

MINNESOTA POWERLINE CONSTRUCTION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**CHARLES BERG
NARRATOR**

**EDWARD P. NELSON
INTERVIEWER**

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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ORAL HISTORY OFFICE

Cover photograph by Robert Sheldon, courtesy of Cooperative Power Association.

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PREFACE

The Minnesota Historical Society has been collecting oral history for many years, dating to J. Fletcher Williams' interviews with territorial pioneers in the 1860s and 1870s. In 1949, Lucile M. Kane undertook a series of interviews on lumbering in the St. Croix River Valley, which became the foundation of the modern oral history collection.

The Society's oral history program was formalized in 1967 with the creation of the Oral History Office, headed by Lila Johnson Goff. Among major projects completed since that time are those concerning environmental issues, the Minnesota farm economy, the state's resort and recreation industry, Minnesota business, and interviews with representatives of a number of groups that immigrated to Minnesota during the past thirty years.

The Minnesota Powerline Construction Oral History Project represents the Society's largest single venture in the documentation of current events. The project was begun in October, 1977 and continued through December, 1979. A single researcher and interviewer was employed during the project's two-year duration. Edward P. Nelson performed all of the basic research, maintained project files, and conducted all of the interviews. He framed interview questions in consultation with James E. Fogerty, who participated in several interviews concerning electric utility operations.

Research for the Minnesota Powerline Construction Oral History Project began early in 1977, and included preliminary interviews with individuals on all sides of the issues. It also included review of local and regional newspapers and radio broadcasts for the preceding two years to provide background for the project and the interviewers. In addition, data was gathered from the Rural Electrification Administration and other federal agencies, from Minnesota state government, and from the utilities. Included were transcripts of public hearings, copies of relevant legislation, maps, and special reports. At the same time, project personnel were placed on the mailing lists of protest organization newsletters, and received notices of their meetings.

Narrators were carefully selected from long lists of those representing all major viewpoints, and the final group included farmers and townspeople from the affected areas, both opponents and proponents of the line; state officials from the Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, and the Governor's Office; officers and board members of the cooperatives building the line as well as from retail electric cooperatives; a county sheriff; and several state legislators. The interviews varied with the nature of each narrator's involvement in the controversy, but all were correlated to provide a firm base for comparison of views and motivation.



POWERLINE PROJECT PROTESTERS AND THE STATE PATROL

INTRODUCTION

With the establishment of the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1935, the United States government gave strong impetus to the development of electric power distribution networks for rural America. Formed to provide low cost loans to develop those networks, the REA has distributed nearly \$20 billion through direct and guaranteed loans in support of cooperative and other public power projects.

Until the mid-1960s, power channeled to customers of the electric cooperatives was largely purchased by them from investor-owned utilities and from federal power projects. The expanding threat of an energy shortage led the retail power cooperatives to pool their resources by forming generation and transmission cooperatives to provide them wholesale power. Projected power shortages and the lack of firm guarantees for purchased power in turn led the generation and transmission cooperatives to construct their own power generating facilities.

Most of Minnesota's retail electric cooperatives are served by one of two generation and transmission organizations: United Power Association (UPA) and Cooperative Power Association (CPA). Both UPA and CPA have since merged into Great River Energy.

United Power, with headquarters thirty-five miles northwest of Minneapolis in Elk River, is the older of the two organizations. It was formed in 1963 by the Rural Cooperative Power Association and the Northern Minnesota Power Association to construct and operate a 166 megawatt coal-fired generating plant near Stanton, North Dakota. In 1972, UPA became the survivor of a merger with its two parent cooperatives. UPA wholesales power to fifteen retail cooperatives serving 175,000 customers in twenty-three Minnesota counties.

Cooperative Power Association, headquartered in the Minneapolis suburb of Edina, was created in 1956 to supply wholesale power to the 135,000 customers of nineteen retail cooperatives in southern and western Minnesota. CPA did not operate any generating facilities prior to 1979.

In 1972, UPA and CPA undertook a feasibility study covering construction of a major generating facility. In 1973, the two cooperatives announced plans to construct a coal-fired generating station near Underwood, North Dakota. The plant was designed to include two 550 megawatt generators, both of which are now in service. The location of the plant in an area well outside the cooperatives' service area was dictated by its proximity to North Dakota's lignite fields, in particular to the North American Coal Corporation's Falkirk Mine. Lignite is a low-grade coal, and cannot be transported economically to distant generating stations as, for instance, can

western low-sulfur coal from Wyoming's Powder River Basin. One simply needs more lignite per kilowatt hour, and the costs of transport generally outpace the benefits of the fuel's initially lower cost.

The Underwood facility is a mine-mouth plant, called the Coal Creek Station, and was designed, together with a 400 kilovolt direct-current transmission line, to produce power for market in Minnesota. The line stretches 425 miles from the plant to a converting station at Dickinson, a town 17 miles west of Minneapolis; 170 of those miles cross nine western and central Minnesota counties and include a total of 659 towers placed at intervals of one-quarter mile on the property of 476 landowners. Western Minnesota is rich agricultural country, heavily planted with corn, wheat, soybeans, and sugar beets, and the powerline route passes through the heart of this land.

Easements for construction of the line were obtained without problem in North Dakota, and in Minnesota's Traverse County. Arrival of the cooperatives' easement agents in Grant and Pope counties, however, provoked a storm of protest over the powerline route, and for the first time its construction became widely controversial. Failing to secure easements from landowners and some county boards, the cooperatives asked the State of Minnesota to route the line. The decision to allow this change brought the state and its officials into the controversy.

