

Interview with Mr. Alexander Lennie
By Vi and Gene Kowalchuk

- Q. Were you born in Alberta?
- A. Yes, Northwest Territories then.
- Q. Can you give us the year?
- A. 1897. I'll be 92 next month, on the 3rd of June.
- Q. When you say Northwest Territories, what area was that in?
- A. Around the Andrew area. That's where my folks were living then.
- Q. Now were your parents born in Alberta or Northwest Territories as well?
- A. My Dad was. My Mother was born in Prince Albert Saskatchewan.
- Q. How about your grandparents?
- A. My Grandfather, on my Father's side, was born in Scotland in 1835, I think.
- Q. And your Grandmother?
- A. Grandmother was born in York, what's now called Toronto.
- Q. So your family has been in Canada for a number of generations.
- A. Yes, except my Grandfather came from Scotland.
- Q. What made him come to Canada?
- A. Well, I suppose he did like a lot of other people did. He was a young boy, I think he was 12 years old when he came to Canada, working for the Hudson's Bay Company.
- Q. Oh, that's interesting. Can you tell us, did you know anything about his life with the Hudson's Bay Company?
- A. No, I don't, I don't know anything about his life then at all.
- Q. All right, have you lived in any other part of Canada before you came to Athabasca?
- A. No, not me. My folks, either. Mother and Dad were married in Prince Albert. Mother was born in Prince Albert, Dad was born in Fort Edmonton and they were married in Fort Edmonton, that's the way it was.
- Q. They were married in Fort Edmonton, did you say?
- A. Yes, they were.
- Q. Then what made you come to Athabasca?
- A. In 1930.
- Q. In 1930, and what brought you here?
- A. Free land, homesteads.
- Q. Land of opportunity, eh?
- A. Yes, yes.
- Q. So what did you get? A quarter of free land?
- A. We had a half section.
- Q. Oh, you got a half section.
- A. I had a quarter of homestead and a quarter of settlement. I was returned from the First World War.
- Q. Oh, I see, so anyone who fought in the First World War got their quarter?
- A. Got a quarter of land free, yes.
- Q. I imagine you had to meet certain requirements, though, right? Clearing and building?
- A. No, if you had a homestead. If you didn't have a homestead and just had that quarter, why you had to then. But I had a homestead, you see, and so I got the half section, I got them both together, one right alongside the other.

- Q. Where did you get married, Mr. Lennie? Did you meet your wife here? Did you meet Mrs. Lennie in Athabasca?
- A. No, I met her down east of Edmonton, Chipman.
- Q. Chipman, I see. And so were you married before you came here?
- A. Yes, I was married seven years when I came here.
- Q. Oh, I see. Did you have a family then?
- A. I had seven children when we moved here.
- Q. Oh, you already had seven children when you moved here. Did you have, how many altogether in your family?
- A. We had ten altogether.
- Q. Oh, wonderful big family.
- A. Yes, six boys, no six girls and four boys.
- Q. And Gordon is one of your boys.
- A. Yes, Gordon is one, yes.
- Q. Yes, I went to school with Gordon, you know.
- A. Oh, did you?
- Q. Yes, I did. We were in high school together so I know him quite well, yes. Besides the soldier settlement land that you got, the other quarter, how much did you pay for it? Did you have to pay anything at all?
- A. It was ten dollars for a homestead. We used to get a homestead for ten dollars and that's what I got, was a homestead and I took my soldier's grant right beside it on the same section.
- Q. Did you say you got a grant?
- A. Well, they called it a grant, soldier's grant.
- Q. But was it in the form of money or just the land?
- A. No, it was, well we could've got it in the form of money or we could take this quarter of land. I had one quarter already so I took the other, too.
- Q. So did you, was there any clearing on either one of those quarters?
- A. No, not a thing, there wasn't a stick cleared off, no buildings or nothing, I had to build them all.
- Q. Well, what did you do? Tell us about the first days that you spent here. I mean, you've got seven children, a wife, and no buildings, no nothing, tell us about those times.
- A. Well, our children was born at Tofield, five of them I guess, yes, five, we moved to Chipman. My wife's folks lived there at Chipman and land was pretty high around there then, you know, and not much money to buy it with. I had bought a quarter from the soldier settlement branch and so I took this half section side by side and we moved on it. There wasn't nothing on it, I had to do it all. So I come up here and I built the house, just a temporary house at the time.
- Q. Now, explain your temporary house, was it a little shack?
- A. It wasn't very big, you know, a log building and it was 30 feet long and 20 feet wide.
- Q. That's not very small, that's pretty big. That's 600 square feet. Did you build it alone?
- A. Yes, I built it alone. I didn't bring the family up until I had the house done except the roof. I had no roof yet and it was getting on to winter.
- Q. I see, so you left them back.
- A. So I left them down there till I got the house finished.
- Q. What did you have in that first house? What about beds, did you make your own beds?
- A. No, we had beds that were bought when we were on the farm at Chipman.

