice, I had to drill. The machine was mine and I had, if I wanted to keep the job—. And at that time crude oil was only like four something a barrel, so I worked for him—pumped. Beside, you know I did my pumping, and then I got good enough that Taylor Drill hired me. So I worked all day for Brown, come off at four o'clock for Brown and go on for Taylor from four o'clock to one in the morning.

McElwee- hmm.

Huber- And still did the pumping. It was a tough job to try to get all that done (laughs).

McElwee- I'm sure it was.

Huber- Used to got laid down and it was six o'clock, time to get up and go again, so (laughs).

McElwee- But you were a young man. You could do all that. Did they pay you well?

Huber- Well, you know I got a buck and a quarter an hour.

McElwee- Ahh, that much?

Huber- Yeah (laughs).

McElwee- I think I made that at Isely's—

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- that same time.

Huber- Wow. Later on, we made you know—. I ended up moving from drilling into service work. I did service work for years and years—for every company out there. And service work is where you have a machine—but we call it a pulling machine. We pull the pipe and the rods and all that stuff out, fix it up, put it back in again— and I worked from Grand Valley to Boy Hill—about everywhere in between (laughs).

McElwee- People don't realize if you're not around the industry, you don't just drill and then pump. Around here we're all pumpers, Bud Floyd was—but you clean them out with some, I won't say regularity, but they have to be cleaned out.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- And that's, that's real—where the real work, and most often when you see something a rig over a well out there in the woods. That's really what they're doing, they pull.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- Your wells have—your wells are typically how deep out there in the (inaudible).

Huber- Well, from down in the lower end on Cherry Run they're four-fifty. But if you go back up to the top of the hill and they're a thousand-fifty, so.

McElwee- And then they're cased how far down?

Huber- Three hundred feet—well, the casing average is with the water table. If you're down here, let's say in Oil City, your water cable here would probably go from a hundred and fifty to two hundred feet. Somewhere in there that's all you'd have to put in. If you go up here on Arm Back, you'll probably have to run three-hundred—two-eighty to three hundred feet up there to get through that surface water.

McElwee- That's a lot pipe. That's a lot of weight.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- And you and the machine, that's still a lot of manpower.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- I, I noticed and you've told me, I ask you all the time "How's your hands?" You've taken a beating out there over the years.

Huber- Yeah. Anymore—any—the arthritis gets to me some days (laughs).

McElwee- Your son helps you?

Huber- Yeah, yeah. He's, well he's been with me—actually he started like I did. My dad used to take me in a basket when I was.

McElwee- Little kid. Infant.

Huber- And I used to—I did the same thing with Billy. I used to take him—I won't remember as I had a basket, but I used to take him. And I had a big old box in the engine house, set on the wall—oh just kept odds and ends in it, and I'd get a bunch of clean rags and lay him in the basket or that box with the engine—the old engine running in there. It was kind of like a heartbeat, he would just sleep right through you know. I didn't have to worry about him (laughs).

McElwee- Right. A low volume--

Huber- yeah.

McElwee- of an engine running of central power (inaudible).

Huber- Yeah.

McELwee- And the squeaking it's rhythmic. For those who haven't been out there in a (inaudible, both talking at once)

Huber- And they played all these records for these kids anymore to keep them calm. I don't know, my daughter-in-law had some of them for my granddaughters, but the gas engine was as good a recording as you could've got, so (laughs).

McElwee- Alright, so you mention your son, and of course your dad and I believe you told me you're actually the fifth generation. Is that correct?

Huber- I'm the third generation.

McElwee- Ok. Third, and then there's a grandson who you hope to get in oil.

Huber- Well, I haven't got any grandsons yet. (Inaudible, both speaking at once) I've got two granddaughters.

McElwee- Well, ok well I don't know. You don't expect them to be—

Huber- The only one that's married is the youngest son—and he has two girls. And he and I own a lease together—he's still in the business, although he works full-time at Meadville

Medical Center, so. The only time he gets to come out much is on Saturdays and days off when he doesn't have anything—something else he has to get done, so (laughs).

McElwee- People don't realize—of course you—Pennsylvania wells are typically stripper wells. Oh, you're lucky if you get five barrels a day. That would be really good production.

Huber- Yeah, that'd be a good one.

McElwee- Really, typically what would you say an average well produces around here?

Huber- Quarter of a barrel a day.

