

NEIL FOLKMAN
February 15, 2000

Today is Tuesday, February 15, 2000. Ann Townsend and myself, Anne Andeen, are interviewing Neil Folkman, who owns Berneil Water Company here in the Town of Paradise Valley. Mr. Folkman, may we have your permission to quote you in part or all of this taped interview?

Neil: Certainly.

Anne: Thank you. First of all, we are interested in what brought your family to this area and when.

Neil: My father came out in 1941 I think to look at land, or to vacation. He liked it and he looked at land. His partner, Merrill Cheney, who had a chemical business in Cleveland

Ohio, came out here and they purchased land in 1941. They built what was originally called the RP Ranch which was a research product for their chemical company in Cleveland. That was what was to become eventually McCormick Ranch.

Ann: Did the research company have a building on what is now called McCormick Ranch?

Neil: No, the chemical company was entirely in Cleveland. They just brought the name out here and used it as "RP", which stands for, Research Products Ranch. It was a partnership of Merrill Cheney and my dad. My dad bought some land on his own and Cheney bought some land on his own, and they owned land in partnership.

Ann: How many acres did they buy up?

Neil: At one time, they had most of the land between Lincoln Drive and Shea, and most of the land between Pima and Mummy Mountain.

Anne: How did the McCormick's get it?

Neil: The McCormick's bought the land from my father. So did Gainey.

Anne: He was land holding out here, and this was in '41?

Neil: '41, I think we sold the McCormick Ranch off in 1946 or '47. We moved out here in 1948. We lived on the corner of Berneil and Scottsdale Road.

Ann: Tell me, do you recall how much per acre your father paid for the land? It's interesting to compare prices per acre then and now in Paradise Valley.

Neil: I don't know in '41. Back in the late '40's my dad was selling 5-acre parcels for \$395.

Ann: Oh my word, quite a difference!

Neil: That was the land along Doubletree, Berneil, Fanfol.

Anne: How long did your family live in the Town of Paradise Valley?

Neil: We never lived in the Town of Paradise Valley.

Anne: You lived here before it was incorporated.

Neil: We lived here before it was incorporated. We stayed at the corner of Berneil and Scottsdale Road. That house we built in 1948. We moved back in Phoenix because there weren't any children for my brother and I to be with, or actually the family to be with.

We moved into Phoenix and never lived in the Town.

Anne: Even after it was incorporated?

Neil: Even after it was incorporated.

Anne: Can you tell us how the water company was established?

Neil: It's pretty simple. My dad had bought the land between what is now the Berneil Dike where Northern would come through. He wanted to develop the land along Doubletree and Scottsdale Road. While you could sell land without water, it was always better to have water. He built a well and started a water company in 1949, if I remember correctly. He changed the name to Berneil in 1951.

Anne: You mentioned to me when we were talking earlier that he knew my Uncle Charlie Mieg and had real estate dealing with him.

Neil: As I remember, Charlie Mieg was our first real estate agent. We sold what was called Colony Ranches which was the area that is now Sunnyvale, Horseshoe, Doubletree, Berneil and Fanfol streets.

Anne: It was called Colony?

Neil: Colony Ranches.

Anne: Tell us about the relationship with Merrill Cheney.

Neil: They were partners in Ohio. I believe that Cheney had a chemical company and hired my dad out of school. Then my dad became a manager. Cheney came out here on vacation and then my dad came out to vacation. They both decided to buy land that everybody thought they should give back to the Indians.

Anne: I think I had heard that before.

Neil: They were partners as I recall with McCormick Ranch, Gainey Ranch and some of the other land. Most of the land on the west side of Scottsdale was owned by Cheney individually or my dad individually.

Anne: They had a water company separate from yours?

Neil: They had Mockingbird Water Company.

Anne: Yeah, our house used to be with Mockingbird Water Company.

Neil: There was a law suit between Merrill Cheney and my dad in the early '50's or late '40's because of the way Invergordon was built. Then they both started their own water companies and their own land filling.

Anne: What areas did the Berneil Water Company serve then and what areas does it serve now?

Neil: It serves the same areas now as it did then. Basically, the areas between the Berneil Dike, which we obviously put in to protect land parcels. Invergordon on the west, Scottsdale on the east, and what would be Northern Road if it came through on the south.