Initial development of the line had been preceded by two years of hearings—on corridor selection, routing within the corridor, and finally before county commissions in the areas affected. In all, thirty-three meetings were held in North Dakota and forty-eight in Minnesota. By 1977, when the Minnesota Historical Society organized the Minnesota Powerline Construction Oral History Project, it was obvious that local resentment against the line had become a major issue within the state, although its future national importance was not yet apparent. Resentment was triggered by the line's placement, which the protesters felt had not been adequately reviewed by those whose land was directly affected; and by concern over rapid escalation of the power plant's cost, from an initial estimate of \$537 million to a later figure of nearly \$1.2 billion. Costs were driven up in part by higher than expected inflation rates, by increasingly stringent federal and state environmental and siting laws, and ultimately by costs attributable to the protest itself.

Additional frustration was created by cumbersome review processes, and by what many protesters saw as excessive concern by the federal and Minnesota state governments for wildlife areas and highway right of way at the expense of protection for productive farmland. In addition to local and state governments, the controversy involved political parties, churches, civic organizations, and businesses in communities throughout west central Minnesota. Several candidates used the powerline issue as a major platform in their campaigns for state office. Attorneys for both sides engaged in a series of protracted legal battles, the legislature was asked for changes in powerline siting laws, and the Governor met pressure and opposition from all

sides. The state patrol confronted protesters in the fields, and the destruction of utility equipment and powerline towers became an expensive crisis and an issue in itself.

The Powerline Construction Oral History Project succeeded in large part because those operating it were outsiders, without a stake in the outcome and without evident bias. Maintaining objectivity is not simple, especially when one is documenting a highly emotional issue, but as emotions rise objectivity is all the more necessary to the maintenance of interview discipline. The careful structure and execution of the powerline project has paid dividends; in 1981 it is already evident that the information available on tape would not have been preserved through any other means, and that it was gathered none too soon. Today would have been too late to capture quite what exists on tape.

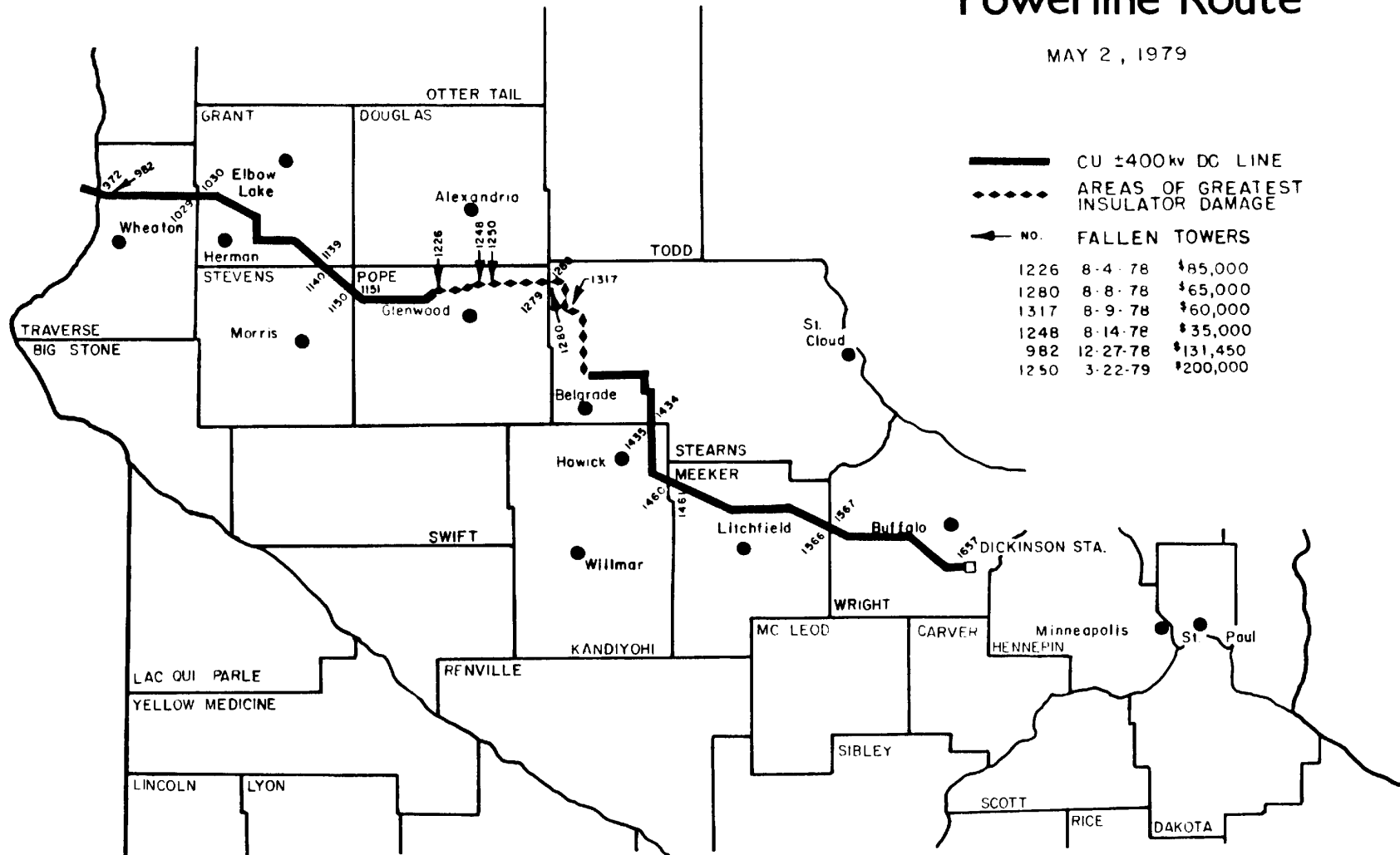
James E. Fogerty
Minnesota Historical Society
March 12, 1981

Updated November 2002

Powerline Route

MAY 2, 1979

15



FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

CPA	Cooperative Power Association
CU Project	Short term for the powerline construction project. (“C” from CPA/”U” from UPA)
DFL	Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party—the Minnesota branch of the national Democratic Party
kV	kilovolt
MEQB	Minnesota Environmental Quality Board
MPIRG	Minnesota Public Interest Research Group
MW	megawatt
PCA	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
REA	Rural Electrification Administration
UPA	United Power Association

