

Interview with Leonard Heim

July 31, 1978

Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

St. Cloud State University Archives

Interviewed by Mark Stone

Stone ([00:00](#)):

Okay, this is an interview conducted at the Central Minnesota Historical Center. The date is July 31st, 1978. The interviewer's name is Mark Stone, and we're talking with Mr. Leonard Heim, of Heim Milling. The interview is taking place at the mill, where the River Road meets the Sauk River. Okay, Mr. Heim, let's start off asking you about your family's background. I wonder if you could relate to us what you know about your grandparents, and the institution of this mill.

Heim ([00:42](#)):

Okay, my grandfather originally farmed on the area which is now Sunset Park. That was the family homestead. He purchased this mill in September of 1900. Then, they moved from the farm at that time to an older home which was above the hill from the mill, but on the same side of the road. The prior owner, who was a Mr. Arnold, remained in residence in the brick house southeast of the mill, which was also on the same property. He remained there, I believe, until 1905, at which time he died, and then the residence agreement terminated at that for his family.

Stone ([01:50](#)):

I see.

Heim (01:50):

At that time, my grandfather and his family moved over to the brick residence in approximately 1905. Then, there were George, Junior, who was the oldest son. My father, John, was the second son. Lewis was the third son and August was the fourth son.

Stone (02:21):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heim (02:22):

They all grew up here, and the first one to leave was Lewis, in World War I, [inaudible 00:02:31]. The second son to leave the mill was, excuse me, George Junior, and he died in 1936. He died in '36. Then, my father purchased the remaining shares from my grandfather and Uncle August in 1941, December, just a couple days before Pearl Harbor.

Stone (03:03):

This was your father, John?

Heim (03:05):

That was my father, John.

Stone (03:06):

Okay.

Heim (03:08):

Then, there were seven of us boys. We were actually the third generation in the family now. Now, we have narrowed down to where there are two of us left, myself and David. He was the third of our family. Now, the last couple of years, our sons are just finishing high school, and they are becoming active in here part-time.

Stone ([03:45](#)):

In the business?

Heim ([03:46](#)):

In the business, yeah. They're helping us now. My son is Kenneth. I have one son.

Stone ([03:52](#)):

I see.

Heim ([03:54](#)):

Dave has two sons now that are active. He has one that's quite small.

Stone ([04:00](#)):

Okay, and what are their names?

Heim ([04:01](#)):

The oldest is Daniel, and the second is Bob.

Stone ([04:06](#)):

Okay. I would like to back up just a minute. You mentioned that your forebearers were migrating west. Now, with the name Heim, I assume that's a German background, so they came from Germany?

Heim ([04:23](#)):

That is correct, yeah.

Stone ([04:27](#)):

Okay. Would you tell us a little bit about what we were talking about before the interview started, about the migrating west from Illinois and stopping here overnight?

Heim (04:38):

The understanding I had was that the Heim family had settled in northeastern Illinois, and possibly some in southwestern Wisconsin, excuse me, northwestern Illinois, northwestern Illinois, on the corner of the Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa, in that area, up in the Dubuque area in southeastern Minnesota. There are a lot of that name in that area now, more so probably than in this area.

Stone (05:11):

Oh, I see.

Heim (05:13):

The name Heim is quite prevalent down there. Okay? We understood that one of the, if it was my great-grandfather or one generation previously, the family, I know it included several sons. I don't know how many daughters there were for sure. But they, for some reason or other, had left down there and were migrating west on the railway. They were now, for some reason or other, I understood that they did not travel at night on the railway that time. Apparently, it's what the situation was. But they stayed in St. Cloud that night, near where the present fire station is located.

Stone (06:03):

I see. That's right off the railroad tracks.

Heim (06:05):

Right off the railway tracks. Apparently, the station was right downtown at that time. The father died that night in the hotel. So, where they were heading for, or planned to head for, I don't know, but I understand then that that's as far as the family went. He was buried here, and they stayed here.

Stone ([06:26](#)):

Okay, and that would be approximately what year would that have been?

Heim ([06:30](#)):

I have not been able to get a date on that.

Stone ([06:35](#)):

Okay.

Heim ([06:35](#)):

I got that from my father.

Stone ([06:40](#)):

I see.