McElwee- Quarter of a barrel, right. So you've got to run a lot of wells—you got to pump a lot of wells to get the kind of monthly production you need to make it worth your while. And even at that you still often times have to have another job. Right?

Huber- Yep.

McElwee- Folks should realize that. It's—in Pennsylvania—

Huber- For years and years, most of the producers like me, they had—well some of them may have worked in like Joy or some place. Maybe worked nights—and they run their lease during the day and slept—like they maybe come home from work at seven and go to work pump their lease, do whatever they wanted to do. Come home maybe 12 or whatever and sleep for a few hours, and then go back wherever they worked for—you know their shift, so. I mean, I think there's probably still some out there doing that, but. Don Taylor, a good friend of mine, he has three drilling rigs, three sputters—and for years and years he didn't—still does operates them sputters and pumps his leases, and probably if he didn't—he does a lot of work in the gas field, he's got a couple of big sputters—it'll go three-thousand feet. And he overhauls these gas wells for these people, like over around Clarion, and down towards Butler. I think he's currently working in Cooks Forest on one up there. But I mean, that's the way we lived. That's what we did you know. I used to do the service work—pull wells. So, maybe you had ten wells over here, you got two or three that need worked on. So I'd come over and do the work, but I still had to keep my—my stuff running. So you know—that's kind how most of the local producers lived over the years here. That's the way they made it (laughs).

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah. Um. The number of producers—the independent producers that we have in, lets say North Western Pennsylvania. I would include, you'd have to go up to Bradford ?? to include them. How many do you think that actually represents. How many, how many guys are actually in that independent producers—Pennsylvania and the Penn producers.

Huber- Four-Hundred and Fifty-Five currently, but we know there's some out there, that aren't in it. There's still more out there, but they just don't belong to the organization.

McElwee- And would that represent essentially the number of active producers out in the woods.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- Well, it's still viable, it's still.

Huber- Yeah, that's from Bradford to Butler

McElwee- Down to Butler

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- Butler (inaudible softly speaking). Right, so we're still at it. Pennsylvania still has um—has that tradition um. Are you using, or have you used any of these secondary recovery techniques. Let's just take the easy one first. I think you used—you torpedoed one or two of your wells didn't you?

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- Well, why don't you tell folks what that's kind of like, and what—what it does.

Huber- Well. Originally we torpedoed every new well we drilled. And when I say torpedo—it takes—depending on the size of your hole—how much nitro you can get in there. In a 5 5/8 hole you can get 5 quarts of nitro to the foot in a formation. So, if you've got twenty feet, you can get twenty times five. You can get a hundred quarts of nitro in that formation.

McElwee- We're talking about the producing sand, what we would call sand.

Huber- So we set that in there, in that formation and then set it off. Well that blows a hole back in it and it enhances the production. It's an old, old proven method that still works. You can still use it. Nobody much does. I had a guy tell me I just didn't—he told me the other day I just wasn't with the new, new age. He says you're still one of them nitro guys. I says well, you know we know it works. I said it—there's no question in my mind that Nitro doesn't work. Then, it came to hydro-fracking—and hydro-fracking is just hydraulic water pressure on that formation. Say you got twenty feet of sand, you've got four places in there that shows up on what we call an electric log—that theoretically shows production. More production in that section than any of the other section in the sand. So they put a notch in there—with an air sand notch, with air and sand blasting, and they just keep turning that till it cuts a ring right there. Then they set a packer down here and a packer up here—well maybe you only got a foot of sand, but that—there was one packer here and one packer there. Then they pump that water and—oh I've seen them go up as high as four-thousand before they broke. Once they break, the pressure will drop right to eight-hundred pounds. Well, then you start putting what we call a prop in there—which is actually just fine sand, and if you look at it under a microscope it has

no edges on it. It's all round. I don't know where they get it or (laughs). I would get it, but that's what it is. And you might pump—oh we generally try to get the rate up to twenty barrel a minute with four pound of sand per gallon of water in there. Well, that goes out in there, and that props that crack open—

McElwee- Yeah.

Huber- So, then when you're all done. You've got to pump all that water that you've pumped in there back out before using—before the oil comes.

McElwee- But that is a very effective way of—

Huber- Yeah. That's a very effective way. I've had wells make a hundred barrels a day doing that.

