Arnason Interview

TM: June 8, 1973. This is Timothy Madigan interviewing Alvin Arnason of Glyndon, Minnesota. This is for the Northwest Minnesota Regional Historical Center. First of all, what's your background? Where were you born and raised?

AA: I was born on the farm near Bruck, Wisconsin, on September 19, 1898. My grandparents came from Norway, from the heart of the valley Norway, the little town of Ilvig. My grandparents on my mother's side came to this country in 1853, and on my father's side my grandparents came in 1857.

TM: Did they ever go into the reasons for immigrating to the United States?

AA: My grandparents on my mother's side were dead when I was born. But my grandfather on my father's side I can recall as an old man. I can't say definitely why they came except I assume their reasons for coming were the same as 99% of the others who migrated to this country from Scandinavia. Norway as you know is a very mountainous country with very little land suitable for agriculture. So life was very difficult. They came to Wisconsin and settled in a valley known as the Beaver Creek Valley, a very beautiful valley. Most of the land was fertile. At the time they came, I think there was a lot of open land and not too many forests and trees to interfere with their tilling of the soil. I recall many things my father related about his parents coming. My grandfather owned the first team of horses in the area and the story is he paid $200.00 a piece for them which would be a fantastic figure in terms of present day dollars. They got along quite well and when my grandparents died my father, who was the oldest in the family, took over the farm. We were, I suppose, as well off as most of the farmers. I
can't recall anything that would indicate that we were poor or that life was difficult for them. I think they did well and enjoyed life very much.

I married Irene Ellis Bjornstad on the 29th of May, 1926. We have seven children, four girls and three boys, all of whom have left us for new homes. Most of them live near us so we see them quite often. My oldest daughter is married and lives in Fargo, as is our second daughter. The third one is married and lives in California and the fourth daughter lives in Hampon, Indiana, where her husband is employed as an engineer with the Republic Steel Company.

As for education, I attended a rural school and completed eight grades, but did not go to high school from the rural school. I did want to finish high school so I wrote for catalogs from all the schools around that I knew of to find out if I could afford to do some high school work so that I could prepare for college. I finally went to Val Paraiso University and enrolled in the college preparation department. This was during the war (WW I), so I was eager to get into the service. Through the efforts of the President of the college I was accepted by the Student's Army Training Corp, which was an officer training program. I was accepted, but two days after I had been accepted by the Corp the war ended on November 11th, so that ended my military career.

TM: I was wondering what your parents' political attitudes were. You mentioned before that they were great followers of Robert LaFollette.

AA: Yes, my father was for a farmer very active in politics. I can remember so well the many times that the politicians would be covering that part of the state, they would always call on my father. We had Robert LaFollette, Sr., and his son when his son ran for the U.S. Senate; they called at our farm.
I wasn't at home at that time, but he was there with Governor Blaine, and we heard a lot of political discussions. My father took me along when I was, I don't know my exact age, but maybe 14 or 15 years old, to the county convention. Governor Blaine spoke before the county convention and of course LaFollette Sr. was pretty much our patron saint. He was a great man, a rather remarkable man, a very forceful orator. He fought the lumber barons of Wisconsin, campaign after campaign, and finally was able to get the state convention to endorse him for the governorship and was elected and later became a U.S. Senator. You see, at that time the state legislature still chose the U.S.' Senators and I think he was, I'm quite sure that he was, sent to the Senate by the State Legislature. I know in the National Convention of 1912 he made a minority report recommending that Senators be chosen by the direct vote of the people.

TM: What was the reason for your parents enthusiasm for LaFollette? Is it because they were farmers?

AA: Yes, I can recall going to meetings of the Equity Association. It was an organization of farmers demanding reforms, demanding better prices and better control over them, and better welfare. I suppose at the time they were essentially Populists. Many considered them radical, but I never thought of my father as being radical in politics or in anything else for that matter. An uncle of mine left Wisconsin and went to North Dakota, western North Dakota. When he became active as a Socialist magazine, a publication known as the Appeal to Reason and I always read the little magazine.
TM: What was it like? I've heard a lot about that magazine.

AA: I was fairly young at the time so I can't recall it very well. I can recall the farm ads. It was smaller than the New Republic. You see, they're not as many pages, but about that size, and I recall that I became quite interested in politics and government as a result of reading this little magazine.

TM: You mentioned that you were going into the service during the first World War. Was there much opposition in your area to the war?

AA: No there was not. As I recall it, I attended mass meetings and so on, and I was so eager to join the service. My father absolutely refused to permit me. He had two sons already in the Army and said, "That's enough." If the war hadn't ended, I would have been in the service.