Ann: Where and what is the Berneil Dike?

Neil: It's the flood control dike that starts just on the north boundary of the Town of Paradise Valley.

Anne: Along Doubletree?

Neil: No, it's the boundary along the north border of the Town of Paradise Valley. It runs right behind Chaparral High School. Then it turns south and runs down east of Invergordon, then down between the Camelback Country Club which was all farmland.

Ann: It isn't a very high dike then>

Neil: No, mostly it's below ground level. It was given to the Town in the early '60's.

They paved it, and maintained it. It was put in to divert water around the subdivision area because there was quite a bit of flooding in those days, as there would be now if the

dike were removed

Ann: If we had rain.

Anne: Was the flooding a problem with the limited housing at that point in time?

Neil: Not really. The lots that sold were not the lots that were subject to flooding. On the old flood control maps, you can see where the washes go through. You can still see where the washes go through because there are no natural washes. They're not really filled in, they just don't run anymore.

Anne: Do you have any anecdotes of things that happened you would like to tell us about?

Neil: I think the strangest thing that used to happen, and that was long before the Town, of course, when we still lived out there, were the sheep drives up Scottsdale Road, where the drives started out on the Indian Reservation and they drove the sheep up to Flagstaff.

The drive would go up Scottsdale Road to our house, which is about five miles, maybe eight hours to drive. We basically went somewhere else and waited for them to get out of the way because they didn't move very fast. There were fences on both sides of the road and they just drove them up Scottsdale Road, all the way up until past what is Shea Boulevard, and then they spread out because the road ended there anyhow.

Anne: Was Scottsdale Road paved?

Neil: No, it was paved to the canal at Camelback Road. It's hard for me to remember because it was 1941. I was a child. I was three at the time. We stayed at what was to be the McCormick Ranch.

Anne: Was the Camelback Inn established at that time?

Neil: Yes, it was.

Anne: Did you have access to taking the horseback rides up Mummy Mountain?

Neil: My dad rode extensively. I think Cheney did too, if I recall his history. I don't know where they got the horses from. Cheney had his own horses. He rode them through the desert. Of course, Cheney developed the land up on the south side of Mummy Mountain. There is a single road that goes up almost to the top of the mountain on the south side.

Anne: You mean Glen Drive?

Neil: I don't remember the road's name.

Anne: Can you give us any of the history of how that road was put in?

Neil: No, I don't know. Well, it was put in to build a house up there near the top. Then it was made private and we never did go up there. We spent a summer in a house Cheney owned on the east side of the mountain. All those roads were put in to develop land.

Anne: Do you know who put the road in up there? It was a long time ago.

Neil: I believe Cheney did.

Ann: Was Glen Drive named for anyone in particular, like maybe the developer or the person who wanted to build a house up there and name it for himself?

Neil: I don't know who did that

Anne: I noticed that you "Cheeney" and so many people want to pronounce the name to sound "Chaney". Is there a correct pronunciation of the name?

Neil: I don't know. He has a son who I think lives up in the mountain. There were some points in my dad's journal that conflicted with what the Cheney family think was the

actual situation. The Scottsdale Historical Society contacted him for his comments. I believe he lives in the mountains.

Anne: On Mummy Mountain?

Neil: No, in the Show Low area.

Ann: Is there anything in the journal that you would like to share with us? I'm not informed about the history of the Berneil Water Company and other details. I haven't lived here as long as Anne Andeen. I have heard that there was a controversy about the water company and the Town.

Neil: That is very recent. That's only four or five years ago. Actually, my father was never a big fan of Paradise Valley.

Ann: He didn't was it to be incorporated?

Neil: He didn't want to be incorporated in the Town. There's an extensive section in here (journal) about dealing with the Town at that time. Let me see if I can give you the names of the people he dealt with.

Anne: He wasn't on a committee who opposed the incorporation was he?

Neil: No, he wasn't. He was dealing with Pete Wagner.

Ann: Was that the person popularly know as "Adobe Pete"?

Neil: Yeah, that was Adobe Pete Wagner. The Mayor, Jack Huntress, the Vice Mayor was Leonard Diem, and also the Town Council. Wagner was attempting to get signatures for annexation in I believe 1962 or '63. My dad went out of town with the promise from the Town Council and the Mayor that they would not annex his property and had a letter saying such. When he came back, they had annexed it. He could have filed a law suit as

a farmer and as a land developer, he just didn't want to fight them.