- A. And we had a new stove was bought at Chipman, new kitchen range. And we had a coal heater, they used to call it, just to burn coal in. And when we got here, it was no good cause there was no coal here, it was all wood. So I had to get a wood stove. So I got one of them airtights.
- Q. So how long before your family came then? When did your wife join you?
- A. I brought her up one day, I think we got here on about the 15th of November, somewhere around there.
- Q. 1930?
- A. 1930.
- Q. That was just during the Depression.
- A. Yes, just starting the Depression.
- Q. Tough time.
- A. Oh, I'll say we had tough times, boy!
- Q. Did you have your own cattle, cows?
- A. Yes, I had seven milk cows and some young stock, I don't remember how many it was.
- Q. Yes, and what other animals? Chickens, did you have any chickens?
- A. We had chickens.
- Q. Pigs?
- A. We had pigs. We brought two pigs to the homestead.
- Q. You must have some stories or some not so good memories about the Depression I imagine, eh?
- A. Yes, it was very hard.
- Q. How did the Depression affect you actually?
- A. Well, you see, you couldn't sell anything. The only thing we could sell really was wood. Cause there wasn't enough farming in the country here and there was no place to sell grain except to the other farmer, homestead or whatever out in the country.
- Q. Well even if you had sold anything, it wasn't worth very much.
- A. Oats, 15 cents a bushel. Wheat was 45 and barley 25.
- Q. When you say selling wood, was the Athabasca Power Plant wood fired?
- A. Yes, it did burn wood when it started up.
- Q. So this is what you mean by wood, it was cord wood for fire wood.
- A. Yes, it was cord wood, yes.
- Q. For the creamery also, maybe?
- A. Yes, for the creamery, too. They had the power plant, creamery did.
- Q. Union Hotel maybe as well?
- A. Yes, Union Hotel burned wood.
- Q. The hospital, the hospital did as well, did it not?
- A. Yes, the hospital burned wood.
- Q. How much would you get a cord?
- A. Two dollars a cord.
- Q. And was that poplar?
- A. That was poplar. Anything you could --
- Q. Tamarack?
- A. Tamarack was two and a half a cord.
- Q. Oh, it was a little higher.
- A. Yes, it was a little better wood.
- Q. Yes, better burning wood, wasn't it?
- A. Yes, better burning wood, yes, but tamarack was starting to play out about that time so went to poplar.

- Q. Yes, was that really your only source of income then?
- A. That was for three years before we got you know, some land cleared up, and could raise a little grain. I never sold grain because I just raised it for feed, and we always kept pigs, and milk cows.
- Q. Were you able to sell some pigs in the early thirties?
- A. Yea, they were about two dollars a piece for a pig.
- Q. Now, how? You would have to ship it?
- A. They used to had a truck in here, Jeff Coke and Elmer Luker.
- Q. Oh yes, now what would they charge you, would they pick up the hogs?
- A. Yes, they get coming right to your place and pick them up.
- Q. And what would they charge you for?
- A. Two dollars for a hundred pounds.
- Q. That didn't leave you very much?
- A. No, that didn't leave very much.
- Q. Well how did you manage? You must have raised a big garden, lots of potatoes.
- A. Oh, we raised lots of potatoes and a big garden, my wife was a good gardener she just raised lots of garden.
- Q. Yes. Because after all you did have a large family to support?
- A. Yea, we had a big family to support but at the same time they helped with the garden too you know.
- Q. Yes. Yes.
- A. And then we had lots of blueberries them days.
- Q. Well there were a lot of many kinds of berries, weren't there?
- A. Yea, and we picked berries and sell the berries.
- Q. Oh, you sold the berries as well?
- A. Yes, yea.
- Q. How much would you get a pound?
- A. Well I sold them as low as three cents a pound, but the average was about five.
- Q. Is that right?
- A. Ten cents would be a unbelievably high, you get that maybe at the start of the season, you know?
- Q. But the price certainly increased after that because I remember when we were kids when we used to go picking blueberries, and we would bring them into Athabasca, but I'm sure we got around thirty-five, forty, even forty-five cents a pail.
- A. Oh yes, it did later on, yes.
- Q. But that was in the forties.
- A. Yes. But in the thirties we didn't get that.
- Q. No, but then every bit helped, didn't it?
- A. Oh yes, every bit helped you know?
- Q. Yes.
- A. I think I spend three years there that I never had a penny of cash. We'd all trade and barter, you know?
- Q. Really? So there was a lot of that trading and bartering back and forth in those days?
- A. Oh yes.
- Q. Who were some of your neighbors?
- A. Well, do you know the Sauers, any of the Sauers?