Powerline Protest Organizations

CO-REG	Coalition of Rural Environmental Groups
CURE	Counties United for a Rural Environment
FACT	Families Are Concerned Too
GASP	General Assembly to Stop the Powerline
KTO	Keep Towers Out
NP	No Powerlines
SOC	Save Our Countryside
SURE	States United for a Rural Environment

CHRONOLOGY OF COAL CREEK PROJECT*

1972

- Mid-year CPA and UPA began discussing the possibility of the two cooperatives jointly constructing a major generating complex.
- October REA completes CPA and UPA Power Requirements Study.
- November 2 CPA and UPA authorize the firm of Burns and McDonnell to prepare feasibility studies and analyses for a joint power supply project to fulfill requirements through 1982.

1973

- May 19 Minnesota Environmental Quality Council created.
- May 23 Minnesota Power Plant Siting Act enacted.
- July 15 Feasibility study completed by Burns and McDonnell.
- July 27 CPA and UPA sign "Memorandum of Understanding."
- July 31 Environmental analysis of plant prepared by Burns and McDonnell.
- September 14 Environmental Report on Transmission System prepared by Commonwealth Associates.
- October 2 Draft Federal environmental impact statement issued by the REA and sent to all cognizant Federal and State agencies. No public hearings were held by the Administrator.
- October Coal Creek project exempted from Minnesota Power Plant Siting Act.
- November 29 CPA and UPA applied to REA for \$82,887,000 in insured loan funds and to guarantee loan funds in the amount of \$453,792,000.
- December Black and Veatch employed as A&E contractor.

1974

- February 6 REA granted initial loan approval and guarantee in the amount of \$537 million.
- April 28 Minnesota Energy Agency created.
- April 1974 to March 1975
A total of 48 public meetings held in eight Minnesota counties.
- August 2 Rules under the Minnesota Power Plant Siting Act adopted.
- August 6 Final Federal environmental impact statement issued by the REA.
- September 11 CPA/UPA applied to the North Dakota State Department of Health for a construction permit.

* Taken from "Coal Creek: A Power Project with Continuing Controversies Over Costs, Siting, and Potential Health Hazards," Report by the Comptroller General of the United States, November 26, 1979.

October 3	Board of Directors of CPA resolved to apply to REA for \$96,000,000 in insured or guaranteed loan funds to meet capital costs of developing Falkirk coal mine.
October 14	CAP/UPA signed "Coal Sales Agreement with Falkirk Mining Company," dated July 1, 1974.
October	Planned generating plant construction start delayed to May 5, 1975.
November	REA approved an additional loan guarantee for \$96,000,000 for CPA/UPA to finance the development of a coal mining operation.

1975

March 28	CPA/UPA applied to the State of Minnesota for corridor designation under the Power Plant Siting Act. This action was taken because some countries would not issue necessary permits.
April 9	The North Dakota Energy Conversion and Transmission Facility Siting Laws were enacted.
April 11	Construction permit issued by the North Dakota Department of Health.
May 5	Black and Veatch start generating plant construction.
September 30	Rules are adopted by the Minnesota Energy Agency concerning certificate of need. Note: These rules were not promulgated until six months after CPA/UPA applied for corridor designation.
October 3	Minnesota issued CPA/UPA a permit of corridor compatibility.
October 6	CPA/UPA applied to the Minnesota Energy Agency for a certificate of need.
November 11	Contract issued for clearing North Dakota right of way.
November 12	Appeal on corridor designation was filed in Pope County District Court.
November 24	CPA/UPA filed an application for route designation and construction permit.
December 2	Appeal on corridor designation was filed in Grant County.
December 12	Contract issued for high voltage transmission line construction.
December 23	North Dakota siting regulations under the Energy Conversion and Transmission Facility Siting Act adopted.

1976

February	Jurisdictional hearing in North Dakota on right of way.
February 25	Draft environmental impact statement issued by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
March 6	North Dakota Public Service Commission assumes control over Coal Creek transmission system.
March 10	Grant County District Court dismisses appeal on corridor designation.

Spring	Planned construction start for transmission line in Minnesota.
April	Planned transmission line construction in North Dakota delayed until April 1977
April 2	Certificate of Need issued by Director Minnesota Energy Agency. Note: Need was determined about six months after the corridor had been approved.
May 5	Final State environmental impact statement issued by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
May 5	CPA/UPA apply for North Dakota DC route designation and construction permit.
June 3	Route designation and construction permit issued by Minnesota Environmental Quality Council.
July - August	Appeals on line construction permit filed in Stearns, Grant and Traverse county district courts.
August 11	District Court order prohibited CPA/UPA from doing any work or contacting landowners in Stearns County.
September	REA approved \$325,352,000 in additional loan guarantees for a new total of \$958,031,000.
October 4	Appeal on line construction permit filed in Meeker County District Court.
October 21	Temporary Injunction Order issued against plaintiffs.
October 27	Action filed in U.S. District Court against the State of Minnesota.
November 8	U.S. District Court action dismissed.
December 17	Route designation and construction permit issued by the North Dakota PSC.
December 22	CPA/UPA apply to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a water intake permit.
1977	
January	MHS Powerline Construction Oral History Project begins.
January 12	A joint Minnesota House-Senate legislative hearing was held in St. Cloud to gather testimony on the powerline dispute.
February 3	Minnesota legislative group persuades Governor Perpich to call in an outside mediator to help the opposing sides resolve the dispute.
March 1	Minnesota Supreme Court consolidated seven powerline court cases into one to be heard by a panel of three district court judges.
March 16	American Arbitration Association Vice President held his first mediation session with a delegation of powerline opponents and power cooperative officials. The session ended in an impasse.
March 22	The three-judge District Court panel met to hear consolidated powerline cases. The panel ordered a halt to all surveying and construction activities on the CPA/UPA project in Minnesota.
April	Transmission line construction started in North Dakota.