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah. Now for folks aren't quite—that can't visualize it—those, those hydro-fracking—that's done with these big trucks. Big heavy trucks.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- I think wells up here, what do you call them, the one up there in Meadville, the one—

Huber- Oh, umm.

McElwee- Something wells, it's not coming to me, the first name.

Huber- Yeah, I can't either

McElwee- There, there, there, they go all over the country, but they're real big units. But these are huge trucks

Huber- Yeah, they're huge. They have what they call a tri-plex pump on the pumper. Which is got three pistons like that. High pressure pistons. And they're powered by a Detroit twelve-hundred pound, twelve hundred horsepower diesel.

McElwee- Yeah, right.

Huber- I mean you could put the—you can push this building off its foundation—something like that. I mean as far as pumping stuff in you know—

McElwee- And the trucks as heavy as they are (inaudible, Bill Huber starts talking)—

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- They bounce on the ground like that.

Huber- When you got your blender—blender truck—well he's a booster to the pumper, but he's also where they put the sand in. When they get ready for the sand, they dump the sand

in—in the blender, and it mixes it with the water—and then you got your sand truck. Depending on the size of your frack—usually one truck but if it's a (audio is corrupted)frack they may be to trucks there.

McElwee- Mmhhh.

Huber- But uh, the other thing we generally run in there is (audio corrupted)and a (audio corrupted) particles of clay mixed in with sand (audio corrupted for extended period of time) Clay from swellum, so you get a better flow back on your well.

McElwee- All of this costs money.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- Cause you use some very serious money.

Huber- Yeah. A frack job—well I don't know what one costs today. I had in the eighties—I did twelve, and we did with Halliburton at the time. Halliburton was like the Cadillac of the Frackin trucks. You paid more for Halliburton than anybody else, and my frack jobs were \$10,000 dollars at the time. Just for the frack job—that did mean the cost of the well or anything. That was just the frack job. Now, I'm supposing it would be somewhere around fifteen maybe twenty-thousand dollars now. I haven't got a producer that's done it to commit to me what he paid for it.

McElwee- You gotta talk to those guys up in Bradford. They seem to be doing a lot that stuff.

Huber- Now there's some individual people out of Bradford and up in that area that have bought frack trucks—*on their own*.

McElwee- On their own. Cheaper.

Huber- We had to—I ?? set operate this summer—the guy paid a million dollars for them three trucks.

McElwee- Wow.

Huber- and they were brand splinter new trucks. And he can set like where you're settin-- you could set there with a laptop computer and he controls that whole frack. There was operators on each truck, but those operators all they did was make sure the computer was telling that truck what to do or ?? What it was doing (laughs). I mean I was amazed you know. You could set there with that engineer in that—they have a little pound truck they usually bring with them, and you could watch that whole frack on the computer—you could even see it go. The computer would tell you, you know. It is amazing how—you know when we did it, it was guessing by your pants and hope you got it right (laughs).

McElwee- Now Bill, umm years and years ago the crude would come up from the ground. You'd put it in these storage tanks—big wood storage tanks. Are you still using the big wood storage tanks or are you into um—

Huber- I've got mostly steel.

McElwee- Steel, mmhmm.

Huber- I've got one more wooden sixty barrel down over the hill. It's probably still usable. We just don't use it anymore, but we used to—well I used to fill it once a month. I used to run that sixty barrel full once a month.

McElwee- Um-hm

Huber- And of course this time of year, back then they had pipelines. So you had to heat it.

McElwee- Yeah.

Huber- So we had a coil—oh about twenty feet away from the tank that'd come off the bottom and come into the coils and went back halfway into the tank. And the bottom line came off on this side of the tank, the top line went to the opposite side of the tank.

McElwee- Yeah.

Huber- So, and we'd run six inches of water in there. Water heats easier than crude oil and holds the heat better. So we'd heat that water up—run it through that tank, and of course it would drop through that oil—go back to the bottom. And as it's doing all that, it's heating this tank you know. It worked really well. Probably one of the best heating systems I ever had—as far as getting—we could have that tank up to sixty degrees on a cold morning.

McElwee- Is that right? And of course it flowed then through--

Huber- Yeah. You had to watch not get it too hot, cause the gauge wouldn't turn it on cause he didn't want to send that hot oil down the cold line and bust the line in two (laughs).

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah. And then also it expands, crude expands with heat, and they didn't want to take it too warm, because they felt they gonna get cheated—

Huber- Cheated. Yeah.

