

Interview with Joseph and Mildred Janak

Interviewer: Ralph Ingram Jr.

Transcriber: Ralph Ingram Jr.

Date of Interview: October 14, 1987

Location: Mr. and Mrs. Janak's Home, Hallettsville, TX

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Ralph Ingram Jr.: This is an interview taking place on 14 October 1987 between Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Janak of Hallettsville, Texas, and Ralph Ingram Jr., graduate student at Southwest Texas State University. I have gone over the preliminary information regarding the affidavits required by the Department of History Archive Section in reference to the taping of this interview for the purpose of a history of Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative, herein after referred to as GVEC. There will be a tape placed in the archives at the university, a tape placed with GVEC, a typed transcription will be in the archives at Southwest Texas State University, a transcription will be at GVEC, and I will also send a copy of the transcription to Mr. and Mrs. Janak. Do we understand each other on all of these points so far?

Joseph and Mildred Janak: Yes.

Ingram: Very good! Now for the interview.

How long have you resided in the GVEC service area?

J. Janak: All my life.

Ingram: All your life. Have you lived in the Hallettsville area all of your life?

J. Janak: Yes, I've lived on this farm all my life. I was born and raised here, on this place, all of my life.

Ingram: All you know then is farming?

J. Janak: I never left home.

Ingram: Is this the original homestead?

J. Janak: Yes, this is the original homestead. It's been in the family since 1881 and in the Janak name since 1881.

Ingram: You farmed all of your life, and you told me previously that you've farmed roughly 190 acres?

J. Janak: One hundred and ninety-two acres, yes.

Ingram: Predominantly oats and cattle-related—

J. Janak: A cow, calf operation with oats, clovers, and alfalfa for winter grazing and coastal Bermuda on the improved pastures. Forage crops are also planted for summer grazing and hay.

Ingram: I might also add to this interview that Mr. and Mrs. Janak are Czechoslovakian in heritage. Mr. and Mrs. Janak are third generation Czechoslovakians, and they speak fluent Czech, which is a great accreditation to their intelligence. What is the greatest difference between now and the time before you had electricity?

J. Janak: It's more of a luxury now compared to what it was then.

Ingram: When did you first get electricity?

J. Janak: We had a Delco 32-volt Electric Plant in the mid-thirties, so we had experience of electricity before REA [Rural Electric Administration] came in. So, with the 32-Volt Delco Plant, we had lights, a radio, and an electric iron. Those were the first appliances we had on the 32-volt current. Of course, Delco appliances took a lot of electricity, but then when REA came in, times were a little better, and crop prices had improved, and Daddy bought a refrigerator. That was the first REA appliance we bought. Of course, we are talking like the standard Delco appliances were lights, a radio, and an iron. I think the REA refrigerator was purchased in '41. Daddy phoned for Mr. Hassman at the GVEC office in Cost and told him that he wanted a refrigerator, and the same evening Mr. Hassman was here. He had a little one-seated car that was made into a kind of pickup. You know what I mean; you have these types of cars around now [a Ranchero]. They don't have a trunk or anything; they're just open like a pickup. So, he brought that on his vehicle here.

Ingram: Do you remember exactly when they ran electricity to your home?

J. Janak: Oh, yes. I remember that. Mr. Blaschke was a close neighbor to us. He lived in the community, and he was getting easements to get electricity to our area. These people were brought up in the hard times, and they just didn't want to spend that money. When you signed the application to get your electricity, you had to deposit \$5. And that \$5 was hard to come by in those days.

Ingram: And this was roughly what year?

J. Janak: I would say in the late thirties.

Ingram: Prior to World War II?

J. Janak: Yes, prior to World War II. Somewhere between '36-'38, somewhere along in there. Mr. Blaschke would always come to Daddy, and Mr. Hassman would visit these other neighbors,

and Daddy told him he had a 32-volt electric plant, “I don’t really need electricity.” The 32-volt electric plant cost him about \$450.

Ingram: Was it diesel-powered?

J. Janak: No, it was gasoline. It would hold about a gallon or a gallon and a half of fuel, and for about a gallon, you’d run it at night and charge the batteries up. For about a gallon, you could have lights, which would be about nine cents per day, I guess.

Ingram: How did you wash clothes then? Did you have a washing machine?