April 22	CPA/UPA applied to North Dakota PSC for an AC line route permit from Stanton to Coal Creek. The application process for this permit began on August 6, 1976.
May 2	CPA/UPA applied to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a permit to cross a Federal wildlife refuge.
July 14	The three-judge District Court panel unanimously ruled in favor of the power cooperatives in the consolidated powerline appeals.
August	Bid solicitation for constructing transmission line in Minnesota.
September 8	North Dakota PSC issued a route permit for the Stanton to Coal Creek AC line. This process took 13 months to complete.
September 13	Construction contract for Minnesota transmission line awarded.
September 30	Minnesota Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of the power cooperatives in the consolidated powerline appeals.
October 25	Restraining order issued which bars interference with powerline construction in six Minnesota counties.
November 1	Transmission line construction started in Minnesota.
November 8	Minnesota Department of Health released its study of public health and safety effects of high voltage lines.
November 13	Powerline opponents filed a \$5 million damage suit in U.S. District Court against the power cooperatives, various state agencies in Minnesota and North Dakota, and various officials.
December 6	North Dakota and Minnesota powerline opponents filed suit in U.S. District Court seeking a temporary restraining order halting further construction contending that the project failed to follow Federal environmental regulations.
December 15	Powerline opponents in Minnesota agreed to demand that the Governor set up a science court.
December 20	Powerline opponents decided not to support a science court unless a construction moratorium is included.

1978

January	About 50 powerline opponents were arrested or cited for obstructing a legal process, damage to property, etc.
January 5	Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich authorized sending up to 175 state troopers to Pope County.
January 9	U.S. District Judge denied powerline opponents' request for a temporary restraining order halting construction. All defendants except the utilities and the sheriffs were dismissed from the powerline opponents' damage suit.
January 13	U.S. District Judge denied the powerline opponents' request for a temporary injunction against the sheriff and utilities.

March 9	CPA/UPA flew more than 90 people to visit a similar power line in Oregon. Although invited, scant interest was shown by protesters or Minnesota legislators. As of this date, over 70 people in Minnesota had been arrested as a result of protest.
March 9	State troopers were withdrawn from powerline guard duties.
April 17	Section 10 permit for the water intake facilities issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Sixteen months expired between application and issuance.
June 9	Permit to cross wildlife refuges issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. Thirteen months expired between application and issuance.
June 12	CPA/UPA engage private security force to guard line and equipment. At times this force numbered about 300 people.
August 25	Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich requested FBI assistance in investigating the attacks on powerline towers.
October	REA approved \$214,053,000 in additional loan guarantees, which when added to \$73,947,000 from pollution bond financing, made \$288 million in additional financing available for a new total of \$1,246,031,000.
October 17	Transmission line energized for first test.
December	Between August 1978 and January 1979, five transmission towers were toppled and over 900 insulators damaged.

1979

January 10	Minnesota Governor Al Quie stated that the eminent domain law needs to be modified.
January 14	CPA/UPA released private security force.
March 1	A total of 3,155 insulators on the transmission line have been damaged.
April 19	The Minnesota House passed a resolution on a 110-11 vote condemning the destruction of equipment on the high-voltage line and urging the Governor, the State Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and other law enforcement agencies to bring the violence and vandalism to a halt.
May 9	Generating unit Number One first tested.
June 25	Over 20 people testify as to health irritants attributed to the powerline at a meeting in Sauk Centre, Minnesota.
June 28	Commercial operation of the Coal Creek plant delayed by a month due to faulty operation of coal pulverizers. As of this date, about 5,500 insulators have been damaged, mostly by gun fire.
August 1	Coal Creek unit Number One put into commercial service.
August	Three powerline towers toppled by vandals.
December	MHS Powerline Construction Oral History Project Completed.

1980

October Powerline ownership transferred to REA.

Five powerline towers toppled by vandals during the year.

LIST OF NARRATORS*

Anderson, Charles L. President, board of directors of Cooperative Power Association. Farmer from Litchfield, Meeker County. Recorded February 14, 1979.

Anderson, Willard. Manager, Agralite Cooperative, Benson, Swift County. Recorded January 3, 1978.

Banks, Robert S. Minnesota Department of Health. Author of health study report on powerline construction. Recorded March 13, 1978

Barsness, Nancy C. Farmer from Cyrus, Pope County. Freelance reporter on powerline issues for KMRS Radio and several newspapers in Pope County. Recorded February 20 and June 5, 1979.

Berg, Charles. State Senator and farmer from Chokio, Stevens County. Recorded June 13, 1977.

Bradley, Wendell. Professor of physics and environmental science, Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Sibley County. Member of CO-REG. Recorded March 19, 1978.

Brooks, Ronnie. Aide to Governor Rudy Perpich. Governor's representative to the MEQB. Recorded August 8, 1979

Crocker, George. Powerline opponent and long-time anti-war activist. Resident of Lowry, Pope County, during the powerline protest. Recorded February 21, 1979.

Emmons, Ira Dale. Pope County sheriff, Glenwood. Recorded April 29, 1977.

Fjoslien, David. State Representative and farmer from Douglas County. Recorded February 1, 1978.

Fuchs, Virgil and Jane H. Farmers and protest leaders from Belgrade, Stearns County. Recorded December 6, 1977.

Gelbman, James. MPIRG Coordinator from University of Minnesota-Morris. Recorded December 8, 1978.

Hagen, Harold. Farmer from Pope County and president of CURE. Recorded June 1, 1977.

Hanson, Richard A. Farmer and university student from Pope County. Manager of Alice Tripp's gubernatorial campaign in 1978. Recorded February 14, 1979.

