

Interview with Fred Baird

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Interviewer: Susan Hughes

Transcriber: Christopher Haley

Begin Tape 1, Side A

Hughes: The first thing that they asked us to do for this project that we're doing is to fill out a standardized biographical sheet. Each one of us is doing this on the person that we're interviewing. So, first, what I wanted to do is just get some basic biographical information so that people who are using this, the transcription of this tape later on, will know who the person is that's talking. They'll know a little bit about you. So first of all, can I get your full name?

Baird: Yes, Fred A. Baird.

Hughes: And your birth date?

Baird: Birth date, June twenty-one, sixteen.

Hughes: And your place of birth?

Baird: Location is Fostoria. I didn't get very far away  
from---

Hughes: So you're a native Ohioan?

Baird: Yep

Hughes: Then they ask for your father's full name.

Baird: The same thing.

Hughes: And where was he born?

Baird: I think he was born southeast of Cygnet. Wood County.

Hughes: And what was his occupation?

Baird: Well, he operated a filling station for a period of  
time. Then he worked at the ~~s~~park ~~p~~lug in Fostoria in  
the latter years.

Hughes: And your mother's name?

Baird: Vera.

Hughes: And where was she born?

Baird: She was born in Kalida.

Hughes: Now, did she work outside the home?

Baird: She worked at the same place.

Hughes: Now, did you grow up in Fostoria?

Baird: No, I grew up partially in Idaho, Colorado, and out on a farm near Cygnet. Then I went to school in Fort Wayne. I was all over the place.

Hughes: You presently live in Findlay. I can fill that part in.

Baird: Year<sup>H</sup>, I been here a long time.

Hughes: You said you went to school in Fort Wayne. That was through highschool or---?

Baird: That was college. Highschool was by Cygnet, or was in Cygnet.

Hughes: What college is it in Fort Wayne?

Baird: At that time it was Indiana Tech., <sup>B</sup> but now it's Indiana Institute of Technology. We were in Fort Wayne Saturday. They have rebuilt that city. Tore it all down and it's all rebuilt.

Hughes: I've never been to Fort Wayne.

Baird: Haven't you? <sup>Ah,</sup> ~~All~~ gee. Well, it used to be quite a town when I was going to school there. That's all entirely different, <sup>now.</sup> Tore the whole middle out. A few years ago I was out there and it looked like a tornado was through there and tore everything down. Now everything there is about brand new. A real change. Can't find my way around there now.

Hughes: Have they changed the school a lot?

Baird: I don't know. I wasn't at the school. I was just through the city.

Hughes: They ask for your occupations.

Baird: My occupations? Well I was a tool designer, then a building contractor.

Hughes: Any special interests or activities?

Baird: At the present time? You can look at it. Well, and toys. I have ten antique cars, ~~a~~ bunch of old toys, a lot of them cast iron. ~~A~~, of course, we collected first, furniture, and then, clocks. I have two hundred and thirty clocks. Then we collected Findlay glass, the old Findlay glass. And now it's almost down to zero. I don't collect anything now if I can help it.

Hughes: I think I'll just put "collector".

Baird: O.K.

Hughes: Now we can start in on "Buckeye". Well, what I wanted to talk about today was your job as a tool designer, and about the World War II era, and also a little bit about the product. Then I was hoping next time we could talk about the factory and the change in ownership, and the physical setup of the factory, and a little bit about the work force.

Baird: You want first, what?

Hughes: Well, the first I wanted to know is how you came to work for Buckeye?

Baird: Well, I started out on a drawing board in Upper Sandusky. I worked there for a year and then I got in a disagreement with the boss. Says, "If you don't like it here, take your tools and go home". So, I did. And on the way home I stopped in at the Buckeye Traction Ditcher, got a job, and a week later I started to work at the Buckeye Ditcher.

Hughes: Was there any special reason why you chose Buckeye?

Baird: Home. We lived in Findlay and it was about the only thing around here that needed draftsmen and luckily, I landed in tooling, tool design. Which I really liked. Didn't really aim for it, but I ended up there and I really liked designing tools and I was really happy until the company started to fall apart. So I quit because I could see the writing on the wall and I was getting interested in building. So, I was transferred from tooling to the engineering department and I think I worked there about two months. I said, "this is it, I don't want no more of this."

Hughes: So when you went into Buckeye, though you went in with specifically looking for something where you could use your drafting abilities?

Baird: Yes, <sup>A</sup> Actually I did a little tooling work over there in design in Upper Sandusky. So, they were looking for a tool designer and it just clicked.

Hughes: What was the company in Sandusky?

Baird: Interstate Automotive Company. Which has since burned down, gone.

Hughes: Did they give you any kind of training above what you had already had in college?

Baird: You mean Buckeye?

