McElwee: Good morning. It's December 5th, 2008. We are 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 the chance to talk with one of these fellows. He's an actual producer of crude oil in Pennsylvania. A guy who spent his entire life out in the woods, drilling for crude and bringing it up and he's had his ups and downs. And that's going to be our subject this morning. And 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 barrels of oil, a far cry of where it was just six months ago, certainly a year ago. You've experienced 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 weathered a lot of ups and downs over the years. Back when I went to work for my dad, which would've been, well I started pumping for him when I was twelve years old, but we were getting $3.65 a barrel for oil then.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: And it kind of floated along and three sixty-five to four sixty five, up until probably '73 and then it started to move up. Then from '73 it took us into the first high peak, thirty-five dollars. We thought we well actually, we thought we'd died and went to heaven right there. (McElwee laughs). But it—it caught, well it caught me—I'd spent quite a bit of money, had a lot of plans, and all of a sudden in '89 we were at nine dollars a barrel. I spent the next ten years trying to get it back out of debt again, because 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 buoy, we didn't do anything drastic we just figured we had enough wealth out that maybe we just oughta try to get as man—much old stuff together as we could. You know, rather than borrowing money and spending money to drill with. You just hate to get caught twice. (Huber laughs).

McElwee: Yeah, I recall you saying, oh nine months ago, you 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 of 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 would do it anymore, I wouldn't go and borrow the money, let's put it that way. I probably could, but I wouldn't. I tried to finagle 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, but right now that's kinda off the table. But I'm hoping maybe it'll come back. And it wouldn't have to come back to a hundred dollars either.

McElwee: Well, yeah, that's a good point. Where would it have to be? What do you consider a good price for crude from a standpoint of a producer, making a viable forum to continue?

Huber: Well, I had a discussion with some other producers here about a week ago. And we all kinda concluded that what you were talking about earlier, about seventy dollars a barrel, we could handle. (McElwee makes noises of agreement). Eighty—seventy to eighty dollars we could do our drilling programs and make some money.

McElwee: (Beginning at same time). Makes it worth your while.

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: It's worth the risk for 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, back in '80 we could drill well for $25,000 and pretty well take care of the well. Now that figure's moved to $65,000.

McElwee: One well.

Huber: One well. So, you know, it's a pretty good investment when you think about it. You know, $65,000. 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—you 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, but you're all shareholder sin that well, so. But you hate to do—I know in the early boom there was a lot of investors that never seen their money back. Never seen it back. I ss—I'm one that if I'm gonna take in a group of fellows to—with me, I want to make money but I want them to make money. So, you know, some of them purely were out there just to get that investor's money and they didn't care, they didn't even care if the well got built some of 'em.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: (Laughs). Long as they got your money you'd—

McElwee: Well that might be your approach (muffled) in the future—

Huber: (Speaking at the same time). Maybe that's the difference between a promoter and a producer, I don't know. (Both laugh).

McElwee: Bill, Bill, for those who don't have an idea at all what your lease is like, why don't you kinda tell us where it is—or at least the one you're currently running, anyhow. And, how you physically describe it and also the equipment you use and the history of some of that great equipment you have out there, that kind of thing. We can't take it for granted that this audience will know, really, what you're doing out there. So why don't you just set the scene, if you will, for your operation.

Huber: Well, I have actually three pieces of property out there, all within a mile of each other. The biggest piece has 571 acres in it. There are probably 110 or 15 wells on that property. Most of 'em are the old raw line power that goes back to the 1900's, where they run them with a shackle line or a rod line we call 'em. Maybe one unit will run 20 wells at a time. But property, the second property has about 26 wells on it, but most of them are on jacks, they're—there's no power there, they're on individual jacks. And then the third property is a small property, there's only twenty acres but there's 9 wells on it and they're raw line wells. There's one new frack ?? well on it and the rest of 'em are—and when I say new, it was new in the '80's, we drilled it. And it's a 15 horse reed, which we've built here in Oil City. Started in I think the patent said 1898 on most of 'em.

McElwee: Your big central power, is that off of a gas engine, or--?

