

Richard H. Indermuehle

Interviewers Janelle Kohl and Kay Krans

What is your Name ?, When and Where were you born? (Janelle Kohl)

My name is Richard Herbert Indermuehle I was born on the 14th of December 1930 in Plainfield, Wisconsin. I was an only child but my mother had one other baby who died as an infant. My mother's name was Florence Lapp. Both my mother and father were born in this country. I was raised in Plainfield and finished high school in 1948. The marshes were started in 1946 and I spent my high school summers working on the marshes. I first came up here in 1945 and began to help survey the property before the marshes were developed with the surveyor Palmer Hanson. My father Herb Indermuehle was one of the original owners of the Cranberry Marshes to be developed. My dad was born in 1900. He was a butter maker during the Great Depression. He owned the creamery and cheese factory in Plainfield. He sold the creamery right at the end of World War II. He wasn't doing anything when he became involved with the Manitowish Waters cranberry venture with Delbert Bartling. Myrtle Bartling (Delbert's wife) was my dad's sister. Myrtle Bartling was Myrtle Indermuehle. That is how my dad got involved with cranberries because he had just sold the Creamery and was looking for something else. He was about 46. This is a totally different kind of agriculture. He grew up on a dairy farm and became a butter maker at that plant and it was during the Great Depression and the man who owned it had come from Denmark. The way the economy was going made the Danish owner want to sell it and go back to Denmark. My grandfather was also involved in the creamery and his name was John Indermuehle. My father said, "I bought it so I would have a job."

What did you do after high school? (Kay Krans)

I went to the University of Wisconsin and majored in Horticulture with an emphasis on small fruits. I graduated in 1955, with three years in the army in between. It was during the Korean War and I ended up in Alaska and I was part of the group watching the Russians. I was part of the Cold War Group.

How Many Original Growers Developed the Cranberry Marshes? (Janelle Kohl)

The original families were the McFarlands, Kollers, Bartlings, and Indermuehles. Then, at the very beginning, what was the Weber property was owned by Vernon Goldsworthy. Then Folsom and Dolman bought property. Dolman never developed his property but that is the Don Rayala Marsh today.

What about Harold Gross? (Kay Krans)

He had the property that became Bartlings. He was not one of the original ones and another man from Wisconsin Rapids was involved when the property was purchased and his name was George Mallard. He did buy the property that Harold Gross bought but he did not do anything with the land. Harold Gross did start a little bit and then Bartlings bought him out.

What were your duties in starting the Marsh? (Janelle Kohl) Were there any roads to the marsh area? (Kay Krans)

I helped to survey the land and the different properties had to be staked out. The land was wild swamp country. There were no roads out to the marsh. There was a small sandy two track road that ended at Alderwood Lodge and on to the old girl's camp just past Alderwood. The Girl's Camp was abandoned. The main lodge to the camp had burned years ago but there were still three or four cabins left at the camp. F.A. Christensen from Necedah bought Alderwood in 1948.

How much can you remember about how your father got involved in this Cranberry Project?

You will find information in handouts. Betty Koller's father was the one first involved and Frank was getting involved as he was getting out of the Navy. Betty's father was a Leasure and her mother was related to the Potters. (Kay Krans interjected that Vernon Goldsworthy had told her that he originally bought property in Manitowish Waters to start a Cranberry Marsh but moved on the Three Lakes because he felt Manitowish Waters was too desolate.) Dick said again that yes, that Goldsworthy originally owned the land that became the Weber Marsh. Clarence Weber bought his marsh from Vernon Goldsworthy and then I bought the Weber Marsh when they sold out. Weber sold to a group of 7 stockholders who bought the Weber property and Goldsworthy was one of the stockholders and managed the farm. I bought out Goldsworthy and took over management and I bought out the rest of the six stockholders one at a time.

How old was your Dad when he came up here? He was in his 50's at that time, born in 1900. He was kind of in a mid-life process. My father owned a creamery and cheese factory in Plainfield. He sold that at the end of World War II. Delbert Bartling got into the cranberries because his good friend Potter was up here and he thought he would try it

too. **Was your dad good friends with Delbert?** No, Myrtle Bartling was my Dad's sister. So, Delbert Bartling married Myrtle Indermuehle. That's how he got involved with the business. So he knew the creamery business but now would be going into a totally different form of agriculture. Dad had grown up on a farm and became a butter maker during the Great Depression. The man that owned it came from Denmark and he wanted to sell it and go back to Denmark. So Dad bought it so he would have a job. My grandfather, John was somewhat involved. **So you graduated from high school then what happened ?** I went to University of Wisconsin and majored in horticulture, with some research on cranberries. My major was small fruits which included cranberries.