Hughes: Buckeye.

Baird: No, I had a boss and he kinda explained what kind of a tool they wanted and I just kinda started out. <sup>I</sup> It was kind of a knack more than a training, I guess. The training was figuring. The figuring had to be very accurate for most of it. So, it kind of

Baird:       came somewhat natural, and I really didn't aim for anything, I just kind of went along. I seemed to hit the groove for some reason or other.

Hughes:       So, you said you started out as a tool designer and then two months before you left you went into engineering. What kind of things, what did the engineering department do?

Baird:       Well they designed the equipment they manufactured, like the ditching machines, and many kinds of things. They made bulldozer blades and frames to fit on the big tractors, so that was all engineered there. I did the tooling, the tool design for that. And then their big, well, they called them backhoes, (they could be used as a backhoe) they resembled a steam shovel, although they were operated with gasoline. They could backhoe, dig, used as cranes. They made a lot of those, a lot of those. Of course I did all the tool desinging on that. Plus a lot of other things. Stonegraders that they fastened behind trucks. The truck would dump the stone in this grader then drive down the road, you know, and it would spread all the stone out even. I made a lot of those. And a lot of things I wouldn't even know what they made. That was a busy place in war time. That place was



Baird: full, I mean full. There wasn't room to walk down through there hardly.

Hughes: That's something I wanted to ask you about, was the war time. I was wondering, you know you had mentioned the last time we had got together that it was really, <sup>the</sup> the factory was really humming.

Baird: Every square foot was in use, and they even added more at that time, more space to work in.

Hughes: They were making specific machinery?

Baird: They were making along their own line plus some government things and even some British. There was one thing that I made for Great Britain. I don't even know what it was. No one was allowed in there. I found later that I was, but I never went in there because I thought I wasn't. So, I don't know what was in there.

Hughes: How did they modify the line to <sup>be?</sup> used for the war?

Baird: Well, they didn't really operate on a production line. On the picture of the buildings, right there, I can point out what they did in the different

Baird: buildings. This building back here was the foundry. This building up here was the machine shop. And, up in here was a tool room near the front corner, and of course, there were more buildings added than there is in this picture. So, the offices were in this area here, and down about that far, in this corner. There were more buildings in here. And this is what they called the erecting room. Now that's where they put everything together. Out in here they sheared the formed steel. And this building back here was for the tractors. They called it the tractor department. They made everything in connection with the bulldozer and the blades and the like.

Hughes: O.K., so this was the erecting.

Baird: Yes. And here was the forge shop. They also heated steel, formed it, sheared it, punched it, and all kinds of things they did with steel, there, in forming parts.

Hughes: So this picture must be, (we had trouble finding a date on this), this picture must be before the war.

Baird: Yes it is. Well before the war, because everything was closed between the buildings when I was there. But, I do

Baird: But, I do remember, I think they filled in a part right in here that was still open about the time I started, and later they closed it. And then a first aid, they put the first aid in there. I remember that. Part of it anyway.

The steel they kept out in the yard, they had a big crane out back here that handled all the big sheets of steel, to take them inside to cut them up into what they wanted.

Hughes: Do you know where the products, <sup>weren't?</sup> who was using the products during the war? What branch of the service they were going to?

Baird: Not really. They went to the division that needed the construction equipment. They probably went mostly to the Army I would say. But, no, we never knew where they went.

Hughes: Were they still making any of the civilian ~~products~~ products for civilians?

Baird: Yes. Well they weren't made for farmers. ~~they~~ they were made, most everything was made, for the government then, you know. I suppose, I doubt if the farmers got any during that time. They made the same kind of

Baird: machines, but they were sent somewhere where the government wanted ditches dug, and the like, you know. So, I think everything--- I don't remember any farmer ever getting a machine out of there during the war.

Hughes: Now how did that, how did this war production affect your job? Were they---

Baird: Oh it made my job boom! Oh yeah, 'cause they were redesigning and designing, both new equipment, better equipment and modified equipment. So, everything new that the engineers designed to be used, I designed the tools to make the things. So the tool designed boomed all through the war time. It was a pretty big department.

Hughes: So they were basically just taking the models that already existed and just somehow modifying them for whatever---

Baird: During the war, yes, they were using the same designs they had. Then after the war, right after the war, when Garwood had the plant, they redesigned most of the ditching machines because they were kind of outdated, you know, new ideas come along. And they

Baird: redesigned every machine that I can think of that they had, and even added some. Which was more tool designing. You know, everytime there was a new machine there was a lot more tool desinging to be done. Tools to be made to make them. So, everything boomed through the war and then when they went into this redesigning machines, still boomed for me.

Hughes: Now when engineering was redesigning them, do you know who was making the modifications? Was it Buckeye that was actually doing it, or were the specifications coming from somewhere else?