Heim ([06:40](#)):

I'm not sure of even the generation. I think it possibly had to be my great-grandfather that died there, because never have I heard my grandfather, and he died in 1945 when I was 14 years old. I was born in '31. He had never mentioned of his father, so apparently, he was very young when his father died, and I assume, according to time elements, he must have been the one.

Stone ([07:17](#)):

Okay. Assuming it was your great-grandfather, do you recall his first name?

Heim ([07:20](#)):

I never heard it.

Stone ([07:23](#)):

Okay, then your grandfather's first name was--

Heim ([07:25](#)):

Was George W.

Stone ([07:27](#)):

George W. Heim.

Heim ([07:27](#)):

I recall him very, very vividly, yeah.

Stone ([07:31](#)):

I see. Okay. Would you know your mother's maiden name and possibly year of birth, approximately?

Heim ([07:40](#)):

My mother's maiden name was Mick.

Stone ([07:44](#)):

Mick. How is that spelled?

Heim ([07:45](#)):

M-I-C-K.

Stone ([07:47](#)):

Okay, and she was a homemaker?

Heim ([07:49](#)):

Right.

Stone ([07:50](#)):

Okay, then your father, John, bought the stock from your grandfather and his son, August?

Heim ([08:01](#)):

Right, yeah. The final sale was 1941.

Stone ([08:06](#)):

1941, and that's just a few days before Pearl Harbor.

Heim (08:09):

That's right, yeah.

Stone (08:13):

Okay. Now, for the record, would you state your date of birth?

Heim (08:18):

My date of birth was February 16th, 1931.

Stone (08:21):

Okay, and that was at the St. Cloud Hospital here?

Heim (08:25):

Oh, I was born at home that time.

Stone (08:26):

Born at home.

Heim (08:27):

I was born within several hundred feet of here.

Stone (08:31):

Oh, I see.

Heim (08:31):

Now, in the old home, which they originally lived in, which my grandfather and his family originally lived in, in 1900. That home has now been torn down and replaced with a new building.

Stone (08:48):

I see. Okay, then you currently live also on the River Road, here, don't you?

Heim (08:51):

I currently live one mile north of the mill and about an eighth of a mile west, near the junction of County Road 1 and 119.

Stone (09:03):

Oh, okay. Fine. Where did you go to school?

Heim (09:09):

I went to school to St. Mary's in St. Cloud.

Stone (09:13):

I see. Okay, so your religious background was Catholic?

Heim (09:18):

Yes, that is correct, yeah.

Stone (09:19):

Okay. What do you remember most about the area? Now, you lived on the river, and I would imagine a lot of your boyhood activities would center on the river. Did you spend a lot of time down there, or were you into the mill early on?

Heim (09:38):

I was probably around the mill here with my dad when I was about five years old.

Stone (09:42):

I see.

Heim (09:43):

I also recall my Uncle George. I used to ride with him in 1936.

Stone (09:48):

Oh, yeah?

Heim (09:49):

Yeah.

Stone (09:52):

Okay. Do you recall the river quite clearly as being a center of your activities as a young boy?

Heim (10:03):

When we were children, in the summertime, you would have approximately 100 kids out here by the day end, every day of the week.

Stone (10:15):

Mm-hmm (affirmative)?

Heim (10:16):

Yeah. That was prior to the municipal swimming pool days.

Stone (10:21):

Oh, I see. Sure.

Heim (10:23):

Almost any old-timer, up until probably 35 years old, would have been down here at some time or other from the north end.

Stone (10:34):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heim (10:34):

Yeah. There was a lot of activity that way.

Stone (10:37):

I see.

Heim (10:38):

The land, at that time, was basically pasture in the area here.

Stone (10:42):

So, there was open access to most parts of the river?

Heim (10:45):

Well, they had to go through the fencing.

Stone (10:49):

Oh, I see.

Heim (10:50):

There were about two cattle pastures between the airport road and the river. We'd have to go through two of them.

Stone (10:58):

I see. Did you do a lot of fishing when you were a child?

Heim (11:02):

Oh, I think everybody did, sure. Definitely. Motor vehicles were not that readily available for young people.

Stone (11:11):

Right.

Heim (11:12):

Basically, the family had one car, and that was about it. Naturally, anyone in the north end here would fish and swim. That probably comprised quite a bit of their summer, because you did not--
Very few families did travel or migrate a lot, those days.