Huber: Yeah, that had a 15-horse reed on it. We didn't have enough gas to run the engine anymore, so I converted it to an electric motor. There's an electric motor sits there with a set of e-belts and a wheel and it spins the fly wheel, of course, everything else is the same, its got the big 10-inch belt that goes out to an oil well supply power built here and in Oil City. Most of this equipment was built here in Oil City. It was part of the--, 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 to build equipment. Designed and built this equipment specifically for here.

McElwee: Yes, yeah, right. Right, in fact, let's kind of focus on that just a little more. Kinds of drilling you do is with cable tools. 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 with 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 people do 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 tool.

Huber: Well, yeah, everything I drilled up until 1980 was with cable tool. 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. (Both laugh). I was sixteen years old, I dressed tools on that rig all summer. Then—that time or a little earlier than that the sputter come in and they were an old steel machine with no walking beam. They had—they did have a beam but you didn't have a temper screw. You're wanting to come up through the beam like this and over the derry and to let out the line all you had to do was lift the brake a little bit and that'd give you whatever amount of line you were looking for. I went to work for Ron Brown in 1967. He had three rigs, three ?? 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 drove or you sat there and watched the birds all day. (Laughter). But you were there. I literally had been around that all my life but I literally never actually learned to drill 'til 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 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 in for Taylor from four o'clock 'til one in the morning. Still did the pumping. It was a tough job to try to get all that done.

McElwee: (Laughs). 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.

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: Did they pay you well?

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

McElwee: Oh, that much? (Huber laughs as McElwee says something unintelligible). I think I made that at Isely's. Same time. (Laughing).

Huber: Yeah. 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 it—we call it the pull machine and you pull the pipe and the rods and all that stuff out, fix it up and put it back in again. And I worked from Grand Valley to Bolley Hill. And about everywhere in between.

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

Huber: Yeah.

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

Huber: Yeah, yeah.

McElwee: Your wells are typically how deep out there in ??

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

McElwee: And are they cased—how far down about?

Huber: Three hundred feet. Well, the casing averages with the martar?? Cable. If you're down here, let's say in Oil City, your water table here would probably go from a hundred and fifty to two hundred feet. Somewhere in there that's what all you'd have to put in. If you go up here on Hongback??, you'd probably have to run three hundred. Two-eighty to three hundred feet up there to get through that surface water.

McElwee: That's a long pipe. That's a lot of weight.

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: And even with a machine it's still a lot of manpower. I noticed—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.

McElwee: Yeah.

Huber: Anymore the arthritis gets in me some days. (Laughs).

McElwee: Now your son helps you.

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

McElwee: A kid, an infant.

Huber: And I used to—I did the same thing with Billy. I used to take him—I don't remember if I had the basket, but I used to take him. And I had a bid old box in the engine house set on the wall, we just kept odds and ends in it. I'd get a bunch of clean rags and lay him in that basket, or that box. With the engine, the old engine running in there it was kinda like a heartbeat, he'd just sleep right through, you know. I didn't have to worry about it. (Both laugh).

McElwee: The lullaby of an engine running of central power or something.

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: And the squeaking. It's rhythmic if you think about—for those haven't been out there there's raw squeaking.

Huber: (Beginning at same time). And they play all these records for these kids anymore to keep them calm. I don't know. My daughter and I had some of them for my granddaughters. But that old gas engine was as good a recording as you could've got, so.

McElwee: Alright, so you mentioned your son and of course, your dad. And I believe you told me you were actually the fifth generation, is that correct?

Huber: I'm the third generation.

McElwee: Okay, the third. And then there's a grandson who you hope to get in—in with?

Huber: Well, I haven't got any grandsons yet. There's a possibility someday.

McElwee: (Speaking at same time) Well, alright, maybe we predicted something here.

Huber: I've got two granddaughters.

McElwee: Okay, well, I don't know, you don't expect them to be out there?

Huber: The only one that's married's the youngest son. And he has two girls. And he and I are 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 something else he has to get done, so.

McElwee: People don't realize, of course Pennsylvania wells are typically stripper wells.

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: Oh, you're lucky if you get five barrels a day, that'd be really good production.

Huber: Yeah, that'd be a good well.