* Listed occupation and place of residence for each narrator is current as of December 31, 1979.

Hartman, Lawrence B. Project Manager for MEQB. Managed siting process for the CU Project. Recorded February 27, 1978, and April 6, 1979.

Hayenga, Wallace. Staff Assistant at Blue Earth-Nicollet-Faribault Cooperative Electric Association, Mankato, Blue Earth County. Recorded March 14, 1978.

Hedner, Gordon and Helen B. Farmers from Pope County; members of FACT. Recorded April 5, 1977.

Hirsch, Merle N. Professor of Physics and Chairman of the Science and Mathematics Division, University of Minnesota-Morris. Recorded February 20, 1979.

Jacobson, Donald G. Public Relations Manager, United Power Association. Recorded August 24 and August 30, 1978.

Jenks, Scott and Lorraine. Farmers in Pope County. Members of FACT. Recorded April 20, 1977.

Jost, Paul J. Vice-President, board of directors of Cooperative Power Association. Member, board of directors of Agralite Cooperative. Farmer near Morris, Stevens County. Recorded February 14, 1979.

Koudela, Carolyn. Farmer from Alexandria, Douglas County. President, SOC. Recorded February 21, 1979

Lennick, Ted V. General Manager, Cooperative Power Association. Recorded September 12 and September 19, 1978.

Martin, Philip O. General Manager, United Power Association. Recorded July 27 and August 2, 1978.

Millhone, John. Director, Minnesota Energy Agency; member of MEQB. Recorded April 10, 1978.

Nelson, C. David. Pope County attorney. Recorded April 22, 1977.

Nelson, James. Farmer and protest leader from Grant County. Member SOC and NP. Recorded May 31, 1977.

Olhoft, Wayne. State Senator from Herman, Grant County. Recorded December 29, 1977.

Olson, Donald. Powerline opponent, protest organizer, and long-time anti-war and anti-nuclear activist from Minneapolis. Recorded April 18, 1978.

Pick, Deborah. Powerline opponent and anti-nuclear activist. Resident of Lowry, Pope County, during the powerline protest. Recorded February 13, 1979.

Richardson, Hervey. Retired farmer and member of Agralite Cooperative board of directors. Recorded December 7, 1977.

Rutledge, Dennis and Nina H. Farmers from Lowry, Pope County. Members of FACT and SOC. Recorded December 6, 1978.

Schrom, Ed. State Senator and farmer from Albany, Stearns County. Recorded February 1, 1978.

Schumacher, Wayne. Former State Representative and farmer from Glenwood, Pope County. Recorded May 31, 1977.

Sheldon, Robert. Public Relations Manager, Cooperative Power Association. Recorded August 7, 1979.

Sieling, Louis. Farmer from Perham, Otter Tail County, and director of Lake Region Cooperative Electrical Association. Recorded May 18, 1977.

Stone, John R. Editor, *Pope County Tribune*. Recorded February 21, 1979.

Strand, Roger E. State Senator and farmer from Pope County. Recorded February 2, 1978.

Tollefson, Paul. Farmer and powerline supporter from Northfield, Rice County. Recorded March 20, 1978.

Torborg, Rev. Elmer. Catholic priest and director of Rural Life Office, Sauk Centre, Stearns County. Recorded January 4, 1978.

Tripp, Alice. Protest leader, candidate for Governor in 1978, and farmer from Belgrade, Stearns County. Member KTO, CURE, SURE. Recorded December 6, 1977.

Vanderpoel, Peter. Director, State Planning Agency and MEQB. Recorded March 17, 1978.

Wald, Kenneth. Environmental use planner for the State Department of Natural Resources. Recorded March 24, 1978.

Woida, Math and Gloria B. Farmers and powerline opponents from Sauk Centre, Stearns County. Recorded February 13, 1979.

THE INTERVIEW

Charles Berg
Narrator

Edward P. Nelson
Interviewer

June 13, 1977

Rodney A. Briggs Library
University of Minnesota—Morris
Morris, Minnesota

EN: Today is June 13, 1977 at the Rodney A. Briggs Library, University [of Minnesota—Morris] campus. We're talking with Senator Charles Berg from District 15, a resident of the Chokio area. My name is Ed Nelson.

EN: Mr. Berg, how long have you lived in the Chokio area? I understand you're engaged in farming? What sort of farming are you engaged in?

CB: Well, it's a general farming operation. Feeding cattle was the main part of our enterprise until just the last couple years. I've lived in that area all my life. I've lived on my present farm since 1951, which I rented it for three years and bought it in 1955. Prior to that time I had lived across the county line in Traverse County, where I was born and raised.

EN: What years did you serve in the Senate?

CB: In the Senate?

EN: Yes.

CB: I served in the Senate from the years 1973 through 1976.

EN: Three years?

CB: Four years.

EN: Four years. Okay. When you were in the State Senate, what ways were you concerned with power lines?

CB: Well, I was a member of the Environmental Protection Subcommittee, a subcommittee of the Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environmental Full Committee. In 1973, we considered thirty-six major pieces of environmental legislation that were drafted by various people, but I think most of the bills, as I remember, came out of the governor's office and received a great deal of push from the governor's representative and the Natural Resources Committee.

EN: And these bills that you considered, the ones regarding power lines, what, sir, were they about?

CB: Well, there were a number of bills pertaining to the Powerline. There was the setting up of the EQC, Environmental Quality Council. The Power Plant Siting Act was another one. These are two, at least, of the bills that have come to the forefront in the controversy of the CPA-UPA versus the farmers of Polk, Grant, and Stearns County.

EN: Maybe I can ask you this. The EQC, what was the rationale for setting that up?