TM: You were later to move to North Dakota, right?

AA: Yes. I first went out to North Dakota with my oldest brother who is now living in St. Paul and is 82, I think, but he had a store out in western North Dakota and after I was married he encouraged me to come out. I had completed a course at the LaCrosse, Wisconsin Normal School, as it was then known. They had a three year course for high school teachers, superintendents, and principals, and so on, so I completed that and I went up to North Dakota then in the summer of '27. I went to the county superintendent's office and inquired about the possibility of finding employment in any of the schools around. He was interested and suggested that I go to the little town of Sanish, that is now under water as a result of the dam. I talked to the school board there and
they indicated right away that they'd be glad to give me a contract for nine months to act as Principal or Superintendent of the school. They had just put up the new building, a small brick building and wanted to start a high school. So I took the job at $135.00 a month. We had our first child there and stayed for five years. The school grew very rapidly, starting out with Freshman and Sophomore years the first year. The next year we had a third year and the following year we added the fourth year. By the fourth year we had 44 pupils in the Freshman year.

**TM:** What were your duties as Principal or Superintendent?

**AA:** They were many. The first year I was the only high school teacher. We had three elementary teachers and I was the high school teacher, and was also supposed to be administrator and head of the school. This was in '27, and western North Dakota was badly hit by drought and the crops were bad. It was difficult for the people to send their children to school, but they did manage somehow. I can recall very well that perhaps half of our high school enrollment was non-resident. The state paid $72.00 for each non-resident pupil. They paid that directly to the school district. The little town was a former Indian reservation which meant that a large number of homes were not owned. The people were squatters, which meant that they couldn't be taxed and so our tax base was very, very small. I realized the only way we could keep the school going was to get high school pupils $72.00 a piece. We could actually operate with $72.00 for each non-resident pupil. So, each Spring I would go out and
visit rural schools and urge the youngsters to come to Sanish to High School, and it worked beautifully, our enrollments went up by leaps and bounds.

TM: You would say there was a good attitude among the parents toward education?

AA: Yes, very definitely. The hardships that they endured in order for their children to go to school were fantastic. They would rent a little room in the homes around town and many of them would go home on the weekend and come back. Their parents would bring them back with loaves of bread, potatoes, meat, eggs and so on, and they cooked for themselves. Some of them worked around town for their board. For instance, we had a girl almost all the time we were there. My wife had three children by the time we left so she could use the help. But we really were thinking more in terms of letting a home for somebody who wanted to go to school.

TM: Were the children themselves really interested in getting an education?

AA: They were. I think their attitude toward education was better than it is today because there was something that made it very difficult for them and it wasn't very easy. It was extremely difficult. They didn't endure hardships. I don't know if the pupils were aware of that, but I know the parents were.

TM: What would the average curriculum be like, what types of courses would a student take in high school?

AA: Our curriculum would include English, math, (which was essentially algebra), U.S. history and world history. We provided nothing in the way of vocational training, but we did have typewriters, so we taught typing, and then general
sciences, Chemistry, with very limited facilities, but we got along. Something interesting happened the last year I was there. I pointed out that the tax base of the Sanish district was very small and was very difficult to maintain the school. The President of the bank, Myron Olson, lent money to the district to keep us going, and we would have been out of funds if it had not been for his interest. In 1932 I was attending the University, working on a Master's Degree at the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, and he came to see me. We met at a lake home where he was spending his summer with his family, and he informed me that we didn't have money to start school. He said that we would either have to eliminate the elementary school or the high school, we just can't scare up enough money to maintain both. So he asked if I had any suggestions. Well, having worked very hard to develop a high school and getting the enrollment up to what it was, I just couldn't accept the phasing out of the high school, so I said, "Give me a little time and I'll think about it." Before he left I had made a suggestion. "We can't close our high school. We've worked too hard for that and there's such a need for it, but I have a wild idea. We will use high school seniors to teach the elementary school." Well, we talked about it. "Well," he said, "why don't we try it." So we opened school with one teacher in the elementary school and three teachers in the high school. We worked with these seniors, we selected the leading students in high school, many of the most capable, and they were very interested. We carried on a teacher-training program the entire year. We required our group of pupil-teachers to prepare lesson-plans and we helped them as much as we could. Some parents were much opposed to it. They thought that this would be just a blank year as
far as their children were concerned. We gave three national/standardized tests, one in the fall, one in the middle of the year, and one at the end of the year. Believe it or not, the results of the test indicated that our pupils were above the national average. The tests which we gave in September and in May indicated that they had made more than the normal progress during the year. A lot of superintendents around joked about it, laughed about it, thought it was crazy, and the state department looked upon it as an insane venture. But the point is not that these youngsters went through school. They were not retarded in any way, there was no evidence that they had missed a year of school whatsoever. I kidded people. I said, "I have proved that teachers are not necessary in at least the elementary school." But it worked out amazingly well. I recall one parent who didn't like what I was doing and I had been given an increase in salary every year I was there. Even the last year I still got an increase in salary. This farmer went to the President of the Board who was also the President of the Bank—and complained. The President said, "We just don't have any money so we're doing the best we can." "Well," he said, "why don't you pay Arneson what he's worth and hire some teachers with the difference?" Fortunately, I could laugh about it.