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

Huber: Quarter of a barrel a day.

McElwee: Quarter barrel, right. So you gotta run a lot of wells, you gotta pump a lot of wells, to get the kind of monthly production you need to make it worthwhile. And even at that, you still often times have to have another job, right?

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: And folks should realize that. In Pennsylvania its—

Huber: For years and years, most of the producers like me, they had, well some of them they worked in the like Joy or someplace. 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 twelve or whatever and then sleep for a few hours and then go back to wherever they work for the—another shift, so.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: I mean, I think there's probably still some out there doing that, but during the day 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 that'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 apparently working in Cook's Forest, somewhere out there. And 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 runnin. So, you know, that's kind of how most of the local producers lived over the years here. That's the way they made it. (Laughs).

McElwee: The number of producers—independent producers we have in let's say Northwestern Pennsylvania—now I would include—we'd have to go up to Bradford for a little and include them—what do you think that actually represents? How many guys are actually in that, independent producers—Pennsylvania independent producers?

Huber: Four hundred and fifty-five, currently. But we know there's some out there that aren't in it. There's 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: (Beginning at same time). Yeah.

McElwee: Well, it's still viable, it's still—

Huber: Yeah, that's from Bradford to Butler.

McElwee: Down the??

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: ?? of economy, yeah, right. So, we're still at it. Pennsylvania still has that tradition. 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: Why don't you tell folks what that's kind of like and what that—what it does.

Huber: Well, originally we torpedoed every new well we drilled. And when I say torpedoed, it takes depending on the size of your hole, how much nitro you can get in there. In a five and five-eights hole you can get five quarts of nitro to the foot in the formation. So, if you've got too many feet, you can get twenty times five and get a hundred quarts of nitro in that formation.

McElwee: We're talking about the producing sand, what we would call the sand?

Huber: Yeah, so we set that in there in that formation and then set it off. Well, it blows a hole back in it and 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 cut—he told me the other day I just wasn't with the new, new age. (McElwee laughs). He says "you're still one of them nitro guys." I said "well, we know it works," I said "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 got four places in there that shows up on what we call an electric log which theoretically shows production, more production in that section than any of the other sections in the sand. So they put a notch in there, an air-sand notch with an air and sandblastin' and they just keep turning that until it cuts a ring right there. Then they set a packer down here and a packer up here. And maybe you only got a foot of sand, but that one packer here and one packer there, then they pump that water. And I've seen 'em go up as high as four thousand before they broke. Once they break the pressure'll drop right to eight hundred pounds. 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 how they get it, but that's what it is. And you may pump, oh we generally tried to get the rate up to twenty barrel a minute with four pounds of sand per gallon of water in there.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: 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 you've pumped in there back out, usually before the oil comes.

McElwee: Mmhmm. But that's a very effective way—

Huber: Yeah, that's a very effective way. I've had wells make a hundred barrel a day doing that.

McElwee: Yeah, so now, for folks who can't quite visualize it, those hydro-fracking, it's done in these big trucks, big heavy trucks. I think wells up here really call them—the one up there in Meadville—

Huber: Oh, um—

McElwee: Something Wells. Some kind of a first name.

Huber: Yeah, I can't—

McElwee: They're all over the country, but they're real big units. But these are huge trucks.

Huber: Huge, yeah they're hu—they have what they call triplex pump on the pumper. Which has got three pistons like that, high pressure pistons. And they're powered by a ?? 1200 horsepower diesel. I mean, you could push this building off its foundation, something like that. (Laughs). I mean as far as pumping stuff in, you know.

McElwee: And the trucks as heavy as they are--

Huber: (Speaking at the same time). Yeah.

McElwee: (Unintelligible) --they bounce on the ground like that.

Huber: Then you got your blender. And the 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 the blender and it mixes it with the water. And then you got your sand truck depending on the size of your fraq. Usually one truck but if it's a (tape breaks) big fraq it may be two trucks there.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: But the other thing we generally run in there is (tape breaks) and (tape breaks significantly)

Huber: --clay from swelling so you get a better flow back on your well.

McElwee: Oh, this costs money.

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: Costs you some very serious money.