J. Janak: You’d wash them by hand, a hand-turn washer. These were rotary machines; they had a rotor on top, and that was all hand work. We did not have a gas engine on our washing machine then. Speaking about this construction of line, Mr. Blaschke persisted in getting easements for REA power line, and since Daddy had electricity, he stayed away from signing it. Mr. Blaschke would leave and visit other people, and no one seemed to sign. So, Mr. Blaschke would come back to us. Daddy said “If you want electricity, when I sign it, all these other people will sign it.” That’s just the way it was. So Mr. Blaschke said, “That’s just what I want, sign it!” So, Daddy gave him \$5 for the application, signed it, and of course at the same time, Mother and my older brother said, “Gosh, Daddy gave away the last \$5!”

Ingram: What kind of relationship do you have with GVEC, both at that time and today?

J. Janak: I would call it a splendid relationship. What would you say, Mildred?

M. Janak: Well, I would certainly say it’s great. Just last night, our member information committee term expired, and this is the plaque that shows it. We attended a meeting in Seguin—a supper meeting—and they had given this plaque in appreciation to Joe and me for membership. We were on the Member Information Committee for two years, from ’85 to ’87. Anytime they asked for anything, if we could we would help them, we did. And, we enjoy doing it. I used to be a 4-H leader. When our children were of age to join 4-H, which is nine years of age, I became a 4-H leader at Wied, and whenever we needed a program, we’d call on GVEC, and they were always willing to present some type of program.

Ingram: 4-H and FFA [Future Farmers of America], they’re very active in those programs, right?

M. Janak: They were in those days, and they still are now.

J. Janak: We had a tri-community fair in our area, and there were three different communities participating. Each community would have the fair one year, and REA was very active in helping. They took all of the pictures and helped give the awards.

Ingram: Now, this publicity goes into the *GVEC Review*, doesn’t it?

M. Janak: They use a lot of it; yes, they do.

Ingram: What do you think of the *GVEC Review*; is it helpful to you?

J. Janak: Yes, it's very informative. It has a lot of information.

Ingram: How often does it come out?

J. Janak: Once a month.

M. Janak: It tells what all the other communities are doing, and this is what we're interested in knowing, what everyone else is doing. And you learn by seeing what other people are doing.

Ingram: As members of the information committee, I'm sure you probably had some input into what goes into the *Review*, I would think, wouldn't that be so?

M. Janak: When they would send out a letter announcing a meeting, on the RSVP they asked us to write in any questions that we wanted to talk about or explained at the meeting. This was very helpful because you can't always think of everything you want to ask while attending. This gave you time to consider some of the things that you wanted to talk about.

Ingram: Are you current participants in the GVEC load management program?

J. Janak: Yes, we are.

Ingram: In what respects?

J. Janak: Our water heater is on the load management at the present.

Ingram: What do you think of it?

J. Janak: It has never affected us. As far as I know, I would say that it was never off. I'm sure they have cut it off temporarily to save the peak load, but we have never noticed that we had cool water.

M. Janak: In other words, it's never affected us in any way where we would be complaining that we didn't have hot water, and we use a lot of hot water. Before they ever started this system, we on our own cut the breaker off for the water heater in the evening and throughout the night. You know, the water stays hot for a long time, and we had enough water for a day or a day and a half before we had to cut it back on again. So we felt like we were saving electricity then by doing that. And when load management began, we let REA take care of it.

Ingram: It makes it easier on you; you don't have to worry about it, and at the same time, you get the same benefit. Uou save money.

M. Janak: We save money for other people, too. If we can keep that peak load down, naturally the power is cheaper for everybody.

Ingram: Their peak load season is in the summertime and in December, January, and February, the coldest time of the winter?

J. Janak: I would say January and February. February would really be a peak load. Januarys are sometimes real mild.

M. Janak: REA has always asked us to participate in peak load management. So we set our thermostats up higher, about eighty degrees, and supplemented the air with ceiling fans. We've always done that, and it works.

Ingram: Are you aware of the fact that GVEC is possibly going to diversify their services into other areas? For example, satellite television, garbage collection, and sewage services. Are you aware of that?

J. Janak: Yes, I'm starting to see that there's a trend to that direction. And I think it would be very helpful to us. Being on a farm, we don't have the cable television like in the city, so it's always an extra expense. I think if we can organize or if the members of GVEC can organize, maybe we can get some legislation or some control somewhere where it would be more equal for the farmer too. Transmission [in] some places in the county doesn't reach some of these people, television transmission and all of that. So I think it would be good to organize on the farm level, and we could help ourselves.

Ingram: Which service would be more beneficial to you?

J. Janak: First, I would say the satellite. And independent garbage service has been available for about the last two months, for people wishing to use it. Sewage, on the farm, poses no problem.

Ingram: TV would then be more beneficial, satellite TV?