Stone ([11:37](#)):

I would especially imagine before you were 10 years old, in the Depression, that it was-

Heim ([11:44](#)):

Those-

Stone ([11:44](#)):

... that limited.

Heim ([11:46](#)):

Yeah, and the war years were no different.

Stone ([11:47](#)):

I see.

Heim ([11:48](#)):

They were no different.

Stone ([11:50](#)):

Oh, really?

Heim ([11:50](#)):

Yeah. People did not-- You did not travel far on, I believe, three gallons of gas, was an A ticket, and I don't know--

Stone ([11:58](#)):

The ration?

Heim ([12:00](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, that was the May--

Stone ([12:03](#)):

Do you recall your mother having to really meter out a lot of things? Was it hard for her with rationing during the war?

Heim ([12:13](#)):

In the rural areas, food was never a problem. We raised our own. We had hogs. We had cattle, chicken, anything. Food was never a problem.

Stone ([12:24](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). How did the Depression, as far as you could tell back when you were a boy, how did the Depression affect the mill? Do you recall your father or your grandfather talking about it?

Heim ([12:45](#)):

Yes.

Stone ([12:47](#)):

I imagine it was hard for everyone, but was it any easier on the mill because it was all the agricultural things that could still be produced?

Heim ([12:57](#)):

Yes. I think there was probably more activity in the food industry during the Depression than there would have been in other industries, because that is an everyday staple. It does not fluctuate. It does not have the highs or the lows as other industries do.

Stone ([13:20](#)):

I see.

Heim (13:21):

The war years, I think, probably would have been worse for the milling than the Depression years. I think my father experienced worse problems, because of the difficulty in getting parts or help or anything in that regard to try to operate.

Stone (13:48):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay, you were only 10 years old at the beginning of World War II, but you became a draftee in 1949, approximately. Did you serve in the Korean War?

Heim (14:03):

No, I was rejected [crosstalk 00:14:05].

Stone (14:06):

Oh, I see. Okay. Let's see now. Okay. Now, I'd like to get into the history of the company. For the record, I wonder if you could explain. You mentioned a Mr. Arnold sold the business to your grandfather in 1900, September of 1900. Do you have any idea when the mill was built?

Heim (14:38):

This mill building, as I understand, was the third mill in the area. The way I understand it there was the combination mill, feed mill and/or flour mill and sawmill, closer to the river than the present building.

Stone (15:00):

Oh, I see.

Heim (15:04):

What happened to that, I really don't know. I do recall timber underlays being in the river bed when I was young. We recalled this before the-- Now, these were basically all tore out in the

flood of 1943. That was one of the--a difficult flood with the water power. Anyhow, this present building was built after another mill on this same foundation burned down in about 1886.

Stone ([15:39](#)):

I see.

Heim ([15:44](#)):

The fire, I understand, was started by a lantern. There was one miller on at night, and when the waterpower would get low, the mill would slow up. It choked, and the miller was trying to get it loose, and an elevator leg loosened up and he had the lantern in a direct line with the outlet of the elevator. So, when he got the flour loosened up, it came out and blew out at the lantern, and then it caused an explosion.

Stone ([16:20](#)):

The flour dust is combustible?

Heim ([16:21](#)):

Flour dust, oh, yes. Yes. He got out in time. It burned it completely down. Fire departments in those days were just almost nonexistent.

Stone ([16:33](#)):

No matter how much water was close by--

Heim ([16:34](#)):

In the rural areas. In the rural areas, you didn't have the pumping equipment or nothing.

Stone ([16:39](#)):

I see.

Heim (16:40):

Then, I understand, it took two years to build it, 1886 and 1887 when he got it finished. That was Mr. Arnold.

Stone (16:49):

Mr. Arnold, okay.

Heim (16:50):

Then, he operated for several years. Then, in the 1890s, I believe they called some type of a depression. I believe they called it the Panic, or the Silver Question, or something of that category. Developed, and he was caught, naturally, with a high debt load and he lost it. He had to cease operations.

Stone (17:19):

I see.

Heim (17:21):

After that, I understood that several people tried it. They would try to buy it from him, or whoever it was holding the mortgage, and they would run it about a year and close.