I worked all summer on the marsh if I was able to. **Kay said: You must have been a valuable asset to the Cranberry business in Manitowish Waters because you had a degree in Horticulture.** My son, Richard also had a degree in Horticulture. **Did any people at Madison affect your thinking about cranberry management?** There were different ones that worked in different areas like entomology that pertained to cranberries. Dr. Dana was the horticulturalist that did a lot of work on cranberries. There were plant pathologists that worked on cranberry research. Originally, the main cranberry variety was Searles variety. McFarlins variety was also an important one at the time. Growers just finished taking the last of the Searles variety out of the Manitowish Waters marsh. They were gone sooner in a lot of the other marshes. There are several varieties out there now. **Were most of the varieties were developed in UW-Madison?** No, the Searles was a native variety that was not a developed one. It was selected from the wild. A grower in Wisconsin found a patch of exceptionally large berries and they were taken from there. The McFarlin variety was developed out East. The Stevens became the

popular variety next. New varieties that are better and ripen earlier have been developed through breeding programs through moving genes around. They have developed earlier varieties, etc. Early years in the marsh was a lot of work. **Was there a favorite part of the cranberry work?** The work was all hand work in the beginning and now it is all mechanized. It was probably not what I had to spend a lot of time doing in the beginning, digging ditches! Digging ditches by hand was not my favorite kind of work. The beds vary so much, our beds were sort of the standard. Our cranberry beds were 2 1/2 acres with them being 125 ft wide and 50 feet long. Other cranberry beds might be configured a little differently according to the lay of land. Originally ditches were dug all around the bed and down the center. This was to facilitate moving the water. Originally, you are digging in peat and then as they got worked out there was more sand. There were also sand islands throughout the marsh. Later on, most of the beds were mainly sand. Once the ditches were dug, the beds had to be leveled by hand to start with on the very first beds. **How many seasons did it take to get the land ready for production?** It took just one season to make the beds. Beds were scalped with a drag line. Stuff was piled in the dykes. **Did you get sick from working the marsh?** No we never got sick working in the construction. The usual procedure was to prepare the beds one year and plant the vines the next spring. They were originally planted by hand. (Dick shows the pictures.) The vines would have been on a wagon. A worker would take a bushel basket full of vines and he sprinkled them in an area on the bed. After they were spread out they were rolled into the sand or peat.. The planter was a drum planter and as it rolled it planted the vines in the bed. Now the planters are more like a disc on a tracker. **When you and your dad started the marsh, how many helpers did you have?** It depended on the

time of the year and what work you were doing. When we were first developing the marsh we just needed a couple of workers. We had a man that had worked for my dad at the creamery. He moved from Manitowish Waters and worked right from the start. His name was Forest **Marchley(sp)**. He stayed for a few years and went back to Plainfield and lived on the farm his parents had and became a gasoline and fuel oil trucker. He set up his business on the farm. **What did your Mom do?** My mother never worked out in the fields, but when the harvest came and the berries needed sorting she worked all the time. Originally, we lived on the corner where Scharmer's(now Brenda Lee) house is located. My dad built two homes there, little 24 by 48 homes. Machley and family lived in one and we lived in the other. (The corner of South Townline Rd and Twin Pines Road). The Scharmer home is one of the original houses but it was remodeled and added on to. My folks home was actually moved to the Cranberry Marsh. It is still there but was added on to a couple times. It also had a basement added when we moved to the marsh. (Dick is identifying the original men of the cranberry industry who were in Manitowish Waters from a picture) **Who were Babe and Lucille Speas?** Fred Bartling married Lenore Speas and I married Patricia Speas. Speas were not involved in the Cranberry Marshes. They were good friends of the Bartlings from Necedah. **Once the marsh was established what was farming life like on the marsh?** For many years we expanded the marsh, two beds at a time. The first year, there were four original beds. Through the years we continued to add beds. We were working on beds while the established cranberries were growing. When I retired, including the Weber property, we had 120 acres. **That is quite an accomplishment in a lifetime.** Most of them were 2 1/2 acre beds and many were fit in according to the land and how that fit into the landscape.

What were your biggest worries between spring and harvest about the crop. The #1 worry was protecting the plants from frost. We also had to worry about hail. We had one hail storm that caused 100% loss of crop. There was the Cranberry Scare in 1959. **Was that the pesticide scare?** Yes, but actually it was politics. The hail was later than that, I think it was in the 1960s. **Tell us about that pesticide scare that took all the fruit off the market.** The man that was the head of the FDA, it was called something else at that time, was trying to get on the ticket as a vice-presidential nominee. He wanted to make a name for himself. He didn't do so well and finally got kicked out of government. The government did make an indemnity payment of about ten million dollars which was divided among all the growers in the whole country and it didn't amount to a lot per grower. The government admitted they were wrong. It was divided up according to the production each grower had. We had insurance for hail loss. The insurance company was a crop insurance company and it was the first time they had insured cranberries. They quit insuring the cranberry crop the next year. **I imagine all the growers had the same damage from the storm and the same insurance.** They weren't all 100% like us but they were all pretty bad. If you had time to flood the cranberries before hail you could save the crop, but you don't have enough warning to do that. **Are there any insects that damage the cranberry crop?** We never had too big a problem with insects that we couldn't control. There are less and less products you can use on cranberries due to the fact that they are grown near water. Insecticides, fungicides, and insecticides are all labeled per crop for use. Because cranberries are a minor crop and research of chemicals is so costly, they don't get priority for research. They have to run multi-year tests on a specific crop and each one of these tests cost a huge amount of money so the companies