- Q. Yes.
- A. Well they're my closest neighbors, they're my cousins.
- Q. Oh, they're your cousins?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Matt and George?
- A. George and Matt and Frank, and--
- Q. Yes.
- A. Tim, they're all cousins, our mothers were sisters.
- Q. Oh, I didn't know that. I see, well, who else now would have been in that? Is that what you call the Ferguson area?
- A. Ferguson area, when we moved in there that fall, there was - start from the - along the south of the old trail road south of where the road is now. Let's see, who's in there?
- Q. Are you talking about the Overaker corner there?
- A. Yes, the Overaker corner and then south. That's where the old trail used to go.
- Q. We call that Ferguson Road now.
- A. Ferguson Road, Ferguson was on the north end of it, and he was the first homesteader in there, so they called the district after him, and the school, we had a school there and we called it Ferguson School.
- Q. Oh, he was one of the first settlers?
- A. The first settlers in Athabasca.
- Q. Now when you say trail, why do you say trail, where did that trail come from?
- A. Pardon?
- Q. Where did that trail when you talked about trail--
- A. Like I say, Ferguson was on the north end of it up by the base line there, and then south down through, first you come through my brothers, two brothers had homesteads there, and John Berg and Donald Booth, then it went on south and come to a - there was a MacDonald there one time, he didn't stay only two years.
- Q. So when you talk about the trail, you're just talking about a road that went past some of the settlers.
- A. Yes, a road going through the bush. There was no road, that's why we called it a trail because there was really, you know, just to cut a road through and you used it.
- Q. Who cut the trail? You people yourselves?
- A. Us people ourselves.
- Q. So you really, could you use horses and wagon or sleigh? Or was it just horseback that you drove down that trail?
- A. Oh no, we went on horseback, or wagon, sleigh, whatever.
- Q. You could go through with a wagon?
- A. Yes. Ferguson up at the north end there, he had an old Model T when he come in there. He used to drive up and down.
- Q. Oh, did he? So how many acres did you clear that first year, Mr. Lennie?
- A. First year I could clear five.
- Q. Now tell us how you went about clearing. Was it all by hand?
- A. All by hand with an axe and a grub-hoe.
- Q. What did the grub-hoe, I'm not sure--
- A. It had a long handle on like an axe and it had a hoe, you know what a hoe is, well this was a heavy hoe. We called it a grub-hoe and used it for grubbing out roots and stuff.

- Q. Well, actually, the bigger trees, you didn't chop them down. With the grub-hoe you exposed the roots, chopped them off -
- A. Yes, exposed the roots and chopped them off and then sometimes they stand there and the wind would blow them down.
- Q. You didn't use horses and a chain to knock them down?
- A. Oh, I did some, the smaller ones.
- Q. And what was your first crop, did you plant a crop then as soon as -
- A. It was all oats.
- Q. Now, getting ahead of myself a little, once you got these roots and what-not picked or cleared, did you, or how did you plow it?
- A. Well, when I got the bush off and roots and stuff cut off, then we had what they call a brake plow, was a special plow for - had a long mow-board, what they call a mow-board on the plow. It's a thing that turns the land over.
- Q. So it was a breaking plow.
- A. Yes, it was a breaking plow.
- Q. One horse, two horses pulling?
- A. No, they had to have two or four mostly.
- Q. And then you had to pick roots?
- A. We were picking roots and rocks and whatever, and then we'd disk it with a disk, a horse disk, and work it up, till it up to ready for seed bed.
- Q. Did you have harrows, as well?
- A. Yes, we had harrows, yes. That's all the machinery there was in them days, a brake plow and stubble plow, and disk and harrows, and a seed drill.
- Q. I see. When you talk about the stubble plow, now -
- A. That was, you used that the second year for plowing because it would turn it over, while a brake plow would just go through and make kind of like a ditch.
- Q. Oh, so once you put a crop in, then you could use a stubble plow?
- A. Yes, after you had a crop in, then you used a stubble plow.
- Q. What was your first crop?
- A. I generally had oats mostly, sometimes I'd sow wheat but mostly oats.
- Q. Well, how did you get it off if that was the only machinery you had?
- A. Oh, I had an old binder. I used to cut it with a mower and rake it, you know, and stack it and just feed it out of the stack that way. Never threshed it.
- Q. Oh, you didn't even thresh it at first?
- A. No.
- Q. So once you got your threshing machine -
- A. Yes, we got a binder and started binding it and threshing it.
- Q. So how many acres the years after that, a little more each year?
- A. A little more each year. I don't remember just how many each year, sometimes more, sometimes less.
- Q. Did you have, was it heavy timber there?
- A. Oh yes, around my place it was heavy.
- Q. So did you eventually clear your whole quarter, both your quarters?
- A. Yes, I eventually did but I finally ended up with a cat.
- Q. With a cat. That was in later years, of course.
- A. Yes, in later years. That was about in, I don't know, '40, '47 I think, or '48. The first time I got a cat to clear land.