Stone (17:37):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heim (17:38):

This, I understand, happened in at least a couple instances.

Stone (17:41):

They just couldn't make it pay.

Heim (17:42):

Could not make it pay. That was the depression in the 1890s. Just what year it hit, I don't know. But anyhow, this kept going until the last people tried it in 1899. I believe three individuals tried it. I don't recall their names for sure. They gave it up, I think, in about the spring of 1900.

Stone (18:07):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heim (18:09):

Then, my grandfather, and I think, two brothers, I understand, I had seen their name on the abstract, tried it. The two brothers gave up immediately. Naturally, it was very discouraging. After everybody else, for 10 years, had been having failures, so giving up quick was not unknown.

Stone (18:36):

They thought they were doomed right away, I suppose.

Heim (18:38):

The odds were against you, with that many failures.

Stone (18:41):

Do you recall their names? This would be your-

Heim (18:44):

I don't know for sure which ones they were. He had several of them that were on farms out here after a while.

Stone (18:50):

I see.

Heim (18:51):

But I don't recall just which ones were thinking of it, or had been in just a short time. Anyhow, then he started in 1900, and he had his problems, but keep going until my dad started-- This was strictly a farm mill back then. My dad started to work in the plant when he was 12 years old, in 1905. Then, at the age of 17, then he took over the miller's job in the mill. The old miller was a Mr. [Besch 00:19:31], and he was a Swiss miller. He had worked in Germany on the Rhine. For some reason or other, my grandfather contacted him when he bought the mill, and apparently he had worked for my grandfather approximately five years. He got the thing going, and then my father became the miller in-- Oh, excuse me. He would have worked for him probably 12 years, maybe up to 12.

Stone (20:00):

So, he learned the job from Mr. Besch?

Heim (20:02):

From Mr. Besch, yeah. He became a flour miller, and then he ran it through the World War I days. There's where they came on their feet a little bit. They were shipping flour to New York for export during the war.

Stone (20:20):

I see.

Heim (20:20):

Flour was a big item in those days. Food had a very high priority, because I think it took a lot of man-hours to get food, and it wasn't really real readily available as today because of mechanization.

Stone ([20:37](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heim ([20:40](#)):

So anyhow, then he was supposed to leave for the service just toward the end of the war, and he would have had to shut the mill down. My grandfather was not a miller.

Stone ([20:48](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heim ([20:49](#)):

I don't know if they had any other help or not at that time. But anyhow, then the war was over, and my dad stayed on as the miller. Then, my oldest uncle, George, he was a Teamster. They would have a team in those days. They would have to unload cars and sock rabbits, haul the wheat over here, and load the flour from here in sacks back on the rail cars going to New York.

Stone ([21:14](#)):

Oh.

Heim ([21:15](#)):

That was, basically, it was a very slow process.

Stone ([21:17](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heim ([21:19](#)):

Capacity of their mill at that time was 200 barrels, which transformed to 196 pounds, or just about 400 bags of flour per day.

Stone ([21:33](#)):

Per day.

Heim (21:34):

On a 24-hour basis, which they did not run, though.

Stone (21:37):

Do you understand that they pretty much exclusively sold to New York?

Heim (21:45):

I understand whatever was not sold locally, I think, was quite readily shipped to the East.

Stone (21:52):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), so that's possibly what really helped the mill get up on its feet, was the demand from New York to Europe.

Heim (22:00):

I believe so, yeah. I think that's basically where the market was in the area. It was railed to New York and then on to Europe. Now Europe, for some reason or other, apparently didn't have sufficient food those days or something to that category, I don't know. But I understand that with the end of World War I, the flour era in Minnesota here began coming to an end.

Stone (22:31):

Oh, I see.

Heim (22:33):

That was the start of the downtrend in the small flour mills. I assume partial mechanization became in Minneapolis and the milling centers of the east, and also possibly the wheat started to be shipped through Duluth and milled in the east.

Stone (22:55):

Sure.

Heim (22:55):

The trend was changing. I do not know the exact details of the trend. But I do know this was a period of time when the small flour mills began their downtrend, 1920 to-- By the early to mid-'30s, I understand that was about the good share of the small flour mills had discontinued.

Stone ([23:22](#)):

Oh, they had?

Heim ([23:22](#)):

Yeah.