don't always test for cranberries. The companies won't test for cranberries when they will test for major crops like corn or wheat. For the small amount they will sell to the cranberry industry, they can't justify the research. **What kind of weeds are a problem for the cranberry crop.** There are pretty good herbicides out there that control weeds in cranberries. They are very expensive. They work quite well. In this area we haven't had problems with fungus. In warmer climates, cranberries can have problems with fungus. It seems there are more pests than we had in the past. I am far from the farming now. Pollination is a very important part of managing the crop. The cranberry is a perennial crop so you don't have to worry about cross pollination. **How many years until you replant a field?** The newer varieties have increased production a lot. Growers tear out the old varieties and replace with the new varieties because they get twice as many barrels per acres. Usually the third year after planting you begin to harvest. Sometimes the second year you get enough berries to harvest.

Family

When did you and Patricia meet? I knew her from before. Patricia and Lenore used to spend time at Alderwood. I knew who she was, but I started going with her at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, after I got out of the army. She was at Madison as well and she majored in nursing. **Both of you were getting well educated for living in the northwoods.** I met her at Alderwood in the summer. Lenore and I were the same age and Patricia was the younger sister. She couldn't go to the beer bars when Lenore and I were 18. I know that I would have met her at Alderwood. We used to go over there when the girls were there. The Speas stayed in the main lodge, that would have

been 1948. We would have been in our junior years at the University. Patricia is three years younger than myself. Well, we got married after I graduated and she went to school one more semester, her program was 4 1/2 years. We got married in Necedah at the Methodist Church. She graduated from high school in Necedah. We lived on the marsh and we built a home and it is still in use. She worked as a nurse as soon as she came up here in 1956. The hospital was called Lakeland Memorial Hospital. It was long before it was Howard Young Hospital. My dad and mom were still working and living on the marsh. We had two children. Susan and Richard. Susan was born in 1957 and Richard was born 1958. Richard grew up helping on the marsh and he took over management when I got up in my senior years. He has a degree in horticulture as well and Susan has a degree in business. Susan helped at harvest time. My dad stayed active until he was 67 and had a heart attack and then gave it up. He puttered around on the marsh after he retired. He loved to work and he lived to be 97. My mom was a year older than my dad and she lived to be 100. They lived on the marsh, ate lots of cranberries and breathed lots of fresh air. Little Trout Lake was excellent fishing. My dad was an excellent fisherman. We ate lots of fresh fish that he supplied. Little Trout was ruined for a while because the Native Americans used gill nets for a couple of years and that really affected it and the tribe clamped down on that and it came back. When I was working in the marsh, we did all different kinds of things. The kids started at the old Manitowish Waters grade school. Susan was in the first 8th grade class that graduated from North Lakeland School. They both went to Lakeland Union High School. We had leisure time. Later on, we had a sailboat on Lake Superior and we sailed for 30 years.

Susan wasn't crazy about sailing, but Richard was a good sailor. She stayed home and took care of the dogs. We sailed out of Bayfield.

I was involved in the early days of the Community Church. I was a treasurer in the church, a trustee in the church, and an elder in the church. I served one term as town supervisor. Our son Richard lives in Manitowish Waters. Our daughter lives in Arbor Vitae. The marsh was sold. Our son in law Tom, still works there as a day laborer. Richard has two sons, one is Theo and he is a deputy sheriff and our other grandson, Richard lives in Grand Rapids, MI and is a lawyer. He works for a real estate company. He is the Chief Operating Officer for the company. The company brokers some big deals. Susan has two boys as well. Jessie is in Madison and Joe is in Durham, North Carolina. Joe is a chef and he uses cranberries in his food. Jessie works for a company that arranges trucking mostly refrigerated for transporting. We have two great grandchildren who are also boys. Jessie and RJ.

Indermuhle is a Swiss name. My grandfather came from Switzerland as a child and they lived around Hartland. They bought the farm in Plainfield, it was a subsistence farm.

It was a nice life living in the Northwoods. I used to hunt and shot a lot of deer, but wasn't too good with birds. We were always happy at harvest time and there was something there and we were happy when the harvest was over. We had the winter to recuperate. In the off season, we maintained all our equipment. We sanded the beds periodically and threw the sand out on the ice. We flooded the marsh in the winter and they were in ice all winter. We had to have mechanical skills, it was too expensive to hire work. Now you need a skilled technician to find the problem on new machinery.

We also skied in the winter. It was a good life. We talked about the beauty of the harvest of the cranberry crop. The red berries and the blue of the harvest sky are amazingly beautiful.