J. Janak: Satellite TV would be our first priority.

Ingram: Member service division—they offer advice on how to save energy. What is your experience with these people? Have they helped you, and in what respects have they helped you?

M. Janak: Well, I think in the saving of energy we've already gone over that. The water heater saves by having the equipment control installed.

J. Janak: If I could say, before the energy crunch, our electric or kilowatts usage was up to 3200 kilowatts per month. Now, our kilowatt usage isn't over 1800. I'd say we average around 17–1800 kilowatts per month. They definitely helped us or maybe the energy crunch helped us learn how to save. Our farm is all electric. We have an all-electric home. Water is pumped by

electricity, and lights are in every outside building; a welder, seed cleaner, grain augers and power tools are items powered by electricity.

M. Janak: The cattle have access to water from the creek, but the biggest part of the time they're drinking from water that's provided from our electric pump. So the pump's going all the time.

J. Janak: I've noticed our cattle grazing at the creek pasture would come home a quarter of a mile to the cow trough to drink fresh water instead of the creek-water.

Ingram: Have you ever used electricity from another cooperative?

J. Janak: No!

Ingram: No. So GVEC has you spoiled?

M. Janak: More or less.

J. Janak: Yes, you could say that.

Ingram: We've already hit on this other topic briefly. Is electricity vital to your life, or do you consider it now a luxury?

J. Janak: No, it's definitely vital. We surely wouldn't want to back up seventy years, we're not talking fifty years, you'd be backing up seventy years if you'd have to do without electricity. It would be like prehistoric.

M. Janak: I'd say the most important thing is your water. It is a pleasure to have the pressure pump. I remember how it used to flow so slowly without pressure. We've always had a pressure pump since '41. Now, we have even a better one, and the pressure is just great; you don't have to stand around and wait for your washer to through washing clothes because your water gets put in real fast. Or you don't have to stand at the sink and wait until you get enough water for your sink full of dishes. I think that's the most important thing.

Not long ago we had one of our pecan tree limbs come down, I guess it was six inches in diameter, and it happened about eleven o'clock at night. Joe just came home from the field; we work late around here. I had supper ready. I had all my food cooked, so I washed a few of the dishes before he came home. He sat down for a minute, and he said, "I'm going to go take a bath." He went to the shower, and there was no water. I said, "Well, what happened?" He took a flashlight and went outside, and this limb had come down from the tree and hit the big PVC pipe and broke it, and water was just gushing out everywhere, so therefore there was not water in the house. So he said, "Good, I don't have to take a bath." I said, "You will get your bath." I got some buckets, and we brought some water in, and that's the way we spent the rest of the night and also in the morning, dipping water for our use. It is times like this when you appreciate conveniences and realize how important it is to have pressurized running water.

J. Janak: You can't even take your vitamin pill without a dipper full of water.

Ingram: During your lifetime here on this farm, which is a good many years, do you recall anytime that you were without electricity? Such as during an electrical storm, ice or snowstorm.

J. Janak: Oh, yes, many times.

Ingram: Do you recall being out of power for any extended length of time?

J. Janak: I would say from one day to the next, and that would be about all.

M. Janak: Well, we had this last freeze about three years ago when it froze so hard that winter we could walk on the tanks, the ice was so thick. It was Christmas day and also for the part of the next day, and we didn't have electricity. We have a little butane burner, and the guys were cooking barbeque on the outside anyway, so you do things like that with power outage.

Ingram: But you weren't out for maybe twenty-four hours?

J. Janak: Like I said, from one day to the next. Overnight and then the next day we'd have power again here. This is the end of the line, and that's usually the line that catches the most abuse.

M. Janak: We have all good neighbors around here, and as soon as something like that happens, we all call each other to see if everyone has power or if everyone is out, and one of us gets on the phone and calls it in, and it gets fixed real quick.

Ingram: Anything else you'd like to add?

J. Janak: Yes, I'd like to say something about line construction as it occurred in the late thirties. I remember when it was constructed. It wasn't done by machinery; that was done by handwork—digging the holes. These laborers would come by, and you could get a job digging holes for the REA, and they'd get forty to fifty cents a hole. Now, those holes were seven-foot deep. If the hole had rock stratas, they'd get seventy-five cents a hole. You earned your money when you dug one of those. That was all hard labor then. Electric rate amounted to about \$2.25 for 15 kilowatts. Our first month's usage, we used 18 kilowatts, so it kind of exceeded that 15 KWK a little bit. We had a light bill of about \$2.50. The wiring system for Delco 32-volt didn't qualify when REA came in; the house had to be rewired. We had an eight-room home, and to rewire that cost \$42, which was a lot of money at that time. It cost \$42 to rewire that home then—lights, plugs. How far would \$42 go today?