McElwee- --when it cooled off. So there's all kinds of plays on that thing.

Huber- Yeah. They still do that today. You get a run slick and you'll see the temperature written on there. No matter whether it's summer or – they take a certain percentage off depending on the temperature, you know.

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah.

Huber- I don't know what it is cause you never know, you just know—you know well they might of come out this morning so that oil's thirty degrees. Now I don't know what that means as far as oh I can get a better price at thirty degrees or if it was summertime and sixty degrees—(laughs) do I get a better price? I don't know.

McElwee- I know, in the old days, the nineteenth century certificates they gave as receipts again. They specified it could be no more than eighty degrees, and if it was more than eighty degrees they discounted it, because the volume they would receive once it cooled down would be a lot less.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- I don't what they did at that.

Huber- Maybe, maybe there's no big—but I know they used to do that a lot. I don't know how much they ever penalized anybody for it you know or whatever, but. They still pay attention to that temperature even today so.

McElwee- Nowadays big tank truck comes to your—

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- --to your lease.

Huber- Yeah they've got—well they can haul hundred and sixty barrel on a tri-axle. And then they have one, two small trucks that'll haul a hundred at a time. If you've got small tanks they send you out—they send a hundred barrel out. And they pay a premium for—if you've got enough oil to fill up that hundred and sixty barrel tanker you get a premium of two dollars a barrel for it.

McElwee- Is that right? Yeah. Yeah.

Huber- I've never—well I've never actually got that premium because usually I'm in that lesser class where they gotta send the hundred barrel tanker out, so (laughs).

McElwee- And, and not to pry into your business but typically you—at least in the year or so you've been doing about a hundred barrels a month? Am I right on that?

Huber- Just about. It varies—it varies from sixty to a hundred. If I got a—if I've had a real good month I'll have a hundred. I got a run going right now—it's probably gonna end up in the sixty barrel class.

McElwee- Well that's good.

Huber- Cold weather and all that

McElwee- Slows it down.

Huber- good stuff you know that comes with winter (laughs).

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah. You um, currently you're selling with the Ergon.

Huber- Ergon, yeah.

McElwee- And prior to that um, who owned it—who had rights.

Huber- Quaker State took it.

McElwee- Quaker State, yeah right.

Huber- I've sold to Crew Levic, National Transit. Yeah.

McElwee- That's way late. When you mention Crew Levic I'm going "Wow, that was sometime ago." They became what, City—City Service or something like and that was a long time ago. Of course National Transit—

Huber- Of course when I think we were selling Crew Levic that was probably when my dad had it.

McElwee- Yeah. That'd be forties, nineteen forties. Somewhere in there. Yeah, that's an old name. The Huber name is an old name Bill.

Huber- (laughs) Yeah.

McElwee- Kind of legendary. I'm gonna put a plaque out there. People don't know this, at least its somewhere—you gotta know where it is, but it's—if you know where the Plummer General Store is, which is a little community place—its from there. You walk, you can walk, it's a bit of a walk. But yeah, right.

Huber- Yeah. Everything—well my granddad Insly—great granddad Insly, he came here from Germany (cut off by McElwee)

McElwee- Would that be by any chance related to Kay Insly?

Huber- Oh, Kate. Yeah.

McElwee- (laughs)

Huber- Yeah, Kate's part of the group (laughs).

McElwee- A little Plummer girl right?

Huber- And—

McElwee- He came.

Huber — he came—he homesteaded a hundred and sixty-seven acres over there—which is where my lease is—and then I don't know when he bought the other piece that I live on, which is the old Turner farm in Plummer. Which is one of the original homesteaders of Plummer. Near as we could find out, I don't know whether Kay knows anymore about this than I do, but I know he was a Cooper, and I know (McElwee speaks over Huber)

McElwee- (Inaudible)

Huber- Shop there, down there by the bridge. And I think he was working for Humboldt Refinery.

McElwee- Which is for our audience, that's a very old name. We're talking 1860's, when we say Humboldt and Kymer. So that goes—that goes back. That's the beginning.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah. Right.

Huber- Well, he had—is there—that's where I get—how many individual incidences were there? I think there were four boys and two girls, but I might be wrong about that.

McElwee- Mmmhmm.