TM: Was there much of an Indian population in the area?
AA: We had two Indian pupils there. The new town now that has taken the place of Sanish and Van Hook has a fairly large Indian enrollment.

TM: I was wondering at this time, in your area, in North Dakota generally, what were the Indian-White relationships?
AA: The first year we were in Sanish, our nearest neighbor lived down by the river and they lived just on the next block, you might say. We got along
very well with them. When our daughter was born they brought over
presents in the form of beads and so on, and we got along with them
very well. There was a boy and a girl that were full blooded Indians
that attended school. They got along very well, there was no awareness
of anything like race prejudice for instance. I had very little experi-
ence with Indians, these were the only Indians that I did live near. I
always liked Indians anyway because they were exciting to me. The farm
where I grew up was a stopping place for the indians. My father used to
visit their camp in evening and talk with them. They would tell stories
about their life. I suppose it was second-hand undoubtedly for most.
Although, I remember an indian whose name was John White Boy, and he
told my father about how he had had to move away because he wanted to get
away from the war. I assume that would be the Black Hawk War, but he
wanted to make it clear to my father that he was opposed to war with the
whites.

TM: Would you say generally in the community there was good Indian-White rela-
tions?

AA: Yes, Yes. A large number of Indians went through our valley on their way
to what was known as Black River where they would live much of the time in
the summer. Then they would go back to Black River Falls where they had
reservations for the winter. I suppose they fished this Black River. They
always stopped at our place. They drove horses and light wagons, in which
they'd pack their children and their provisions.

TM: When you were school superintendent in North Dakota did you become involved
in politics?
AA: I was not active in Sanish. At that time, the non-partisan league meant a lot more to me than the democratic party. The non-partisan league, in my opinion, was the liberal political organization in North Dakota, and I was sympathetic with the non-partisan league. At that time there was a very bitter feeling, generally speaking between the farmers and the townspeople. The townspeople, about 90% at least, were against the non-partisan league - very bitter, as a matter of fact. About the second or third year I was in Sanish, I voted by absentee ballot. It wasn’t long before it was known around town that I had voted non-partisan. (Laughter) I got some criticism. Incidentally, I thought I had voted secretly.

TM: Why were the townspeople opposed to the non-partisan league? Did it seem an economic threat?

AA: I think so. The non-partisan league sponsored cooperatives and the business people thought that this was an infringement upon their domain so they were almost 100% opposed to the non-partisan league.

TM: You were to become WPA director in Minot?

AA: Minot division. The WPA was set up in 1935. We had had several attempts at developing work programs, but finally President Roosevelt got through Congress a bill providing for a work program instead of direct aid. They had had the FERA Aid which was a work program plus a direct assistance in the way of food and I think rather even money - but anyway food.

I had moved from Sanish in 1932 to Leads where I was superintendent at Leads School, which was a fairly good promotion. I was there from 32 to 35, the depths of the depression. I felt very keenly the uncertainties
and the difficulties that people were suffering. Western North Dakota had bad crops and the economic depression, so there was a lot of real hardship. I felt it and worried about it. How did I get involved in WPA? A friend of mine with whom I had worked in the Democratic party, this was in 1932 to 34 I would say, he called me one day. He caught me directly in Rugby, North Dakota, where I happened to be and asked me if I would be interested in accepting a position in WPA, Works Progress Administration, they called it then. They hadn't been alphabetized yet. He told me my salary would be $225 per month, that was better than $1800 for 9 months. I told him without hesitation that I was very much interested, as a matter of fact I said, "If the position is open you can say I have accepted." So he asked me to come down to Grand Forks the next day, where he was assistant state administrator, setting up the personnel for the organization. So, I went to Minot and set up an office. I moved my family there and read mimeographed sheets for a month or so because it took quite awhile to get the personnel and the program moving.

TM: How large an area did this cover?