Stone ([23:25](#)):

Okay. Now, your grandfather bought the mill in 1900. Now, did he sell his farm to get the capital to do that? I'm kind of interested in how one is able to obtain a business like this at the end of a bad economic period. Did he retain his farm?

Heim ([23:50](#)):

I really don't know. I never had found out the details of it.

Stone ([23:56](#)):

Would you have any idea about the number of employees he might have had at the time?

Heim ([24:02](#)):

I have one photograph that I obtained from a relative in the area. At that particular time, and I can just about dateline that to about 1900 to 1905, in that area, we have a dateline to that approximately, there were seven individuals on the photograph.

Stone ([24:30](#)):

Including the--

Heim ([24:32](#)):

Including my grandfather, but none of the boys.

Stone (24:35):

Oh, I see.

Heim (24:35):

I saw none of the boys in the photograph. Seven adults were on the photograph.

Stone (24:40):

Okay. Do you recall what your grandfather raised before he came into this business?

Heim (24:49):

Crops on the farm?

Stone (24:50):

Yeah.

Heim (24:51):

Okay, this area, though, I understand, around that time was basically a wheat-producing area.

Stone (24:57):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), okay. Now, you mentioned the flour that your grandfather and father eventually would send out. Was this all types of flour? Was this basically a white flour, a whole wheat? What was it considered back then? Were there several grades? Were there as many grades back then as there are now?

Heim (25:22):

According to the descriptions on the old flour bins, which I think are still visible yet. We could see them. There were three grades.

Stone (25:34):

Oh, I see. Okay. Okay, I guess that's enough of the background. We'd like some current information, basically pertaining to the types of products, the types of processes that the flour

and your products undergo, any processes that you perform that are unique to just the milling industry. Could you talk to us about your types of products, then?

Heim (26:05):

Well, as far as the flour industry, we discontinued, Father discontinued milling when I was two years old, in 1931. So, that is entirely phased out.

Stone (26:22):

All right.

Heim (26:24):

Okay. In other words, you'd like to have some background on the feed industry in this area?

Stone (26:28):

Sure, and then specifically the types of products that you produce.

Heim (26:31):

Okay. Beginning in the '30s with the discontinuing of flour milling and the beginning of the feed industry, the first mixtures that were made were probably combination of grain products only. I recall my father mentioning about that. At that time, the rolling of grain was quite prominent yet. They used a hard, solid-core roll, similar to what was used in the flour milling industry. They would make... I recall this would make a ground feed, they called it at that time. Was a combination of crushed corn and crimped oats. Now, they were run on two sets of rolls simultaneously and ran together. Now, this was probably the beginning. Now, the horse population was quite high yet at that time in the agricultural area. I think, in the towns, it was pretty well just being on discontinue. In other words, I can recall yet a team horse as being on a lumber wagon in town or something like that, but it was quite an oddity. So, it was basically in the agricultural area where it was used yet. That probably was till the mid-'30s, and then they

started with combination of proteins. In other words, using byproducts from the processing of other grains which were not native to this area, namely soybeans. They were not grown in this area in those days. Any soybeans or processed soybean meal would have to be shipped in at that time. I can recall my father shipping soybean meal in from Decatur, Illinois. It would involve about two to three weeks to get a 20-ton car of soybean meal at that time. Then, as the home slaughtering began to hit the downtrend, and your large packing houses started, well, then you began to get involved or be able to obtain packinghouse byproducts. They were also a good source of protein.

Heim (29:44):

Another protein, which was native to western Minnesota, was flaxseed meal, called linseed meal today. That was another one that probably became prominent in that same era. That was in the mid-'30s. They were combined, those three, in varying amounts for different animals. Someone and probably eliminated one of those for a certain animal, et cetera, was probably the beginning of your formulated feed in this area in the early '30s.

Stone (30:25):

Okay.

Heim (30:27):

After that, getting into the World War II days, things became a little more involved. Vitamins were developed in the late '30s, artificial vitamins. Fish products were brought into the area, brought into play on formulations. Minerals became a little more readily available after that, various types of minerals. To begin with, the basic mineral supplement in that early era was limestone, ground limestone, which came out of Iowa, was quite close to the area. Another quite

readily source of phosphate, then, the limestone was for the calcium part and the phosphate came out of bone meal, steamed bone meal, which came out of the packinghouses in the area.