Huber- But anyways—well anyways, my granddad Huber somewhere along—we don't know too much about him, my great granddad Huber. He came here from Germany, he brought his wife with him, and they moved down in the hollow below the Insly Farm—and then Great Grandpa took off, he left it all of—he knew his—supposedly eight of them. I don't know, I gotta go to the court house and check that all out, but I know that my granddad worked an oil well when he was twelve, carrying sucker rods, because he was the soul support for them out there.

McElwee- Oh, is that right?

Huber- And then somewhere along the line he met an Insly girl.

McElwee- Mmmhmm.

Huber- I don't know how that—

McElwee- He just, he just couldn't resist (Bill Huber starts talking)—

Huber- Just couldn't resist (laughs) and they got married and near as we can tell. They were all together in the business. The Insly brothers, the Huber brothers, and they built drillin rigs.

McElwee- Mmmhmm.

Huber- And we figured probably in the 1880's, 1890's they were building drilling rigs all over the—I had one thing that I found from Grandpa Huber where they built a couple of rigs in Diehl Town for a guy.

McElwee- Mmmhmm.

Huber- And uh, well then in well 1906, the story is that a promoter from New York came in, leased the old farm. And they built a rig and they hired Uncle Henry Huber to drill it. And they built a well, and the well made forty-five to fifty barrel a day, and they telegraphed New York and told them that it was a dry hole and bought the well. Now that—

McElwee- (laughs)

Huber- I don't know, I don't know whether that's true or not.

McElwee- (sarcastically) Ahh I don't believe that Bill (both laugh).

Huber- Anyways, they drilled that well. Of course after that you know they drilled some better wells in down there. And they—and if you look at the old deeds in the court house, there was Insly and Huber all over. Like Eagle Lock area and Pit Hole—I mean the old deeds had their name. I don't know exactly how much at one time they had. I had a lawyer tell me one time, he says "When I searched them deed, all was I found was Huber and Insly." I said "Well, you know they, they were active."

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Huber- And they and Tracks over here, put the money up to build a ?? . And the ?? was the last ?? in Plummer.

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah. Alright. A rather famous well. When you talk of 45, 50 barrels a day, were they flowing or pumpers. Do you recall? Either way--

Huber- Either way, most likely a 60 barrel well would have been pretty significant. If it wasn't a flow-er it was awful close. (inaudible, interrupted by McElwee)—

McElwee- It was close. Yeah those kinda numbers sound high.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- Those are big numbers!

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- And uh, Pennsylvania at least in those days always enjoyed a premium on crude prices over Oklahoma, Kansas, California, Texas crude. So in those days they were doing well. Wouldn't you say?

Huber- They were doin well.

McElwee- Really well.

Huber- Number ten on that same lease—it's marked right on my—I've got the old record book out there—the drilling wells, they kept very good records. A lot of leases you—well some even that I've had. You just kinda gotta guess what you know, but I don't know whether Grandpa Huber or L.R. Insly, but they kept a record book, and they knew just exactly where that sand was, and exactly where that oil came in at, and all that stuff. But anyway, this well, number ten, said this well made a hundred barrel a day from six feet of formation and a third of sand and you know that it gives you the whole thing.

McElwee- Mmmhmm. Oh yeah. Yeah.

Huber- I was lucky in that respect that they kept those good of records.

McElwee- Are those records still in your possession—

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- in your family? And I'm sure everybody realizes how—let's call it valuable they are. (Inaudible) storehouse standpoint. So oil well Bill, we all know where the records are (laughs).

Huber- Well

McElwee- And hopefully you will remember us as time goes on (laughs).

Huber- The Smithleys, which Max Smith married Mary Huber, and Max Smith was one of the drillers for Huber and Insly, but I ended up with one of their, one of Max Smith leases over the years, but I got no records of it. You know, they drilled all these wells in there, I got a pretty good idea, but there's nothing written down. You know, sometimes it's hard when you don't have anything written down, or any idea you know. It's nice to know that, that say second Sam was at 701 feet and it runs to 720 feet or whatever it might be.

McElwee- That's. That's invaluable information, and in years to come with the technology that they are developing because of the increase price in crude, who knows what's gonna come back out of those sams. They're not over yet.

Huber- Yeah. No, no. I don't foresee us being you know—may be the price is down and I think maybe it's gonna go back up. But probably this oil is still gonna be produced you know. It's—

McElwee- It's there.

Huber- It's there.