CB: I never carried any of these bills. These were bills, as I said before, that—most of them I think—came out of the governor's office. They probably were drawn up at the request of someone in the governor's office. I never believed that these bills were for the purpose that the proponents testified. I saw the power companies pushing these bills, these particular bills. And I had prior knowledge of the legislature in that I served as a lobbyist for a number of years. And the rule of thumb is that you can tell when a poor bill has been a benefit by looking to see who's testifying in favor of it and who is pushing the bill strongly and who's doing the active lobbying for it. And I saw the power companies actively lobbying for these bills, saying that what they wanted was farmer input. But I never believed that that was true. I just felt that it was to set up a buffer, using the state as a buffer between the power companies and the landowners. And I received a great deal of criticism in that time for my opposition to parts of these bills. But it's turned out that my feelings were right. And I think the proponents really pulled the wool over the eyes of most of them, the people on the committees, wanted it sunk.

There were a number of things that happened particularly in the setting up of the EQC that made me believe more strongly as time went on that this is what was happening, especially in the endeavor to keep the Commissioner of Agriculture off the EQC—keep him from being a member of the EQC. In our deliberations on the—setting up of the EQC—in the subcommittee, and in the full committee, and even on the Senate floor it became obvious to me that this is what was happening.

I'm speaking strictly from memory—and this is four years ago—but I made an amendment in the committee, in the subcommittee to put the Commissioner of Agriculture on as a member because the Commissioner of Natural Resources was on and a number of the other commissioners. But for some really strange reason, the Commissioner of Agriculture, who should be probably the most important person, was left off.

And the author of the bill was Jim Lord, who is now State Treasurer, and had worked in the governor's office prior to this, he objected. We put him on in the subcommittee. By the time the bill got to the full committee, the Commissioner of Agriculture was stricken, strangely because there was no committee action. So we put it on in the committee again, but the Commissioner of Agriculture... Well somewhere between the full committee and the floor of the Senate it disappeared again. And we put it on the Senate floor and had some battle to put it on, but we did put it on, otherwise Agriculture wouldn't have any representation. Unless the governor, in the

people that he appointed, would have specifically performed on it.

But I feel that, you know, the feelings that I had in spite of the testimony, I think that what's happened has proven that I was right on that.

EN: The 1973 Siting Law and the creation of the MATC, they're making changes from the old bill. How did the old bill differ from what was being proposed? What was the way it was done before?

CB: Well, I haven't got the bills in front of me. I haven't studied the bills since. And, as I said before, we had so many pieces of environmental legislation in front of us at that time that I don't remember specifically. The eminent domain feature has been in state law for a number of years. I believe back in 1959 the power companies received the power of eminent domain for routing the power lines. The pipeline companies received it in 1971, if I remember right. But since those pieces of legislation have been on the books, when there—there became an impasse.

The power lines and the pipeline companies just went to court and started eminent domain proceedings and condemned the property, and a settlement was made. The landowners really had very little to say. Now the proponents of these two pieces of legislation said that the reason for it was to give the landowner some say. And the hearing processes were set up under these bills. But the hearing processes depend so much on the feelings of the hearing officer. But I feel they're really of limited value to the landowner. I think it's so easy for the power companies or the pipeline companies to sway a hearing officer, an average hearing officer's thinking, that I think it's of limited value. In fact, I think it was almost more of a detriment to the landowner because you now have the State of Minnesota involved as a buffer. And it makes it extremely difficult for a landowner. I think almost more difficult than before. But that's just my feelings. I guess that's what you want here.

EN: Yes, I do. You said the reasons for change came not from the constituents or did they come from the people, the landowners?

CB: I never had one of my constituents ask for this type of legislation. I think that this came the way most legislation comes, and that is that some special interest wants a piece of legislation—sells someone in high places on the idea. And that's where the birth of the legislation comes. Then oftentimes legislation gets passed for the wrong reasons. And by the time it's passed, unless you've been able to ferret out the fish hooks in it, it becomes a detrimental piece of legislation instead of a constructive piece of legislation. As I said, in 1973 we had too many big pieces of legislation, far-reaching pieces of legislation. When you have that many, it's impossible to clean up all of them the way they should be. I think legislation passed, as I remember, with a rather heavy majority. The legislation wasn't far better in my opinion, but, you know, so many things are unforeseen, and some of the fears that you have... You know, I was a freshman legislator at the time, and I was voicing the most opposition to it. The people who had been in the legislature for a much longer period of time said, "Your fears are unfounded." But they weren't, as far as I'm concerned.

EN: Where do you see this controversy starting? What are the problems?

CB: In the CPA-UPA controversy, my feelings are that the power companies did an extremely poor job of public relations. I feel that that is where the controversy started. I think that this problem could have been solved a number of times before the parties got polarized on both sides of the issue. In fact, I think we had the problem pretty well solved back in the winter of either 1974 or '75, yes 1975, I believe it was. When the landowners in Grant County, a number of them came into the courthouse in Grant County, and a number of the landowners in Polk County came in, and agreed to try to draw a line for the powerline that would be the least objectionable.

At that time the “no powerline” group was formed already. But it wasn’t under a real full head of steam. And I think at that time—and this is what I stressed to the farmers involved—that under the EQC, under the Power Plant Siting Act, they, themselves, had to take the initiative, if they weren’t going to have the State of Minnesota dictate where the lines should go and then have very little say about it as to where it was going.

I talked to the power companies. The power companies had agreed to change the line if it were at all feasible. And at that time, the power companies were willing to compromise. They had agreed to work with individual farmers to try to eliminate individual spots. I think at that particular time, I think this could have been remedied.

I spent many hours talking to some of the people who were opponents of the line and tried to explain to them what the situation was. Not that I was opposed to it, but the law was on the books. And those are some of the facts that you had to look at. If they wished to have some local control, they had to take the initiative on it. And the answer that I always got is that line’s not going to go through. Except at those times when they agreed at Grant County and at Polk County that they would try to draw the line. And they did draw some tentative lines. I think agreement could have been reached. But the time that the power companies and some of these farmers had agreed to meet, there was a snowstorm. It was a couple of weeks later before they were able to get together. By that time some of the leaders in the “no powerline” group had talked to the farmers involved. And by that time the polarization had reached such a state that things just got worse instead of better.