Stone ([31:42](#)):

Out of the packinghouses.

Heim ([31:42](#)):

Yes. Those were probably the basic backgrounds on minerals.

Stone ([31:47](#)):

I see.

Heim ([31:49](#)):

Since then, there's developed, got much more involved and into the trace mineral elements. They come from as far as Nevada and some of the manufacturers of phosphates now come out of Florida, phosphoric acid mines are in Florida now. They're shipped in from that area. The prominence of bone meal has declined.

Stone ([32:21](#)):

I see.

Heim ([32:22](#)):

The cost of reclaiming it, and the rate of the volume that it's available in have just pretty well put it out of the picture.

Stone ([32:40](#)):

Now, you've mentioned that the milling, the feed milling processes, and the ingredients have become more complicated and specialized. Do you feel that this is entirely necessary, or that we're looking a little too carefully at the types of things, or do you think it's definitely a positive thing for healthy cattle raising?

Heim (33:07):

If we are to maintain the production per animal that we have attained today, we will definitely have to keep up with the same program we have, and I'm sure there will be improvements on present-day processes, how it's being done. I feel we've made, our industry has made quite great strides. Now, if you look at production of cattle, what production you get per individual cow, there's been some terrific progress made in the past 20 years. Now, whether you could make a lot more progress in the next 20 in that line, I don't know.

Stone (34:16):

Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's almost reached the state of the art. It's hard to say. There's always new discoveries, huh?

Heim (34:23):

It's hard to say, yeah. These animals, I think, they are... The only way we've been able to keep that production under such stress per animal is to keep their nutritional programs really going.

Stone (34:38):

Okay. It sounds like you almost have to have had some training in chemical biology, or whatever. Have you had any special training other than the training that you got at the mill here?

Heim (34:56):

I have had no formal training on that, but we currently, we update ourselves constantly on subscribing to various publications. Plus, we also have a nutritionist on call. In other words, we have a retained person in the city.

Stone (35:26):

As long as you're talking about training, did you personally go to college, or were you working in the mill right away?

Heim (35:33):

I worked here part-time while I went to school, and since 1949, I have been here full-time.

Stone (35:41):

Did you pursue business in college?

Heim (35:44):

I never went to college.

Stone (35:45):

Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

Heim (35:47):

Excuse me, yeah. I graduated from high school in 1949.

Stone (35:50):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), okay. Okay, what parts of your production costs least, and what also costs more? What has risen least sharply in production costs over the years? What has risen the sharpest? Such as shipping or your raw material costs?

Heim (36:20):

Raw material costs, in our industry, have not changed appreciatively as far as grains since World War II days, since the end of World War II.

Stone (36:41):

That's kind of unusual, [crosstalk 00:36:42]-

Heim (36:42):

The same prices that are paid for grain today have been equaled or exceeded in the later World War II days.

Stone (36:57):

Hmm. That's kind of a unique thing to the milling industry, then, perhaps, huh? What about your shipping costs? Do you handle all of your shipping, or do you contract? I notice you have a Heim Milling truck out in back. Do you handle all your shipping yourself?

Heim (37:20):

We handle actually a very small portion of our own shipping.

Stone (37:25):

Mm-hmm (affirmative), and is that basically to farmers in this area?

Heim (37:28):

Yes. Yeah, that would be in the interim, local area, probably keeping within our own vehicles within 60 miles.

Stone (37:37):

Okay. As long as we're talking about your market area, what are the boundaries of your area that you ship to?

Heim (37:46):

About a 60-mile range.

Stone (37:48):

Okay, now that is-- Does that include any shipping that's done by rail?

Heim (37:55):

We do not ship anything off by rail.

Stone (37:59):

Okay.

Heim (37:59):

Our receiving by rail is very low, a very low portion.

Stone (38:04):

Okay, so you deal strictly in Minnesota, then? Or do you deal--

Heim (38:08):

Sales?

Stone (38:08):

Yeah.

Heim (38:09):

All Minnesota.

Stone (38:10):

All Minnesota. Okay. What about your competition in the area? Could you name any of the mills that do the same kind of processes as you, or are there none?