McElwee- And as long as it's there, you or somebody is gonna go after it, right?

Huber- Right.

McElwee- Yeah. That's, that's the creed of the producer.

Huber- Yeah. (laughs)

McElwee- (laughs, then inaudible speaking) Even if you only give us a nickel for it we're gonna get her.

Huber- Yeah, that's about right.

McElwee- That's really it. That's really it.

Huber- It's like you and I were talkin earlier—nobody—well nobody thought this 40 dollar oil was gonna happen to be truthful—but everybody that so far is still doing there—I've only heard of a couple that are going to slack off because of the price. They're all—well they're all like I am, they're hoping it comes back, which I think it will. The demand for this oil—maybe the—I think the biggest thing right now is the economy's got everything. I think if the economy would come back so would oil. I don't know, you know whether we'd go back to a hundred and fifty, but it definitely would come back from where we're at now. Cause it's kinda like what we talked about you know—our economy went down, so did China, so did Japan's. And China was really buying the oil. They were buying it like it was no tomorrow. And that demand some of these days with the amount of people in China has to come back.

McElwee- Yes. I might add on that, my wife happens to be in China right now, and this is her second trip. She see's those big drilling platforms all over along the coast of China. They're drilling out at sea. They're not like us and waiting. They're out there, and they're developing every reserve they possibly can. Yeah. Right, uh.

Huber- Well, course they were going on and on and on and I do believe there's a lot of truth to it about our oil's gonna run out. And in time I guess it will, it has to. It's not a renewable resource, so we should be thinking about whatever we need to do.

McElwee- The alternatives.

Huber- To go on from here you know.

McElwee- Bill, um, I—there are several films that are about the Drake Well and their archives—I think you own copies of your father and his friends and brothers—I don't know what brothers—but one was actually working on the old Huber lease. That was when they torpedoed it. I think, when was that in the 50's? Uh.

Huber- No, that, well there are there—part of that's in the 50's. The early part of it was 1940, and they were torpedoing—well they're drilling and torpedoing with the old wooden ?? machine.

McElwee- Yeah, right.

Huber- And uh, my dad was and my granddad were great believers in if you were going to shoot a well, shoot everything you can in it, and shoot it with as much as you can get in it.

McElwee- Mmhmm.

Huber- So some of those shots on those films were 180 quarts of Nitro were coming out of the hole.

McElwee- Mmhmm.

Huber- And.

McElwee- That's something to see.

Huber- Yeah it's—

McElwee- That, that, that's real dynamic.

Huber- You know, you just as it comes out and goes, you know it's kinda looking at Old Faithful—and if you've got a ?? shot in there it just starts to fall of when the next one hits her and takes her right back up again and. It's quite interesting really.

McElwee- Yeah. Were you there when those—lets see I know you're about my age—you could conceivably could have been there for some of those shots anyhow.

Huber- Yeah. Uh, there was some there on the end of the film in the 1950's.

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah.

Huber- I was at—I was there for those. And then dad drilled—yeah that was in the 50's.

McElwee- Was your family involved in that demonstration well, that was built along Cherry Run, below where you are—

Huber- Oh, the Drake thing?

McElwee- Yeah. Right. Were you?

Huber- No, I don't know. I know who W. Turk was.

McElwee- Yeah, right. That's

Huber- And if he was probably some of our family was, because Plummer was pretty much (laughs).

McElwee- Well Bill even though that was built as an educational thing or a demonstration, none the less has a lot of the old families involved—

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- and it definitely shows what it was like in the early days. And that film exists too. I think Drake Well has that, am I right on that?

Huber- I think Drake Well has that. Yeah.

McElwee- That's one in the future folks ought to at least look at.

Huber- Yeah, I think they ought to get it out and show it or something you know. A lot of people—we knew it existed, but there's a lot people probably right here in the area, and even the Tri-City area that, that film was ever made here, or maybe never even seen it. But they did a pretty good job for the time and era they were working in.

McElwee- Yeah, oh yeah.

Huber- Vincent Price made the next one.

McElwee- That's right.

Huber- And of course it was Hollywood style but--.

McElwee- Now, um, because it is—we, we had it—this is the year or two 2008, 2009, we are observing the 150th anniversary of Drake Well, and at the same time concurrently we hadn't planned that. Currently the price of crude went through the roof, and the entire world became interested where the early wells were in Pennsylvania. And you attracted quite a crowd.