He was accused of being a "quick buck artist." That was what the Town was telling people in order to get them to bypass this thing. My dad was never a big fan of the Town of Paradise Valley.

Ann: I can understand from his point of view feeling that way.

Neil: There's a small section in the journal about what he could have done with this land.

I don't know where it is, but I remember some of it. There were offers to make it a used car lot, and outdoor movie theatre because drive-ins were very popular in those days.

Ann: This is what he wanted to do?

Neil: No, no. That's what people had come to him. He loved the Valley and the mountains.

Ann: I see. This is what people wanted to do with the land if they bought it from him and he refused to sell the land for those purposes. Was this along Scottsdale Road?

Neil: Yeah, along Scottsdale Road. He farmed that land for many years.

Anne: What kind of farming did he do?

Neil: Grains and cotton.

Anne: And cantaloupe? We've been in the Valley since 1960. I remember that from Lincoln Drive south along Scottsdale Road to McDonald, there was a cantaloupe field. I just wondered if he grew cantaloupe too.

Neil: No, we never grew cantaloupe, mostly grain.

Anne: No cattle?

Neil: We had cattle but not to the extent that Cheney had cattle or the McCormick's had cattle. McCormick, of course had Angus.

Anne: Those were the red and white ones?

Neil: The McCormick's had Angus and Cheney had Herefords. Gainey had Arabian horses.

Anne: So did the McCormick's.

Neil: Yeah, but not to the extent that Gainey did. Gainey had some prize Arabian horses.

Ann: Well, you have seen a big change in this area!

Neil: It has been a pretty big change. I think the other funny story that I always remembered, and I think I remember it right, is that there were only half a dozen children north of Lincoln that went to school in 1948, the one year we lived out here. My brother and I were two of those half dozen children.

Ann: Did you go to Judson School?

Neil, No, Scottsdale Grammar then, it became Kiva, which it is called now.

Anne: No, you are thinking of Loloma school down in Scottsdale. Loloma is the Scottsdale Art School now.

Neil: It's the old 90 degree school with an office building in the middle and it jutted out on both sides.

Anne: Down in the middle of Scottsdale. Right, that was Loloma.

Neil: It was an America West parking lot for a while.

Anne: It was a number of things.

Neil: Anyway, our car broke down one day on the way back and nobody found us until 10 o'clock in the morning because nobody missed us.

Anne: That's comforting

Ann: It was time to move to Phoenix then.

Neil: High School was Scottsdale High, which was on Indian School just east of Scottsdale Road.

Anne: I didn't know that that was built at that time. Are there any other things you want to talk about?

Neil: Not what I can remember because like I said, I lived here in '48. I moved into Phoenix. My dad farmed at the time. Then there was the annexation problem. I was in California for five or six years at that time. I came back here and took over the operation of the water company in 1959, and have been here since. Then, of course, we developed the Folkman Ranch, the last 18 remaining parcels of the Folkman Ranch.

Anne: I noticed that they are removing the shack at the corner of Doubtree and Scottsdale Road.

Neil: That is not a shack, that's a pump house.

Anne: Excuse me, pump house. What kind of housing will be put there?

Neil: I'm not even sure who owns that--- I believe the Town owns that corner.

Anne: But you own the....

Neil: We don't own anything anymore. No, those wells were all contaminated for years.

We haven't used them since back in the '50's or '60's. We traded that to the City of Scottsdale for what will now be an emergency water supply. We have two wells with enough capacity for our system. They're both on the same APS power lines, the APS

power grid. If APS goes down for any period of time, it cuts our entire water supply.

So what we've done now is contracted with the City of Scottsdale in exchange for the site for the widening of Scottsdale Road. They're taking everything down and connected us to Scottsdale for emergency supply.

Anne: Oh, I see. I didn't know.

Neil: Now in a power outage or something like that, all our customers would have some water on a contingency basis.

Anne: The City of Phoenix bought the Mockingbird Water Company. Whatever happened to the Paradise Valley Water Company?

Neil: Paradise Valley Water Company is still there.

Anne: Is it over there at Cattle Track?