Ingram: It might just pay one month's bill. We're on PEC [Pedernales Electric Cooperative] in San Marcos, and that might pay a fourth of a bill.

J. Janak: This gasoline for that 32-volt system probably burned a gallon a day, and that would—gasoline was nine cents a gallon then—so we had nine cents a day for fuel. If you multiply that

by thirty days, you'd have \$2.70 for gasoline for a month. So it paid for that electricity. Two and a quarter for 15 kilowatts. And, on this 32-volt system, you'd have to have a certain amount of batteries to amount to 32 volts. And those batteries didn't last long, I think maybe they'd last a year or two, and then you had to replace them. Of course, we could replace them with a car battery then. The Delco batteries were a bigger battery, but when one of those went out, we'd replace them with a car battery. Car batteries were about \$3.50 at that time. Western Auto had a six-month car battery for \$1.75. That was the cheapest car battery I ever saw. If you talk to the Western Auto people, the dealers now don't even remember that. They don't know anything about a six-month battery for a \$1.75. But most of those batteries had a year guarantee or a year and a half. We used an electric iron on this Delco 32-volt system. I guess the electric iron had probably 1500 watts at least or 1200 watts. And when you put that load on the 32-volt system, your lights went down to not more than a candle light. So you had to go outside and start the 32-volt system. As long as you were ironing, you had to run the 32-volt system to generate power because your storage batteries didn't have that much current to run that iron. So, generally every evening that 32-volt plant had to run for maybe three or four hours.

Every June, they'd have an annual picnic on the Guadalupe River bottom, in the early forties. The GVEC office was in Cost then; that's southwest of Gonzales. They'd have their annual membership picnic, and Daddy would always say we're going. He was all for it. That was a noon meal with a meeting afterward, and by sundown we were back home. We had a '36 Chevrolet car at this time. I remember that one time we had a field of cotton to chop, we didn't need but about two hours of chopping to finish, but Daddy said, "No, we'll go to the picnic!" As we were going by that field, we said in Czech, "*Rust, Travxckd Rust, mi jedem na picnic*"—"Grow grass grow, we're going on a picnic." The next day, it started raining and raining and raining, and I guess it rained for about a week, and when we got into that cotton to chip it, it took us a week to clean it up, and we could have done it in two hours before that picnic. So, we never said no more, "grow grass grow, we want to go on a picnic." We looked forward to those picnics always.

In the later years, as GVEC grew bigger and the membership grew bigger, the office was moved to Gonzales, the main office. That first refrigerator we bought had a seven-watt violet florescent-type light in it that was made to kill bacteria and keep the odor down in the refrigerator. That was an old Kelvinator refrigerator. What it cost, I don't remember; I wouldn't know. About in '43 and '44, we remodeled the home and the next appliance was an electric stove and a thirty-gallon water heater. A forty-eight-inch circular fan was installed in the attic. That would have been our air conditioner then.

Ingram: When did you get your first air conditioner?

J. Janak: We built our home in '67, and in '67 we went to an all-electric home and put in the air conditioner. We still have the same unit today. That's twenty one years ago. I talked with some of the employees at GVEC, and I asked if it would be economical to replace that air conditioner, and he said he could sell me an air conditioner that would pay for itself in three years' time on

the energy it would save; on the energy it would save, it would pay for itself. So, that goes to show the efficiency that's coming in in the appliances and everything. That's our next project, to replace this air conditioner.

M. Janak: You talked about some of the new services that GVEC may offer in the near future earlier. Another service was discussed last night at our panel membership meeting. Mr. Hines mentioned that they're also helping the people by watching out for crime that is happening out in the county. I don't know if you have heard anything about this, but he said that their men are out in the country, so many of them and so much of the time, that they know almost every car that belong to the homes and they know which people are home and which people are not. He mentioned two cases last night where two homes were ripped off while the owners were away on their job during the daytime. So, he says they are making a greater effort now. They're telling all of their employees that go out into the country and work at their jobs, as they're doing their own work they're also keeping an eye out for crime. We thought that was very brave, crime stoppers. That's one of the new programs that they have.

J. Janak: If we can instruct our members to watch each other's place, that's where we will all benefit. It's not only saving electricity, we can save our property—each other's.

Ingram: I thank you very much for your time, and this has been a very rewarding experience for me. I hope it has been for you. Like I say, you'll be getting a transcription as soon as I can get it typed.

End of interview