AA: This encompassed the northwest area of North Dakota. North Dakota had been divided into four districts. I was the district director, or the administrative head of the district. I travelled quite a bit, met with mayors, county commissioners, and set up projects. I urged them to plan. We had, I suppose, half a dozen engineers in the district that helped set up projects. But it was my job to go around and visit cities
and counties and urge them to set up projects so we could get people to work.

TM: What types of programs did you set up?

AA: We built dams, many of which washed up in a few years because they didn't know enough about building earthen dams. But some of the engineers did know something and many of the dams are still standing. There are many man-made lakes that the WPA constructed. We built community buildings, we constructed side walks, water and sewer extensions, developed parks, just allot of very worthwhile projects. I would say 70 to 80 percent of the projects were excellent projects. Some were what we might call raking projects because the local communities would not provide the necessary funds. They had to provide trucks or often tools or things like that. Only a small percent of the project was paid for by the local community but we did have to have some contribution from the local community. Some of the cities did a marvelous job in planning. They saw the possibilities of getting their people jobs so they could work and earn a living and many of the leaders entered into the program with a lot of enthusiasm and as a result we had excellent projects. The city of Valley City, North Dakota, stands out as the outstanding community in the state, perhaps in the whole Northwest, because they had a mayor named Fredericksen who later went to Washington. I forget now what particular position he had, but he did go out to Washington. He was so interested and so eager to provide projects that they built an armory there under the Public Works Administration. They built a municipal building, parks, and extended sidewalks. They had just outstanding projects throughout the whole program and it was due largely to the efforts of this Mayor Fredericks.
TM: Did they have any programs for writers or artists in your district?

AA: Yes, yes. We didn't do very much with it. This was known as the "Professional Project." These projects that were semi-professional got the highest pay. I think it was $66 a month. Many of them worked in court houses developing court house records. Many of them were competent business people who had been trained as accountants and they were professional people without jobs. They generally got these better jobs in the court houses or in city hall.

TM: Overall, in North Dakota and nationally, what would you say were the main success or the main failures of the WPA? It's good points?

AA: It's good points were that the local community provided good projects and we did some excellent work. Road building for instance was fantastic. We had a man in the southern part of the state by the name of Ogat Ryan. Ogat Ryan in the county was about the same as Mayor Frederickson in the city. He built hundreds of miles of new gravel road, graded it and graveled the road. He worked hard to get all this done. It worked out beautifully. It provided work for the people there. They hauled gravel with horses, which gave work to the farmers. At first when WPA was set up, the farmers were not eligible to work under the work program. They had a separate program known as the Resettlement Program, which provided cash income as well as provisions like fruit, vegetables, and meats. It seems to me, in 1936 the Works Project Administration was thrown open to farmers who were in need and they often came with a team of horses, a wagon and/or scraper. They worked on the road or maybe building a dam. This was a God send for the people of North Dakota who hadn't had any crops and were suffering doubly from the general depression and bad crops as well.
TM: How would you evaluate the handling of the depression under Roosevelt?

AA: I would say that the biggest mistake made on the work program was that the wages were too low. The theory behind the work program was that we would provide purchasing power on the part of the people who had not been earning any money for two or three years. This would get our economy going, but it started out at 33 and went to 44 dollars a month. The income was so small that it could not really spur industry on to expand and get their wheels of industry going. There just wasn't enough purchasing power. This was brought out very clearly by 1938 when we suffered a recession rather than a depression. Leon Hendrickson, who was President Roosevelt's economic advisor, a man that I became very well acquainted with, got his picture on the front of "Time" in 1938 because he predicted the recession. He said, "We can't escape it. Industry has started up and we're producing, but the warehouses are filling as they did originally. In other words, there's not enough purchasing power to absorb the production of our factories demands."

This is exactly what happened. By 1938 WPA was beginning to liquidate. It really had not solved the depression. The European war coming in 1939 did that. The idea of the work program was excellent. I think a capitalist country ought to stand by a work program that the President could start up whenever our economy started to slow down because this would avoid unemployment and keep purchasing power. In other words, the recession would not last very long if we immediately took steps to employ our first laid off their job and get them back to earning and developing purchasing power.

TM: Would you say then that this was the main defect in Roosevelt's program?

AA: I think so, too small an income. If it had doubled or tripled I doubt we would have had the recession of 1938.
TM: I was wondering how you saw Roosevelt's liberalism? Was it really as radical as some conservatives make it to be?

AA: Not radical at all. He addressed himself to the problems. I think when he first ran for President he didn't understand it much better than Hoover did. I think he realized that we had to do something and if we tried enough things we might hit the right one after awhile. I don't think he had a clear understanding of just what the problem was. Certainly his speeches in 1932 indicated no radicalism on his part. He gave the kind of political speech that had always been given, lower taxes and more efficient administration. But really addressing himself to the real problem - I don't think he did. I think he learned fast. He surrounded himself with people who did understand or at least would have some grasp of it and he was the kind of person who would accept new ideas very quickly. I think he was a very great man because he was daring. He was willing to try things and this was the trouble with Hoover, he just didn't dare try, with the result that we made no progress at all and went deeper and deeper into depression.