Heim (38:29):

In Stearns County, we consider ourself a complete mill, although we are small. We have, I believe, only two other concerns who produce a complete line in their own individual establishments.

Stone (38:59):

Where are they located?

Heim (39:01):

Well, actually, both of the others are a multiple plant. We are actually the only single plant--

Stone (39:11):

Self-sufficient, almost?

Heim (39:13):

--that I know of, yeah. The other two are multiple.

Stone (39:15):

I see.

Heim (39:16):

They both were family enterprises. They started up as farm, really. One was the Kolb family in Belgrade.

Stone (39:25):

What was the name?

Heim (39:26):

Kolb family in Belgrade. The other enterprise was the Thelen family at Freeport, Minnesota.

Stone (39:35):

Oh, I see. Okay.

Heim (39:37):

We would be in-- But they were multiple mills in the later years, now. We would be the only, I think the only individual family concern operating a complete one.

Stone (39:50):

Is the competition from these other two interests always been fair and healthy for the feed business, do you feel?

Heim (40:07):

Oh, yeah, as far as-- I would say this way, that as far as the other organization, as far as competition, I would say competition's always been very brisk.

Stone (40:18):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Heim (40:20):

As far as hard feelings, I would say there never has been any.

Stone (40:25):

Okay. I guess we're talking about a basic free enterprise component.

Heim (40:30):

Yeah, competition has been very brisk. Actually, our contact is almost nil. Personal contact, where you would say there would be hard feelings, is almost nil. But you do compete, definitely, on your outlets. It's very brisk.

Stone (40:49):

Can you recall any instances where you've had to update production, change production, lower prices, or anything because of your competition? You don't have to name them, but do you recall instances where there's been a lot of pressure, where you've had to change?

Heim (41:05):

I think probably the biggest change that had to be made in the milling industry here was the advent of the pelleting.

Stone (41:16):

Pelleting?

Heim (41:16):

Pelleting.

Stone (41:16):

I see. These are the feed pellets, right?

Heim (41:20):

That is correct. That was in the late '40s and early '50s. This was the big revolution in milling. If you were going to stay in as a self-sufficient plant, you had to put pelleting in.

Stone (41:33):

Why did pelleting revolutionize it? Was it easier to handle? Was it more compact food?

Heim (41:43):

Well, to begin with, it was probably starting with the advent of bulk feeding. Pelleting or crumblized, which was a crushed pellet, could be stored in tanks, and became a free-flowing product which stayed pretty fluid. Another thing, as your farm site became larger than that, and feeding probably was not done as much on a hand basis anymore, you needed something which was less likely to blow away with the wind, more readily handled. Also, it was found that you could get a better conversion with a pelleted feed. It was more palatable. In other words, an animal-- This was always a problem through the years, back in the '40s and that, was to get a dust-free product, which an animal would more readily consume.

Stone (42:58):

I see. Okay. Are there any special problems that are unique to your industry that is a constant, nagging thing that you have to deal with? Does that ring a bell?

Heim (43:22):

Oh, I think maintenance probably would be the biggest item in the milling industry, to keep things, keep your establishment clean.

Stone (43:34):

Keep it dust-free and--

Heim (43:36):

Keep cleaning your machines and your bin, because you're handling a food product. That's probably one of your biggest chores all the time is to do that.

Stone (43:52):

Okay. How many employees do you currently have?

Heim (43:58):

We have four full-time employees, then my brother and I. My father is here in the afternoon for a couple of hours or so. Our sons work part-time, three sons, when they aren't in high school.

Stone (44:16):

So, it's really kept in the family quite a bit, huh?

Heim (44:18):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Stone (44:20):

Okay. What job do you-- Now, I understand that this business would be quite a chore in itself to run, but do you undertake any of the physical processes that are here? Do you do any-- Do you have a title?

Heim (44:36):

Well, I am the president of the concern.

Stone (44:36):

You are the president.

Heim (44:36):

Yes, I am.

Stone ([44:39](#)):

Okay. One last question. Now, I would imagine, since it is such a family business, that there's really no mention of unions or anything. You've never had that many number of employees to do that. Okay, I guess this is my last question. I'd like to know about the general business climate in the Sauk Rapids-St. Cloud area, back when you started really getting into the business and now. Has it always been very friendly and very open to the milling processes?