Huber: Yeah, a fraq job, well I don't know what one costs today. I had, in the '80's, I did twelve. And we did with Halaburton at the time. Halliburton was like the Cadillac of the fraqin' trucks. You paid more for Halliburton than anybody else. And my fraq jobs were ten thousand dollars at the time. Just for the fraq job, that didn't mean the cost of the well or anything, that was just a fraq job.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: Now I'm supposing it would be somewhere around fifteen, maybe twenty, thousand dollars now.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: 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 of that stuff.

Huber: Now there's some individual people up in Bradford, and up in that area that have bought fraq trucks on their own.

McElwee: On their own.

Huber: And, I seen a set operating this summer. This guy paid a million dollars for them three trucks. And they were brand splendid new trucks. And he could set like where you're setting and you could set there with a laptop computer and you controlled that whole fraq. There was operators on each truck but those operators, all they did was to make sure the computer was telling that truck what to do, or that machine what it was doin. (Laughs). I mean, I was amazed, you know. You could sit there with that engineer in that—they have a little ?? truck they usually bring with them. And you could watch that whole fraq on the computer. You could even see it go, you know. That computer will tell you, you know.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: It's amazing how, you know when we didn't it was guess by your pants (Laughter) and hope you got it right.

McElwee: Now Bill, years and years ago (Huber coughs) the trode'd come up from the ground you put it in these storage tanks, big wood storage tanks. Are you still using the big wood storage tanks or are you into some metal ones?

Huber: I've got mostly steel.

McElwee: Steel, mmhmm.

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

McElwee: Mmhmm

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. It 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. And we'd run six inches of water in there. Water heats easier than crude oil and holds the heat better. So we heat that water up and run it through the 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. And 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 the cold mornings.

McElwee: Is that right? Then of course, it would flow then through the—

Huber: You had to watch you and not get it too hot 'cause the gauger wouldn't turn it on 'cause he didn't want to send that hot oil down a cold line and bust the line. (laughs).

McElwee: And then also, it expands, crude expands with heat and they didn't want to take it too warm because they felt they were gonna get cheated when it cooled off. So there was all kinds of plays on that thing.

Huber: They still do that today. You get a run slip 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 mighta come out this morning well that oils thirty degrees. Now I don't know what that means as far as do I get a better price at thirty degrees or if it was summertime and sixty degrees do I get a better price, I don't know. (Laughs).

McElwee: I know in the old days the 19th century certificates that they gave, the receipts they handed, they specified it could be no more than eighty degrees. And if it was more than eighty degrees they discounted them because the volume they would receive once it cooled down would be a lot less.

Huber: Yeah, yes.

McElwee: I don't know what they did.

Huber: Maybe there's no—they used to do that a lot, I don't know how much they ever penalized anybody for or whatever. But they still pay attention to that temperature, even today, so.

McElwee: Nowadays a 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 triaxle. And then they had one—two small trucks that could haul a hundred at a time. If you've got small tanks they send you out—we send the hundred barrel out. And they pay a premium. If you've got enough oil to fill up that hundred and sixty barrel tanker you get a premium of two dollars a barrelful.

McElwee: Is that right? Yeah.

Huber: I've never, well, I've never actually got that premium 'cause usually I'm in that lesser class where they gotta send the hundred barrel tanker out. (Laughs).

McElwee: And not to pry into your business but typically, at least in the last 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'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. Cold weather –

McElwee: Slows it down.

Huber: --and all that good stuff that comes with winter.

McElwee: Yeah, yeah. Currently, you're still with the Ergon?

Huber: Ergon, yeah.

McElwee: And prior to that who owned it, who had rights to it—

Huber: Quaker State took it.

McElwee: Quaker State, yeah.

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

McElwee: That's amazing. When you mention Crew-Levic, I'm going wow, that was some time ago. They became what, City Service or something like that. And then that was a long time ago. And of course National Transit--

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

McElwee: Yeah. That'd be '40's, 1940's. Somewhere in there.

Huber: Yeah, yeah.

McElwee: That's an old name. The Huber name's an old name, Bill. (Both laugh).

Huber: Yeah.