TM: When did you first become active in Democratic politics in North Dakota?

AA: I would say about 1932.

TM: I suppose your high point was when you were on the platform committee in 1938 for the Democrats?

AA: Yes, that was it. We wrote a rather liberal program, decidedly progressive. The problem in North Dakota was that the candidates all filed as Republicans, but they had the non-partisan league organization. The fight was always between the IVA's, the Independent Voters Association and the non-partisan league. In 1932 and 1934 I had become well acquainted with this Henry Holt of Grand Forks and, of course, I had met Tom Moody and visited with him on several occasions. Tom Moody was nominated by the state convention at Minot in 1934. I was at the convention as a delegate from our county and Tom
Moody was a rather impressive and colorful person. He got the nomination and then he went on in the fall and was elected Governor. He didn't stay in the office very long—about a month when the supreme court declared him ineligible to serve as Governor because he had not lived in N. D. five years prior to his election. So, he left the office and was almost immediately appointed WPA administrator for the state of North Dakota.

TM: Was this when William Langer came in?

AA: Long time ago, I'll see if I can keep everything straight. No, the following election, when Tom Moody was elected, his running mate or his lieutenant governor was a Republican. So, when Tom Moody was declared ineligible to serve, the office went to the Republicans, and the lieutenant governor, who was an old farmer from the northwestern part of North Dakota served out the term. Langer's wife ran in 1938. Well, Langer was convicted of, what was the charge?

TM: Having federal employees buy his newspaper?

AA: Ya, ya. So he could not serve but his wife took over and she was the candidate in 1938.

TM: Langer was probably one of the more controversial governors in North Dakota.

AA: Well, I had been kind of an admirer of Langer's. I thought he maybe was a little shady in his operations now and then but he was a capable fellow, and I think essentially a good liberal. As a matter of fact, when he went to Washington as Senator from North Dakota, I think he was one of the very outstanding Senators. Certainly he did a lot for North Dakota and was admired by lots of people in North Dakota.

TM: Did you know much about or develop an impression of the Farm Holiday Association in North Dakota?

AA: The Farm Holiday Association was headed by Usher Al Burdick, Quent's father. He was quite different from Quent; he was essentially a rabble-rouser. I
remember listening to him on several occasions, this must have been about '34. He was a capable fellow no doubt about that, but I considered him perhaps, more of a cheap politician. I think his son was a very fine person, but Usher, I wouldn't say the same.

TM: Do you think the Farm Holiday Movement in general had an impact on N. D.?

AA: It certainly did. The Frazer-Lembke bill was pretty much the result of the Holiday Association in North Dakota. It was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1934. But I think it was re-enacted along with a number of other laws that have been declared invalid by the court. Justice Roberts changed his vote so it became the 5 to 4 decision for Roosevelt. When Roosevelt threatened to increase the court, "pack the court" as it was known, Roberts saw the handwriting on the wall. So, he just started switching his vote. Congress repassed legislation and they became laws. Of course, the 5 to 4 decision went the other way.

TM: Let's go back a little bit to the 1938 Democratic platform in North Dakota. What were some of the basic tenets of this platform?

AA: Of this platform. Well, I was very happy to be chosen to the committee. I immediately got together with the other members of the committee and I sold them on the idea of writing a very liberal platform. In the first place, I thought that's what we needed. In the second place our only chance of winning was to write a platform which the non-partisan league could accept. In 1938, the candidate for the nomination for governor was John Moses who had been in the IVA until 1932. So he was not known as an outstanding liberal. I argued that the campaign had to be on issues on the liberal platform and as a result we would get support from the non-partisan league and could with the election that way. Mr. Lascowitz, father to the mayor, wrote the preamble. Bill Murray wrote the labor. I wrote the rest of the
platform. It was fairly lengthy. I patterned it to some degree after the Progressive Party in Wisconsin. I wrote around for some of the liberal platforms and Wisconsin had a particularly impressive platform. I got many ideas from the Wisconsin Progressives. It made a terrific stir at the Convention. The old timers, especially those who had been associated with the I.V.A. thought we had gone completely wild. They insisted that we would go down in defeat if such a radical program were adopted. But we fought it through. We sat up until 3:00 at night. The Minneapolis paper had black headlines, "Dems Battle Over Platform." But we voted on each item. John Moses fought me right down the line. He thought the platform was entirely too radical. But the rest of the committee went with me. He had a man from Minot who was on his side. Otherwise, I had already sold the others on the idea of writing a progressive platform because the Congressional candidates would have to run against Usher L. Burdick and William Lemke of Fargo, both non-partisan leaguers and they were liberals also. So we had to. I said we had to out Langer-Langer and out Lemke-Lemke. That went over and finally it was adopted. A big fight at the Convention might have been some fraud, but when the vote came we had it easily. John Moses, who was endorsed by the convention for the governorship, decided against running on the platform. He asked me to come down to have breakfast with him about 10 days after the convention and the first think he announced was, "Well Al, we've got to forget about the platform, it's too radical." "I've had 50 letters from friends around the state begging me to repudiate the platform, just man't run on it." "It's too radical." We had mimeographed stacks of the platform and were going to carry on our campaign entirely on the platform rather than on the candidates. But the platform was dropped, nobody ever saw any more of it. We didn't have
shredding machines at that time, but if we had, we would have shredded it.