Heim ([45:18](#)):

Oh, I always feel that we're very well-received. I think as far as the business climate, as far as the competition, when we started in World War II days, there were an awful lot of small mills that were equal size as ours. Through the years, a lot of them have since gone out of business. Probably, you could say that the field is a lot thinner today than it was at that time.

Stone ([45:59](#)):

What would you attribute your mill succeeding, in the light of all the other mills falling by the wayside? Was there any one thing that you could attribute it to?

Heim ([46:18](#)):

Well, probably would have to say that some, a couple of them that discontinued, were located right in the central city.

Stone ([46:29](#)):

I see.

Heim ([46:30](#)):

Yeah, location, probably what it is. I suppose some went by a lack of modernization.

Stone ([46:45](#)):

Okay. Unwilling or unable to change their processes?

Heim (46:53):

Yeah. You always find a milling situation, a small one, is generally a closely held business. If some of the principals in the business health would happen to strike them or something, your health would go bad and you'd no longer-- You wouldn't be able to have the energy to keep up with the modernization. Well, that would be one for the-- No one else to take over. That would be one more out of business. Location, and the population, would happen to really box you in if you happen to be in the right area. I can think of two of them that had that problem.

Stone (47:41):

What were the names of those?

Heim (47:43):

St. Cloud Milling was right downtown.

Stone (47:44):

Right.

Heim (47:45):

There was a St. Cloud Farm and Feed, was right downtown. Those are the two. With the decline of railroading and the advent of trucking, some of these plants who were located in a congested area, you immediately had problems, traffic problems.

Stone (48:10):

I see. With the dust involved in the business, and I'm not sure if that's a problem anymore, but are there any problems at all with lung disease or anything in the milling business in general?

Heim (48:32):

Well, from my own experience, my father, he is 85 now. He started at 12. He hasn't had any. Myself, I'm probably the next longest one in this, I haven't had any.

Stone ([48:46](#)):

Okay. Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't covered? Anything you'd like to say?

Heim ([49:02](#)):

Well, probably the thing that we probably forgot was probably the beginning of waterpower, as to how it was, why the plant was established right here.

Stone ([49:11](#)):

If you'd like to mention anything about that, it'd be fine.

Heim ([49:14](#)):

Well, basically, I think the reason it was built out where it is here was the fact that that same power was a factor, and you had to go where it was, so mainly they built on a river.

Stone ([49:27](#)):

I see, and currently you use all--

Heim ([49:29](#)):

All electricity today.

Stone ([49:30](#)):

--electrical power.

Heim ([49:30](#)):

Yeah. Waterpower, they had water in an old steam engine here years ago when the flour mill was running.

Stone ([49:38](#)):

I see.

Heim ([49:38](#)):

They discontinued the steam engine in World War I days. Then, they just had waterpower until 1954. Then, we bought our first diesel engine.

Stone ([49:59](#)):

Okay.

Heim ([49:59](#)):

Then, we bought another diesel engine in '58, a larger one. We ran a combination of waterpower and diesel. In '59, we put our first motor in that powered a machine and was [inaudible 00:50:19], then we had electric, diesel, and waterpower.

Stone ([50:24](#)):

I see, so you do use-- You're not totally self-sufficient in your energy. You do use cooperative electricity as well as your diesel engines now?

Heim ([50:33](#)):

In 1965, our stand went out, then we discontinued waterpower permanently.

Stone ([50:47](#)):

I see.

Heim ([50:47](#)):

Then, we were diesel and electric.

Stone ([50:53](#)):

Okay.

Heim ([50:53](#)):

In 1971, we discontinued our diesel.

Stone ([51:00](#)):

I see.

Heim ([51:01](#)):

Our line-shafting all went that, too.

Stone ([51:03](#)):

Okay.

Heim ([51:05](#)):

Yeah, so at that time, we went to all individual group-driven motors, which could be-- You have a guard on every machine and every motor. Well, that was with the advent of OSHA and everything.

Stone ([51:19](#)):

Excuse me. Do you still have your diesels to use as a backup in case of any problems?

Heim ([51:24](#)):

We disposed of our diesel quite shortly after we switched over to all electric. Since then, we have been all electric power.

Stone ([51:34](#)):

I see. Okay, unless you have anything more to add, then that concludes this interview.