Neil: I don't know. They used to have an office up here about half a mile on Invergordon. They had a big tank and their offices there. Then they moved the offices out but the tanks are still there and the pumps are still there.

Anne: Is yours the only privately-owned water company that serves the Town now?

Neil: The Paradise Valley Water Company is still in the Town and Phoenix serves Paradise Valley, too.

Anne: We were switched to Phoenix from Mockingbird Water Company.

Neil: When the Town bought the Mockingbird system that was in Phoenix, they had to buy all of the Mockingbird system, which is part in Scottsdale and part in Phoenix, and part in Paradise Valley, and the part of the County where it wasn't incorporated. Then they sold off or traded the part in Scottsdale to Scottsdale.

Ann: Do you have any thing more you would like to share about the Berneil Water Company and events in its history?

Neil: There's really nothing. The water company business is a very blah business. It's regulated, you pump water out of the ground and sell it. That's it.

Ann: Where are the wells specifically?

Neil: There's a well on the south boundary of Camelback Country Club and there's a well on the southwest boundary of Camelback Country Club. Those are the two wells.

They both are large producers. Actually one well is shared with Camelback Country Club. We have a contract with them physically where they own the well, we own the pump, and we pay them a withdrawal fee. The other well is one just recently drilled.

Everything south of the Indian Bend Wash is a very good well. Cheney's well up there, or the old Mockingbird well is very good. I can't think of the other person's name that had the private ranch that was up there. Had a very big well. So we pretty much knew that south of the Indian Bend Wash would have good wells. North of the Indian Bend Wash, the wells are not very good and are mostly contaminated.

Ann: Do you know what the contamination is?

Neil: Chromium.

Ann: Where did that come from?

Neil: I don't know. There's no natural chromium in Arizona.

Anne: How deep are the wells?

Neil: Our current wells, I think are between 1,100 and 1,300 feet, and the water level is about 400 to 500. One of them hasn't changed much in all these years.

Anne: Really, because we're always hearing how we're depleting the ground water.

Neil: The Camelback well has been in the ground and we added 60 feet about 10 years ago. It hasn't changed much at all. It went up during the floods, the 200 year floods, and the water perked down. Some geologists feel there's a pretty big pool of water that is blocked up against the mountain. The wells seem to indicate that because there is plenty of it coming out all the way through Scottsdale, south of the wash.

Anne: As I understand it, there is very little ground water north of Bell Road, in that area up there, is that true?

Neil: I don't know. There's a lot of water in the Cave Creek basin.

Ann: Because of other wells existing in the area, did you father feel comfortable in drilling the wells where he did? How do you decide where to drill and "know" you will get water?

When we were farming we had our own well drilling rig and we did drill holes all over the place.

Ann: Until you hit water?

Neil: No, no, they all hit water. There's water still north of the wash, it's just not as good as the water south of the wash.

Ann: South of the wash is good water, north of the wash the chromium.

Neil: It's chromium now; there wasn't any problem years ago.

Ann: Was there a manufacturing company operating further north?

Neil: There might have been some dumping over there years ago, but nobody's been able to trace it. It goes back to World War II. We had wells all over the place and refining

operations. They had a well drilling rig so they could drill.

Ann: Out here in the desert and nearly all by yourselves, you were pretty capable in doing all kinds of tasks for yourselves, car repairs, as well as....

Neil: The original Indian wells were only fifty feet deep.

Anne: Where were they located?

Neil: they were all over the place.

Ann: Only fifty feet? Would you hit water at fifty feet today?

Neil: You might hit some water at 200 or 300 feet, a very, very small amount. Most of the water is apparently south of the wash, at 300 feet. It perks out.

Ann: So most of the water cannot be found at fifty feet now.

Neil: Oh yeah. That was a long time ago, that was even before white man got here.

Probably why the Indians left.

Ann: You have a wonderful journal here that documents a lot of information about the Berneil Water Company. Would you be willing to share, i.e., copies, of this journal for the History for the Town of Paradise Valley?

Neil: I would be more than happy to have it copied for you and send you a copy of it. As I indicated earlier, there is a copy of it in the Scottsdale Historical Society.

Ann: We would appreciate it very much. I think it's very valuable to the history of our Town.

Neil: Alright.

Anne: Thank you very much for this interview. We'll look forward to receiving a copy of the journal.