TM: This would be a good time to discuss your own personal political philosophies.

AA: My political philosophy. I think I can state truthfully that I have been a liberal from the time I can remember. I was always concerned about justice and fairness in politics. I think Wilson said, "I love those lonely figures climbing the ugly mountain of privilege." The idea of privilege always meant a great deal to me. In a democracy we think of everybody enjoying the same rights, but it has been very obvious all through my lifetime that it isn't true. There are those who have privileges not on the basis of their blood but on economic position or other positions. The injustice of the influence of privilege has always troubled me. I have for a long time felt that vested interest from corporations and other forms of economic groups as something that is one of the real evils of capitalism and if capitalism is to survive, it must find some way of reducing the influence of so-called big business. Otherwise, we will not survive as a democracy. If I can recall what I said in the platform a long time ago. Speaking about vested interest, I said something like this: "These groups stand ready and willing to sacrifice democracy whenever it becomes necessary to preserve their wealth and power. "That, perhaps, expresses it to some degree. I didn't know I could recall that many years back. But essentially that's what I mean. It appealed to people, especially the non-partisan league. John Moses turned to me when I read this and said "Al do you really believe that?" I said, "John, I do believe it. You ought to believe it."

TM: Probably one of the things that Langer was noted for in the U.S. Senate was so-called isolationism or his opposition to involvement in foreign wars and foreign service. I was wondering, was there a general feeling of that in North Dakota?
AA: I was not aware of it. I suppose yes. I can recall, for instance that my wife and I were invited to Bismarck with a local couple in Sanish. We were guests of the warden. That's the closest that I've come to it, being in jail or a penitentary. We stayed there over night; came down Friday and then stayed Saturday and came back on Sunday. At the dinner table I think he had some other friends in, so it was a large table. Of course, we got to talking politics. I was the only liberal there, the others were good old conservatives. This must have been in about 1930-31. We got on the question of international relations and what-not in the depths of the depression. The warden, I think maybe, or one of the others remarked, "Well if Europe would pay us a war debt, we wouldn't be having this problem." I said, "do you really think so? Let's see, how would Europe pay our war debt? With Gold? There isn't that much monetary gold in existence. The only way they could pay it would be to give us goods and we have too many goods right now. Our warehouses are bulging. How would they pay?" The point that I'm making is that this was it, Europe wasn't treating us right. They had borrowed money during WWI and weren't paying it back and as a result we were going through an economic depression, indicating a complete lack of understanding of how the whole system works. But that was isolationism at least in the opposition to these European involvements.

TM: When did you first move to Minnesota?

AA: Spring of 1938. Having a farm background I just longed and dreamed for a little farm somewhere. When we lived in Fargo and I was a WPA,
every Sunday we would drive around and look at places. What made me especially interested was that I was rearing a family on the uncertainty. I had a job, but it was a temporary job. School work was so inadequately paid, but economic pressure was the thing. I think the lack of security made me want to get on a farm in the worst way.

TM: So farming in 1938 was a good business investment?

AA: No, no, very bad. We put down $500 on the farm for $5,000. This farm could be sold now for about $400 an acre. We paid about $30 an acre. We had it all planned, we were going to make a lot of money. We didn't. In fact it was very difficult. If it hadn't been for an arrangement that I was able to make with a neighbor, we would have lost it. We bought it on contract and we received a notice to vacate within 30 days which was a terrible shock. They were really nice people, they lived in St. Paul. They came down and I had gotten hold of a neighbor, a young fellow who wanted more land. So I sold him the idea of renting the farm, putting in the crop, renting the land. He would pay the owner their share of the crop so that the owners would be getting paid for the farm and at the same we were hanging on to it.