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- And let's have some fun here a little bit. Tell us what it's like to be an international star of stage, screen and television.

Huber- Well—

McElwee- (chuckles)How, how many interviews did you do for—

Huber- Uh, twenty-six. It started with the Wall Street Journal—and all he had was one of these telephone cameras, and he took some stuff on that. But it was, it was like a day like today when he was up—but it was in February. It was snowing, it was blowing, it was cold. He wanted to walk around up in there, so we did. He couldn't believe my truck, we

had about that much snow—I took him right up in. My truck is pretty good at getting—I got good roads number one, but number two it will go in the snow pretty good so. We were up in there, and of course he wrote the article, and that's the second time I was in the Wall Street Journal. The first time, oil went to nine dollars and they come out and interviewed me, back in '89, and then they come back and interviewed me again. Although he had no idea that I'd been in the Wall Street Journal once before (laughs). So, well then CBS nabbed that up and they showed up. And that was quite a, that was quite a production. I had the Oil City Derrick reporters and photographers, I had well Oil Heritage people there, and CBS crew there, and you literally had to get a traffic cop up there at my engine house—we (inaudible) to get them out of there.

McElwee- Yeah. Uh-huh.

Huber- But there again it was cold. And of course this guy, I don't know where he come up with this idea. He wanted to know what crude oil taste like. I said "Well taste it, right there it is." He standing there looking at it. I said "Go ahead and taste it," and he looked at me. So I reached my finger in like that and went. Well he either had to put up or shut up then. He had to do it.

McElwee- Uh-huh.

Huber- So he tastes it. Oh he says "It ain't bad." I said "No, it ain't bad. It won't kill you." (laughs). Well of course the rest picked up on that and bout every crew that come in there wanted to taste crude oil (laughs). I kinda still laugh about it, but we had after that the French came, the English came. These guys were out of London, and then the French come back again, but this was a different crew. Like you said, I must have been popular in Europe.

McElwee- Yes, yes.

Huber- And uh, then the third French crew showed up. And they wanted to do a documentary on me. And the one girl was with—well she did, she did the talking actually. She says "You very, very, very famous in France." And that's the way she said it (laughs).

McElwee- Believe it. You're a very, very famous around here too. Did you tell them that (laughs)?

Huber- Yeah.

McElwee- And now I think also, aren't you the one who said "They can have their fame, I'll take the money." Right (laughs).

Huber- Yeah (laughs). And after that, the Japanese showed up. And the Japanese are something else. They are—they're very nice people, but they certainly are—if you've never been around them much, I hadn't. They came and it was funny. They called and wanted to do this, and I said fine, whatever you know. Well I thought they were going to do it that

day. They made an appointment, and oh about 11 o'clock this stretch limousine shows up in my driveway. My wife says "Well it's either the Japanese or the RRS, have you done anything you shouldn't have done?" I said "No, not that I know of." (laughs). Well the Japanese come in. Well the girl spoke very good English, most all of these foreign people did. This man—and she said "This is the Imperial Japanese History Minister."

McElwee- Mmm

Huber- "He flew here from Japan to meet you." Wow. You know. So we talked, and they went over to the lease. Well, the day they went over—the first time they went over—I, you've been up there—some days on a damp day that belt gets water on the back there, and when it spins in it sprays off. Well they thought they were shot in there. I threw the clutch in and the belt come in and the water sprayed—and him and her thought that somebody was shooting at them. They run down through the woods, we had to catch them.

McElwee- (laughs)

Huber- I think they were going back to Japan (both laugh).

McElwee- That's great.

Huber- (laughs) and then they left, and they made an appointment to come back with the filming crew. Well they come back in about a week, and they had themselves and two videographers—is that what you call your guys? Anyways, they're up there in the back of my truck with a camera on their shoulders, and their hats turned back, and they're videoing all the way out of the driveway over to the lease and you know they videoed the whole thing. And all of them wanted to go up and see the crude oil coming out of the ground, and we did all that. They sent me a copy of what they made—I'll have to give it to you, you'll have to see that.