EN: Why do you think that the 1973 law itself didn’t take care of these with the hearing processes and information meetings and the citizen’s advisory council group?

CB: Well, I think there were some unfortunate things that happened. And I don’t know the reasons for why the hearing officer lost some pages of transcript. I think that was an unfortunate incident. It may have been an honest error. But it gave the opponents of the powerline some more ammunition. I think there’s been wrong on both sides. First of all, the public relations were extremely poor by the power companies. And the second was that so much misinformation was put out by the “No Powerline” groups. The idea that there was going to be no compromise—that they were going to keep the line out entirely. I think these controversies are bound to develop if you have that type of attitude in place. And the price that’s going to be paid for the controversy is going to be tremendous. The trouble is that you can’t hurt the powerline companies because

they pass the additional cost on to the consumers.

Now I introduced two pieces of legislation back in 1975 and '76, that had they been passed at that time could have alleviated a lot of the problems. One of them was to route the power lines along division lines. The second, which passed the House—I gave the files to Frank DeGroat, the house files, and, if I remember right, they passed there, but they lost in the Labor and Commerce Committee. But the power companies had done their work well in that committee. And they had all but five votes against the proposal and openly admitted that they had twelve votes in their pocket against running along division lines because they said it would cost too much. They've changed their mind some since. The second was a tax credit proposal. What passed in this session of the legislature is something very similar, except that it's just an extra payment by the utility—instead of dividing up their tax payment. But it's the same concept. I think those two pieces of legislation—had they been passed when I drew those bills—I think those are the two bills that are going to provide the secret for settling this controversy. At least alleviating them to some degree.

EN: So you recognized quite some time before the controversy developed that there was a potential for this.

CB: I met with the power company's leadership on at least two or three occasions down in the Cities. And I've told them what they were going to run into down here. I told them what the problems were. I told them why the controversy was developing and tried to tell them what farmers were like. In fact, one meeting that I met with the leadership of both the CPA and UPA, they said, "We hope that you'll be blunt and tell us what we're doing wrong." And so I did. I told them that their public relations were extremely poor—that they were making the wrong approach here—that they didn't understand farmers and people that they had working out here didn't understand farmers.

Here was this group of executives, and probably pretty well paid executives, sitting around this group. But they really didn't have a concept of what farmers are like nowadays. Their concept of farmers still is the old concept of the hayshaker. And I told them at the meeting, "Now you people sit around this table, and you think of farmers as the hayshaker type, the person who isn't too well-trained, not very articulate and probably not too well-educated. And you think that you can just jam this down his throat. But the typical farmer that you're dealing with, and I know most of them in Grant County and Polk County, any one of which would probably come in here and buy out every one of you lock, stock and barrel. And still go about his business."

I don't know whether they particularly liked me saying it, but it happens to be true because many of the people that are dealing with up there are millionaire farmers and have decided that, you know, they're not going to let power companies, even if they own the power companies, dictate to them what they're going to do. Many of these farmers are strong individuals or they wouldn't be farming. And I think this is something that these people who are far removed from farms haven't taken into consideration. Farmers are not like they used to be, if they ever were. I think there's been a lot of misconception of what farmers are like. They used to feel that if you couldn't do anything else, you could farm. Just exactly the opposite is true now because of the

high capitalization price and so forth.

EN: In this issue there's a lot of talk about the health and safety factors and the line. Was that a concern at the time of the legislation?

CB: No, not particularly. It was a concern for the farmers or at least they voiced it as a concern. But in the summer of 1975, and I had never had any contact with this type of a line. In fact, it's new in the United States. But they do have an experimental facility in Canada. I had the opportunity to visit that facility. I received a plane ticket to go there which was all. I paid my own expenses to the Cities, my own meals and my own expenses back. But I did go to this facility. While I was there the line was energized, as it was periodically all the way through their testing. But I saw no evidence of it having any detrimental effect on animal life. I remember in particular that in this one area right under the line, there were a lot of wild strawberries and they were ripe at this particular time. And, in fact, the plant life looked better under the line than it did away from the line. There were gophers. There were rabbits in this enclosure. I had heard the rumor that birds wouldn't fly over. Well, there were flocks of blackbirds flying back and forth over it. It seemed not to bother anything.

The line was thirty-five feet high in one area and only seventeen in another. It had rained the night before. So I thought, you know, if this thing is that dangerous, while you're here you might as well find out. So I took off my shoes and socks and I walked around barefoot under the line. When I was walking into the thirty-five foot high span you could feel very little. When you walked under the seventeen foot overhead piece of line, there, if you were walking, especially walking in water, you could feel your hair on your neck begin to stand up and the hair on your arms, like static electricity, just like you'd take a comb and run it through dry hair along the length of your arm. And you have the same sensation.

There was a nest of robins in the powerhouse, and she had three young robins in the nest about ready to fly. The stories were rampant at that time that if you had to work around the line, it caused a sterility problem in humans. But I asked the people who worked at the power plant and were working around it all the time, how long they'd been there, and they'd been there an average of ten years. In that time, their families had increased by twelve. So apparently it caused no problem there. I think that the health factor and the safety factor, this argument that there is a strong possibility of accident, that's wrong. That's definitely wrong.

We also at the same time had them bring a radio that we plugged in under the line and a TV [television] set. It showed very little problem with interference. That was another argument, that you couldn't have a TV or you wouldn't be able to have a radio if you were too close to the line. But, at least at this particular time, this didn't seem to be a factor. When they had the line energized to the fullest amount you could hear a slight crackling, if you were close to the line—something like bacon frying—you'd hear a sizzle, a pop. But that was the extent of the noise factor. Just from that first-hand experience I never took much stock into the argument that it was a hazard or that much of a hazard.