Baird: Well, during the war there would naturally be modifications from the government periodically. Which actually was a machine's changes more than machine design. Then after the war the company took it upon themselves, which was then Garwood. Rather than sell repair parts, the replacement parts, they weren't going to do that at all. They were going to make new machines instead of selling repair parts, ~~+~~ they were going to sell machines. That was one of the downfalls of the company. Because it's too expensive a piece of machinery. The first time something breaks, throw it away! Throw the whole machine away, that is. So, that didn't work. In

Baird: fact, there's a little company over here now called Werk-Brau. Saw the writing on the wall when Garwood quit making repair parts, this little company over here started and still's in existence, making the repair parts for the machinery.

Hughes: Werk-Brau? How do you spell that? I can look it up in the phone book I guess.

Mrs. Baird: W-O-R-K, B-R-A-U?

Baird: I think that's it. I'm not sure the first word, whether it is spelled that way or not.

Mrs. Baird: W-O-R-K B-R-A-U

Baird: That's pretty close. You can find it---, you can look it up in the phone book and see how it's spelled.

Hughes: Now, you mentioned before that, you said there was one room you couldn't get into, then you found out later you could.

Baird: Yeah, I could have.

Hughes: What kind of restrictions did they---did they put restrictions on the workers' movements around the factory?

Baird: Just in that part. No one but the ones that worked in there were allowed in there and I don't even know what they were making. So, I thought I wasn't allowed in there, so I never went in. So, I never got to see it.

Hughes: Now that was something that they--- did you say they were shipping to Britain?

Baird: They were making it for Great Britain. Something they used in the war, but I don't know what it was.

Hughes: That is interesting. I wonder what it was.

Baird: I don't know.

Hughes; Were there ever government people around?

Baird: Probably, but we never knew when they were there unless they would happen to walk through our office or something like that. I was continuously all over the plant, but I'd see a guy in a suit. I wouldn't

Baird: know who he was. Wouldn't even talk to each other. Too busy with what we were doing to care about anybody else. The main thing, out of one eye you had to watch the other way to keep from getting run over with a crane. These cranes carried these big pieces of equipment and they rang a bell for you to get out of the way. When I was first new there, I didn't know what that bell was and I was standing right out in the middle of the building there. *down?* They were coming the center of the building with a great big piece of machinery on it. I wasn't paying any attention, you know. *I* It was coming. Finally some guy run out and said, "hey, you gotta get out of the way", I said, "where are you going?" There wasn't no room to go anywhere, there was so much stuff there. You had to crawl through places where they were working and get out of the way of that thing. I soon learned to stay out of the way. One eye you're watching to stay out of the way and the other eye, whatever you were doing. It was really confusion. Everything going in every direction. Nowhere to go. The floor was full. Guys were working there, you know, and they were welding. You had to watch your eyes for that. I'd never seen a busier place in less space, anywhere, and I've been in quite a few factories.



Hughes: So how was the-- the production was-- how many shifts did they have?

Baird: Well, they worked continuously during the war.

Hughes: Did they hire any--- were there any women coming in to take the place of the men who had gone?

Baird: Well there was a woman welder out there. She was a good lookin' gal and all dressed up in her uniform, so to speak, and her shield. She caught a lot of guys' eyes. But, she was a welder. And there wasn't so many women worked out in the shops. Mostly were office workers, most of them. 'Course, the offices were full of women, but there were just a very few women that was scattered around here, there, out in the--- where they actually built the equipment. Now -  
Xadays, there would--- well, there might be more now if it still existed, but that was pretty heavy work. But X there would be more women there now because even the machinery is changed, so much now that a woman can operate it.

Hughes: Did they take the equipment out and test it there before they sent it on?

Baird: Yes, <sup>+</sup>there was a place about a mile, hardly a mile, out Crystal Avenue. They owned a big field and they would take the equipment out there and use it to see that everything worked <sup>ALL RIGHT</sup> ~~all right~~. They dug the heck <sup>→</sup> out of that field.

Hughes: So it was Buckeye's responsibility to test the equipment, <sup>+</sup>they didn't send it on to the government?

Baird: No, no, every piece of equipment that I know of went out there and was worked. The ditching machines dug ditches, the bulldozers pushed them shut and along come a ditching machine and dug them out again. They wore that out.

Hughes: I have that one picture of that tractor on the hill. That was an interesting one.

Baird: I don't know what's going on there. I tried to decide what it was, but it says on that note on the next page that, ~~well~~, I forgot what it did say. (reading from paper) "Pulling Buckeye ditcher up a steep grade". Well, <sup>→</sup>they would be pulling a ditching machine up there. I don't know where or what for. I don't think it was around here. It was somewhere it