McElwee- Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Huber- But it's—there is only one shot I think of my engine house in that whole, whole thing. But this film, made with cartoon characters, and I mean it starts out, it shows this Japanese girl doing things in a house. And I think they're going—I don't know Japanese--going on what would happen if there was no crude oil, and the next scene shows her standing their like this, you know. (McElwee laughs) Not knowing. I mean (Huber and McElwee talk simultaneously) it just keeps going on and on and it shows this, looks like a General with his hand in here like this, and of course they were ?? on. I'd love to know—

McElwee- What they were actually saying.

Huber- — what they were actually saying. But I have the video—

McElwee- They were probably saying "That Bill Huber, what a strange guy." (both laugh) Yeah.

Huber- Then, after that—who was the next one. Oh, CNN—er-uh not CNN but—

McElwee- Fox?

Huber- British—

McElwee- Oh, yeah BBC.

Huber- BBC.

McElwee- BBC.

Huber- And I did BBC radio, and I did BBC television. Oh. Then I did Swiss Radio and Swiss Television. I did German twice. I did the Italians. And then the one and I'd love to see this work—this, this was on the Sunday night, and we had been somewhere and come back and I was watching television, and the phone rings. "Hey, Bill! This is Mcnerny." I said "Who?"

McElwee- John?

Huber- John, yeah. He say's "I got Seanus Murphy here, from Dublin, Ireland." I said, well you know, I didn't know really what to say, I said "Yeah?" "Well, he's a photographer and like to take pictures. Could he come out" I said "Yeah." Well, he says "I'll bring him out eleven o'clock tomorrow." I said "Fine." Well, we hung the phone up, it wasn't a half an hour and the phone rang again. "Hey Bill, Mcnerny. We're setting in your driveway, can we come in?" I said "Yeah. I guess. You're out here now you know." So they come in, this guy was a very nice guy, but definitely an Irishman.

McElwee- Mmhmm.

Huber- So, he came out at eight o'clock the next morning and he never left until five o'clock that night. And I'll bet he took two-hundred rolls of film. He was on his belly in the powerhouse, taking the belt going over and oh just stuff—he promised me he would send me some of his work, but I've never seen it yet—but.

McElwee- Well, we're going to get it. Somehow or other we're gonna get it.

Huber- Somebody said he was a six grand photographer in the world. Now I don't know if that's true or not either.

McElwee- Is that right? Well if nothing else, he'll send you a coffee table book. That's my, that's my—

Huber- He knew what he was doing when it come to taking pictures you know.

McElwee- Yeah. Yeah.

Huber- He got in that belt house with that belt running. And of course it was a nice day, and the sunlight was fingerin through them old boards on there, you know. "Oh, beautiful shot" he kept saying, "beautiful shot." (laughs) His finger just kept going like that all the time. Then he'd, you'd think he'd have a digital, but he didn't. He'd pull out another roll of film. He had two cameras. One hung over here like a gun fighter with two—two guns you know. And I'd say "Well whats two cameras?" Well he says "This is long range, this is short range over here."

McElwee- Well, we're kinda coming to the end of our one hour. You mentioned this, this man knew what he was doing. You knew what you're doing, and it's quite evident every time I talk to you. I honestly consider it a real honor for you to even bother to share a lot of what you have with me over the years, and certainly with everybody else around. It really takes a fellow like you that actually tell us what's going on, as opposed to what we think is going, and that you'd taken the time today to do that. I really appreciate it Bill. I mean it. I appreciate how giving you've been to everybody over the last couple of years. It's an invasion of your life, we all know that. But you're a treasure. What you do is at the base of everything we talk about around here, and I'm really pleased you did come and talk with us this morning, and I thank you very much. I do. I know you're hands probably hurt, but um I really wish you continued best. Let's just end this by saying fifty-sixty dollar barrel of crude is about where—

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: Yeah.

Huber: If we could get fifty or sixty dollar crude, I'd be a happy camper.

McElwee: Yeah.

Huber: I said back last summer this is kind of unreal. They kept saying—telling me it was gonna go on, but I couldn't see it really going on. It was too much, you know, really too much.

McElwee: But if we get around let's just say sixty, producers like you will continue and—

Huber: Yeah, and probably even—well, there's gonna be producers here as long as there's Pennsylvania crude in the ground. And I don't foresee it runnin out. We've taken a hundred and fifty years worth of it outta there now and we still have it so—it's a little harder to get than a lot of crudes, other crudes, but as long as it's there somebody's gonna get it. (Laughs).

McElwee: A hundred and fifty years from now.

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: Okay, thank you Bill, thank you very much.

Huber: Thank you