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

Huber: Yeah, everything, well, my granddad Insely, great-granddad Insely, came here from Germany, and they—

McElwee: Would that by any chance be related to Kay Insely, of--?

Huber: Kay, yeah. Yeah, Kay's part of the group.

McElwee: Of old Plummer Drill, right?

Huber: He came, he homesteaded 167 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 plain, which is one of the original homesteaders of Plummer. Near as we could find out, I don't know if Kay knows anymore about this than I do, but I know he was a Cooper. And I know—

McElwee: Barreling--barreling?

Huber: --where his shop was down there by the bridge. And I think he was working for Humbolt refinery.

McElwee: Which is, for our audience, that's a very old mill, we're talking 1860's when you said Humbolt refinery. So that goes back, that's the beginning.

Huber: Yeah, well, he had—that's where I—how many original ?? were there. I think there were four boys and two girls but I might be wrong about that. But anyways—well, anyways my granddad Hubert, somewhere along we don't know too much about him, my great-granddad Hubert. He came here from Germany, he brought his wife with him. And they moved down in the hollow below the Insely farm and then grandpa—great-grandpa took off. He left all, supposedly eight of them—I gotta go to the courthouse and check that all out. But I know that my granddad worked that oil well when he was twelve carrying sucker rods because he was the sole support for them out there.

McElwee: Oh, is that right, yeah.

Huber: And then somewhere along the line he met an Insely girl. I don't know how that—

McElwee: Just couldn't resist them.

Huber: Just couldn't resist. (Both laugh). And they got married and near as we can tell they were all together in the business, the Insely brothers and the Huber brothers. And they built drilling rigs.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: And we figured probably in the 1880's and 1890's they were building drilling rigs all over the—I have one thing that I found from grandpa Hubert where they built a couple of rigs in Hill town for a guy. But then in well, 1906—the story is that a promoter from New York come in, leased the old farm. Then they built a rig, they hired Uncle Henry Huber to drill it. And they drilled the well and the well made 45-50 barrel a day and they telegraphed New York and told them it was a dry hole and bought the well. (McElwee laughs). I don't know, I don't know whether that's true or not.

McElwee: Oh, I don't believe that, Bill.

Huber: But anyway, they drilled that well, of course after that, you know, they drilled some better wells in there. And they, if you looked at the old deeds in the courthouse, there was Insely and Huber all over like Eagle Rock area and Pit Bull. 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 I found was Huber and Insely and they were active. And they in tracks over here, put the money up to drill a ?? And the ?? was the last well in Plummer.

McElwee: Yeah, alright, a rather famous well. When you're talking 45 or 50 barrels a day were thy flowing or pumpers, do you recall? Either way—

Huber: Either way. Most likely a sixty barrel well would have been pretty—if it wasn't a flower it was often close.

McElwee: It was close, yeah. Those kind of numbers sound fine. Those are big numbers.

Huber: Yeah.

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

Huber: Really well.

McElwee: Really well.

Huber: I remember ten on that same lease, it's marked right on my—I've got their old record book out there for drilling wells. They kept very good records. A lot of leases, well some even that I've had you just kind of gotta guess. But hell, I don't know where Grandpa Huber or L.R. Insely, but they kept a record book. And just exactly where that sand was and where that oil came in and all that stuff. Anyway this well, number ten, said this well made a hundred barrel a day from six feet of formation in the third sand and you know, it gives you the whole thing.

McElwee: Oh, yeah.

Huber: So, I was lucky in that respect, they kept those good 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, from a historical standpoint. So, well Bill, we all know where the records are. (Laughs). And hopefully you'll remember us as time goes on.

Huber: The Smith lease which—Max Smith married Mary Huber. And Max Smith was one of the drillers for Huber & Insely. But I ended up with one of their, one of Max Smith's leases over the years but I got no records of it, you know. They really don't lease wells in there, I got a pretty good idea but there's nothing written down. And 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 sand is at 701 feet, it runs to 720 feet or whatever it might be.

McElwee: That's invaluable information. And in years to come the technology they're producing because of the increased price of crude, who knows what's gonna come back out of those seams, they're not over yet.

Huber: No, it's—I don't foresee us, you know maybe 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.