EN: Did you express your opinions to people who were telling you about their concerns?

CB: Yes.

EN: And what was their reaction to that? Did they believe you?

CB: I guess reluctantly. But, you see, people in that frame of mind, even though they hear it, don't really want to believe it. You know, if you become emotionally involved with something, it's very difficult to make, really, a clear, concise decision. You let your emotions interfere with your better judgment. And I think this is what's happening.

From my first knowledge of the line going through, I'm fully convinced that we need electricity. The greatest danger that I see is that North Dakota will put up the type of legislation that would make it difficult for us to get the energy we need. I don't think the line—it's a nuisance. I think people should be compensated for it. But I think our biggest danger is not being able to get the energy that we need. As you probably have seen lately where North Dakota put a stop on the permitting of this line in retaliation for Minnesota's stand on the Garrison Diversion Project. You can see that we're at the mercy of another state. And they've got the pull. We have to have it for energy, unless we developed peat. And we've got environmental considerations there, and the environmentalists are fighting the utilization of peat. So we've got, you know, we've got lots of problems here.

[Tape interruption]

EN: —from your constituency to the powerline?

CB: You mean during the controversy?

EN: Yes.

CB: No, because I don't let myself get put under pressure. I attended a number of meetings. And I never have allowed myself to become emotionally involved in the situation. I felt that this controversy was of such magnitude and it held such problems for the future that you had to say the things that you felt were true, regardless of whether there was an election coming up or any political considerations. I felt political considerations had to be put aside because, you know, there had to be some settlement to it. If you allow that to interfere with your judgment, then you can't make a clear judgment. [unclear]

EN: How about some of the legislators who have almost come out against the line? It would seem that they would be in a position to see the needed energy, too. Is it possible that we don't need the energy?

CB: No, we need the energy. I feel that some of the people who came out against the line, I think that's against their better judgment. I think that is for political consideration. And, as you know, most of them are back serving in the legislature. But a long time ago I made a decision that I was going to call it as I saw it, regardless of whether you got re-elected or not. This is the way I've

seen this controversy and I feel that way yet. There has been nothing that has come up that's changed my mind. In fact, it's reinforced my ideas that my thoughts on it were substantially correct. And I think there's been, obviously, two of the major pieces of legislation that I proposed are in the new bill. They're hailing this new bill as the, you know, as the settlement of the controversy. And there's only three main parts to the bill. Two of them are pieces of legislation that I proposed when I was in the legislature. In fact, no one had ever considered an annual payment or a tax credit for those that had to take the line on their property. We had a tough time getting it through the Senate Tax Committee. They passed it readily this time. Tough time getting in the Senate bill last time. But this time it went in with a big margin. So, you know, history will show whether you were correct or not. And I think in this instance it's shown that my feelings were substantially correct.

EN: What do you think then are the solutions to this particular controversy?

CB: Well, I think the line will be built. There's no question in my mind that it will be. It's in the hands of a three-judge panel now that's to hear some appeals. But I think in time it will be built. If it's postponed, the only persons that are going to pay the additional cost are the consumers. And the consumers, of course, are members of the [group of] people who are opposed to the line.

I don't like to see the line after they're through, you know. If it were possible any other way to get electricity through, but there is no alternative. It will be our cheapest form of energy, and we, as farmers, are heavy users of it. There is just no alternative as far as I can see. Not only will this one be built, but other ones will be built unless North Dakota puts a stop to our building power plants out there, in which case we'll have to try to transport the coal. Rail car I would imagine would be the only means of transportation. And the only other way you can get it is through a slurry in a pipeline. But I think that is not feasible. First of all, North Dakota and South Dakota don't have the water. And I think it's a very bad way of transporting. It's the cheapest, but you have a water pollution problem. And you've got a water scarcity problem. I think that's going to be one of our problems. Next to energy, or maybe even surpassing energy is going to be the water problem. And I think that is staring us right in the face within the next few years.

I've always felt that this powerline controversy was blown way out of proportion because I see many problems in the future that will dwarf the powerline controversy, and it would make it seem very inconsequential in another ten years. I've told a number of meetings of the powerline group—or the groups that oppose the powerline—that this controversy will seem inconsequential in the next few years.

And I've told them of some of the problems coming and some of the problems that will come out of our legislature. There is a feeling among a growing number of people that farmers are only stewards, even though they may be owners, that they have only a right to farm the property. But agricultural land is a natural resource, and consequently as a natural resource belongs to the public. And the public shall determine how it's going to be used. I think that will be the next big controversy. It'll be over land use.

That would make the powerline controversy look like a tempest in a teapot. I've seen copies of

the bills. And I know what the feeling of a number of people in state government is. And here is where the ideas for the bills originate, most of them or a number of them.

EN: I guess I really don't have other questions. Maybe you have some final comments or additional things that you'd want to add to what you've already said.

CB: No, I think I've probably shared with you my feelings on it. I hope that this controversy, at least, is settled in the near future because I think with the problems that agriculture is facing you can't have a divided camp. I don't think that you should have an agricultural area divided along political lines. I think the greatest enemy that we have as a farm community is a community divided along political lines when my feeling is that both political parties, major political parties, are so dominated by the urban areas that I don't think we'll get a fair shake out of either one. And, of course, this is my own feeling, but it's a feeling that has developed; not only as a legislator, but working on legislation. And I think that after this last election many people, who felt like farm profits are going to be over, are now coming into a very rude awakening because they find that it really doesn't make any difference whether you have a democratic president or a Republican. Our problems are still the same. And, in fact, I look at the period ahead. I think it's going to be the most difficult, at least since I've started farming back in 1948. I think we've got extremely tough times ahead. That's why I feel that the other problems will far outweigh the CPA-UPA controversy.

EN: Okay. Well, thank you very much.