TM: What was the condition of other farmers around here, pretty rough?

AA: Very, it was very rough. Very difficult, I think wheat was selling for 38 cents a bushel, oats maybe 5 cents - 10 cents a bushel. There wasn't any money to make. You couldn't make expenses.

TM: When you first started farming was there much machinery at all or was it by teams?

AA: We had a team of horses but they worked a couple of hours a day. We
worked with real handicaps. We didn't have adequate machinery. I had just a quarter of land. When I rented the farm out, I had a partner who was a friend of mine. We had a tire business on Center Avenue. It turned out to be a very good business and it made good money. We got along very well and I got another quarter of land with a Federal land bank loan on the two quarters and in 4 or 5 years did pretty well. I started buying land out here so things have been all right as far as farming is concerned.

TM: When did you first become involved in politics in Minnesota?

AA: In Minnesota? I think about '48 to '50. In 1950, I was elected Secretary of the Clay County DFL. In 1954 I became chairman. I attended the State and District Convention in 1950. That was two years after the Progressive movement.

TM: I was going to ask about your impression of Henry Wallace.

AA: I wasn't very sympathetic, frankly with the effort to elect him. I knew he wouldn't be elected, but I felt it was poor politics to have a fifth candidate. He wouldn't have a ghost of a chance of being elected and he could lose the election for the Democrats. So, I wasn't very sympathetic for that reason. I was a great admirer of Wallace, however. I think Wallace was a great man, remarkable person really. Maybe not the smartest politician in the world but he was very intelligent and a fine individual.

TM: You mentioned earlier about when you were Secretary for the Clay County DFL, that there was a move to oust Wallace supporters in 1950?

AA: I think this went on in every county I'm sure. I'm certain in the district it went on. An effort was made to oust those, or refuse to seat those, who had been active in the Wallace campaign. I thought this
was entirely wrong. Both groups were liberals and certainly to try to keep them from being seated at the Conventions I thought was wrong. I thought it was poor politics and it was essentially the wrong thing to do.

TM: The 1950's are usually considered rather conservative times in the United States. I was wondering how that affected Minnesota politics? I know that Hubert Humphrey backed alot of anti-Communist legislation in the Senate when he finally became Senator in the '50's.

AA: You are perhaps aware that Humphrey actually sponsored legislation to outlaw the Communist party and that it was passed by both the houses and signed by the President. It's on the law books right now as far as I know. It's never been repealed. Frankly, I can never recall reading it or s-eing any reference to it, but it's on the books. It outlaws the Communist party, strictly; absolutely unconstitutional.

TM: Especially with the Wallace campaign and the Progressive Party in '48, there were alot of charges of Communist infiltration and so forth.

AA: I wasn't close enough to know. But I certainly have been told and am aware that when Governor Benson was in, he lost out in '38 because he had permitted Communists to get tied pretty close to him. In Minneapolis-St. Paul, he had the Trotskyites and the actual fight among the Communists, which is pretty ridiculous actually. But he certainly became besmerved and it helped to defeat him, there's no doubt about that. It became one of the big issues really.

TM: Through the 50's was McCarthyism. McCarthy was always big on accusing many people of being Communists that weren't and so forth. Was there much red-baiting and that type of thing in this area?

AA: At that particular time? Of course, McCarthy came later.
TM: Ya, it'd be in the middle 50's.

AA: Ah, ya, so let's see, when was he first elected?

TM: I think McCarthy came in about '48, but he really got going in about '52-53.

AA: Ya, ya, McCarthyism. Being a liberal, of course, I'd be opposed to the man. McCarthy was truly an evil genius, there is no question about it. The man was without any principles whatsoever. Anything that would help him was okay, he'd stoop to anything. He was a dangerous individual because he had a fantastic way of swaying people. The tactics he used were vicious. You are too young to know first hand, but he would wave some documents, say "I have here documented proof that so and so is a Communist," or a card-carrying Communist or something like that. He'd never let anybody see it. It was entirely false. But it went over. The people believed it. They didn't say, "let's have a look at it." He used this again and again. Big charges. There are 283 known Communists in the State Department. What do you do? How do you combat something like that? You call and you say "You are a liar, Mr. McCarthy, you're a liar. Let's see the proof." Then maybe he'd reduce it to 160 or something like that. He destroyed character. I can remember, what's his name, he was an authority on the Far East. McCarthy absolutely ki-led him. The professors in the universities got fired, and they kept going. New revelations all the time, something new. After he'd killed somebody off he'd pick somebody else and he'd turn out these mimeographed sheets everyday. The newsmen gobbled them up because they made news. But when they were censored the thing stopped. Eisenhower finally had enough. Eisenhower was urged to deal with McCarthy but he
just didn't have the courage or his advisors were against it, but when
McCarthy attacked the Army that was something different. Eisenhower
then became excited with the result that they censored them and that
ended McCarthy. You know the story, how he ended?