McElwee: It's there.

Huber: It's there.

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

Huber: Right.

McElwee: That's the creed of the producer, that's their goal. Even if you only give us a nickel for it, we're gonna get it.

Huber: Yeah, that's about right.

McElwee: That's really it, that's really it.

Huber: It's like we were talking earlier, nobody, well, nobody thought this forty dollar oil was gonna happen to be truthful, but everybody that so far is still doing their—I've only heard of a couple that are gonna slack off because of the price.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: They're all, well they're all like I am, they're hoping it'll come back, which I think it will. The demand for this oil, 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, if it would come back a hundred and fifty, but it definitely would come back from where we're at now. 'Cause it's kind of like what we talked about, you know, our economy went down, so did China's, so did Japan's, and China was really buying the oil. They were buying it like there was no tomorrow. And that demand some of these days with the amount of people in China has to come back.

McElwee: I might add on that, my wife happens to be in China right now and it's her second trip. She sees those big drilling platforms all over along the coast of China, they're drilling 'em. See, they're not like us and waiting. They're out there and they're developing every reserve they possibly can, yeah, right.

Huber: Well see, we're 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.

McElwee: Bill, there's several films up at Drake Well in their archives and 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.

Huber: Mmhmm.

McElwee: I think, when was that in the 50's?

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

McElwee: Yeah, right.

Huber: And my dad, my great granddad were great believers in if you're gonna shoot a well shoot everything you can in it and shoot it with as much as you can get in it. So some of those shots on those films were 180 quarts of nitro comin outta the hole. And—

McElwee: That's something to see. That's real dynamic.

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

McElwee: Were you there when those—let's see, I know you're about my age. You could conceivably coulda been there for some of those shots, anyhow.

Huber: Yeah. There was some there on the end of the film in the 1950's.

McElwee: Yeah.

Huber: I was in—I was there for those. And then dad drilled the—yeah, that was in the fifties.

McElwee: Now 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: You know, I don't know. I know who W. Turk was. And if he was probably some of our family was because Plummer was pretty much--. (Laughs).

McElwee: Well, even though that was built as an educational thing or a demonstration thing, nonetheless has a lot of the old families involved. And it definitely shows what it was like in the early days. And that film exists, too. I think Drake Well has them.

Huber: I think Drake Well has that, yeah.

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

Huber: Yeah, I think they ought to get it out and show it or something, you know. A lot of people, and we knew it existed, but there's a lot of people probably right here in the area, even the tri-city area that didn't know that film was ever made here, Maybe never even seen it. But they did a pretty good job for the time and the area they were working in, you know.

McElwee: Yeah, oh yeah.

Huber: Vin—

McElwee: Now—

Huber: Vincent Price made the next one and –

McElwee: That's right.

Huber: --it was Hollywood style.

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

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: Now, 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 laughs).

McElwee: How many interviews did you do for—

Huber: Uh, twenty-six.

McElwee: Twenty-six.

Huber: It started with the Wall Street Journal. And all he had was one of these telephone cameras and he put some stuff on that. But it was 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.

McElwee: Mmhmm.

Huber: He couldn't believe my truck, we had about that much snow. I took him right up in. My truck's pretty good at gettin—my, I got good roads number one but number two it'll 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. Then they come back and interviewed me again, although he had no idea that I'd been in the Wall Street Journal once before. So, well then CBS nabbed that up and they showed them. And that was quite a, that was quite a production. I had the Oil City Derrick reporters and photographers. I had Oil Heritage people there and the CBS crew there. And you literally had to get a traffic cop up there at my engine house, (McElwee laughs), to direct traffic to get them outta there. And then 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 tasted like. I said "Well, taste it, right there it is." He's standin there lookin at it. I said "Go ahead and taste it." He looked at me and so I reached my finger in like that and— 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." (Huber laughs). And of course the rest picked up on that and 'bout every crew that come in there wanted to taste crude oil. I kinda still laugh about it but we had—after that the French came. The English came. These guys were outta London. Then the French come back again but this was a different crew. Like you said, I must've been popular in Europe.

McElwee: Yes, yes.