TM: Not all the details.

AA: Well, after he was censored he would come with his arms full of mim-
eographed material to hand out to newsmen and they'd turn away from
him. He couldn't get rid of anything. It played on his mind to the
point that he just killed himself by drinking. He drank like an in-
sane person. He didn't last but a short time. Censoring did the job.

TM: I would say the main person that has stuck out in Minnesota politics in
the last 20 years was Hubert Humphrey. How would you evaluate Humphrey?

AA: No question that he is a remarkable person. Certainly one of the best
speakers that this state has ever produced. He has been a very thorough-
going liberal. I think Hubert Humphrey is a great man, but I have dis-
agreed with some things. I didn't particularly appreciate what he did
as Vice President. I realize it is very difficult for him to do anything.
But being a liberal I would say that if I'm serving under somebody that
is doing something that I think is entirely wrong, I would refuse to
serve under him, that's all. I thought it was entirely wrong for John-
son to do it. I thought Hubert Humphrey was defending the Vietnam fiasco
right from the start. He did just that through the whole campaign. I
don't think he should have resigned, but at least he should have re-
fused to speak for Johnson's policies. He should have said, "I'll serve
you in every way I can, but I cannot go with you on this because you are
wrong, so I won't make any speeches." That subject I believe he did.
He became very near calling anybody who opposed Johnson's Vietnam policy as flirting with disloyalty.

TM: You were very active in the 1968 campaign for Eugene McCarthy.

AA: Yes.

TM: What was your reasons for your hatred of the war, dislike of the war?

AA: That's right. I think the Vietnam war is a blot on our nation that is going to take years and years and years to heal. It's an insane thing, the idea of sending an army over to Asia to try and settle what was essentially a civil war. That's all it was, a civil war. It's still a civil war, it'll be a civil war for several years yet to come. North Vietnam will undoubtedly take over. I think Communism is something that appeals to the downtrodden, the down and out. They prefer it to any other form of government or economic organization. It might even be good for the people as a transition because they have had no experience in democracy. They are uneducated so maybe a highly disciplined type of order is what to expect but certainly it has paid off to be thought of as temporary.

TM: What kind of initial response did you get from people in the area who were farmers?

AA: Until Johnson made a statement that he was not running, I would say 95% of them were with me and told themselves they were absolutely opposed to the war and opposed to Johnson's policy. But just as soon as he announced that he was not running and Humphrey became the candidate, they switched so fast you couldn't hold them back.

TM: I was wondering what you thought of the 1972 Minnesota Democratic convention. Were they adopting a number of radical, or so-called radical platforms?
AA: Yes. Well that sort of a thing sort of appeals to me, because I've been pegged more or less a renegade as far as the party organization is concerned. I suppose politically it wasn't smart and that's what you have to go by, if you don't succeed. You may have a very good idea, but if it doesn't succeed it isn't -uch good, I guess.

TM: How would you evaluate the political atmosphere in the Red River Valley in the last twenty years or so? Would you consider it leaning more towards the liberal or conservative side?

AA: We're definitely swinging from liberal. Clay County, for instance, voted for Coya Knutson. Clay County had been a liberal county all along. But sugar beets made a difference in the politics of Clay County. It's a crop that's profitable and with the result that beet growers, in general, are very well off financially. That affects the politics.

TM: With prosperity they got more conservative?

AA: Oh yes. Going back to North Dakota, this doesn't sound good from the standpoint of political science, but the non-partisan league did pretty well. But on the big crop, they invested it. So some of the leaders, I suppose, they kind of pray for crop failures once in a while. There's a very close relationship between the economic conditions of people and their politics.

TM: Do you think the politics in this area will become - will swing more to the conservative side.

AA: I think so, I think so. I just have that feeling that Bergland is standing pretty well in the area as a liberal.
I think he's doing a good job and I think he's doing a good job in public relations. So, I have an idea he will stay in for some time. I think a lot of conservatives are beginning to understand that these liberals aren't quite as crazy as they think they are. At least they can endure them; they aren't too dangerous. If they work for their interests in certain fields they're willing to accept them then as Democrats, I believe.

TM: Well, that's about all the questions I have for you.

AA: Okay, fine. Maybe I didn't talk loud enough.

TM: Oh, I think it came off fine.