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

McElwee: I believe it. You're very, very famous around here, too. Did you tell them that?

Huber: Yeah.

McElwee: And now I think also, aren't you the one that said they can take the fame, I'll take the money, right?

Huber: (Laughter). Yeah. And then 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, which I hadn't, you know, but they came and it was fine. They called and wanted to do this and I said fine, you know. Well, I thought they were gonna do it that day. They made an appointment and oh about eleven o'clock this stretch limousine shows up in my driveway. And my wife says "It's either the Japanese or the IRS, have you done anything you shouldn't a done?" I said no, not that I—no. (Laughs). Well the Japanese come in. Well the girl spoke very good English. Most all these foreign people did. And sh—but this man—and she said this is the Imperial Japanese History Minister, he flew here from Japan to meet you. Whoa, you know. So we talked and they went over to the lease. Well, the day they went over, the first time they went over, you've been up there, some days on a damp day that belt gets water on back there. And when it spins in it sprays off. Well they thought they was shot in there. I threw the clutch in, the belt come in and the water sprayed and him and her thought somebody was shootin at them. They run down through the woods, we had to catch 'em. I think they were going back to Japan. (Both laugh).

McElwee: That's great.

Huber: Then they left and they made an appointment to come back with a film crew. They come back in about a week and they had themselves and two videographers, is that what you call you 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 the driveway and over to the lease and they videoed the whole thing and all of 'em wanted to go up and see the crude oil coming outta 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's only one shot I think of my engine house in the whole thing. But this film made with cartoon characters and I mean, it starts out it shows this Japanese girl doing things in the house. And I think they're going, I don't know Japanese, going on about what would happen if there was no crude oil. And the next scene shows her standing there like this, you know, nothing on.

McElwee: (Laughs)That's right—

Huber: 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're babbling on and 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." (Huber laughs). Yeah.

Huber: Then, after that, oh who was the next one. CNN, er not CNN but—

McElwee: Fox?

Huber: British.

McElwee: Oh yeah, BBC.

Huber: BBC. 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. Then the one and I'd love to see this work, this was on a Sunday night and we had been somewhere and come back. I was watching television and the phone rang. "Hey Bill, it's McNerny." I said "Who, John?" He says "I got Seanus Murphy here, from Dublin, Ireland." I said well, you know, I didn't know what to say. I said "Yeah?" "Well he's a photographer and'd like to take pictures. Could he come out?" I said "Yeah." He says "I'll bring him out about eleven o'clock tomorrow. I said "Fine." Well we hung the phone up. When half an hour, the phone rang again. "Hey Bill, McNerny, we're settin in your driveway, can we come in?" I said "Yeah, I guess, you're out here now." (McElwee laughs). So they come in. This guy was a very nice guy, but definitely an Irishman. So he came out at eight o'clock the next morning and he never left 'til five o'clock that night. And I'll be he took two hundred rolls of film. He was on his belly in the power house taking the belt going over him and oh just stuff. And he promised me he'd send me some of his work but I've never seen it yet.

McElwee: Well, where did he get, somehow or another where did he get?

Huber: Somebody said he was a six grand photographer in the world, now I don't know whether that's true or not, either.

McElwee: (Speaking at the same time). Is that right, 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. He got in that belt house with that belt runnin. And of course it was a nice day and sunlight was fingering through them little boards on there, you know. "Oh, beautiful shot," he kept saying, "beautiful shot." (Both laugh). And his finger just kept going like all the time, then he'd—you figured 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 gunfighter with two—two guns, you know. And I'd say "well, what's two cameras?" And he said "Well, this is long-range this is short-range over here."

McElwee: Well, we're kind of coming to the end of our one hour. You mentioned this man knew what he was doing-- you know what you're doing. And it's quite evident every time I talk to you that I—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 to actually tell us what's going on as opposed to what we think's going on. And that you've taken the time today to do that, I really appreciate it, I mean it. I appreciate how giving you've been to everybody over the last couple 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 and I'm really pleased you did come and talk with us this morning and I thank you very much. I do. I know your aunt?? probably hurt but I really wish you the continued best. And let's just end this by saying fifty, sixty dollar barrel 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