- Q. I see, what would they have charged you in those years, in the late '40s? What would they have charged you to clear an acre of land? Or was it by the hour?
- A. By the hour, and I paid I think it was around about \$15 an hour, something like that.
- Q. I remember the name Gleishman, I believe he had a cat and he did quite a bit of custom work.
- A. Yes, he did a lot of that work. He had three cats, you see.
- Q. Now, cats like that charge close to a \$100 an hour. So, I imagine your children were growing up and helping you with your work.
- A. Oh yes, as they got older and they got old enough, they went out working. But I managed to put them all through Grade 9.
- Q. Did you? So they went to Ferguson School then.
- A. Yes, that was the first thing when I got my homestead, I says, I'm gonna have a school first thing, so my children can get to school. Well, two of them went to school at Tofield and they had two years, I think, down there and then they come up here and then there was a year without a school. So we got the school built.
- Q. Did you help build the school?
- A. I was the main builder.
- Q. But, of course, it probably was a log building, too, wasn't it?
- A. Yes, it was a log building. We had, there was two guys lived west of me, I don't know if you knew Fodchuks in Athabasca, Russell, and you know Steve. Well, they were out there on their homesteads, and I got Russell and Steve to hue the logs and that paid off their taxes that way.
- Q. Oh, I see. Who was your first teacher there?
- A. A fellow by the name of Amber Ross. He came from Lamont. His Dad was a minister, a United minister down there. So, I knew him pretty well. So, when I moved up here, I kept in touch with him and I told him we were gonna build and start this new school district up here, so he brought his boy up and we got him for a teacher.
- Q. That school must've closed in the '40s or was it in the '50s already?
- A. Late '30s. Oh, when it closed, in the late '40s, yes, I think so, late '40s, somewhere around there, yes.
- Q. So how many of your children came to Athabasca, attended school in Athabasca?
- A. Well, there was seven of them. But the last two are Alice and Gordon what came there. I was working in town, working in the hotel, carpenter there on the hotel, and we moved into town for a year.
- Q. Oh, did you? The whole family?
- A. Yes, the whole family. I rented a house in town and we moved right in. And Sharon went to school there, Gordon and Alice went to school there, too, to take their Grade eleven.
- Q. Is Gordon your youngest child?
- A. No, I have three younger than him. Gordon, and then Diane, she's a nurse, and Rodney, he's steam engineer, he works in Rocky Mountain House, and Sheila, she's Bill Kostiw's wife.
- Q. Oh, I see, yes, oh, then Sheila was your youngest child.
- A. Yes, she's the youngest, yes.
- Q. Oh, of course, yes, yes, I know now who you're speaking of. I'm just going to go back a little bit now. My husband, Gene, has been talking to me about the fact that you were in World War 1, and I wanted you to tell us a little bit about your experiences.

- A. I don't care to talk about it, no, not over there, no.
- Q. Is that right?
- A. I just never got over that and I don't care to talk about it.
- Q. Very good, very good, Mr. Lennie, we can certainly appreciate that.
- A. I've seen too much misery and suffering.
- Q. I could imagine. None of your children, none of your sons went overseas -
- A. They were in the second war, the two oldest boys. Lester was killed over there.
- Q. One of your boys was -
- A. One of my boys, yes. Lester, my second boy.
- Q. Oh well, I can understand why you wouldn't want to be talking about wars. I was going to ask you also, do you live, Mrs. Lennie still lives on your home place. Does Mrs. Lennie still live on your home place?
- A. Oh yes, oh yes, she lived till 1950.
- Q. I mean Mrs. Overacker, your daughter, I'm mixed up, that's right. Mrs. Overacker is your daughter. Is that your home place there?
- A. Yes, it's part of it. I gave the school district three acres to build a school on, and that's where she's living now, in that old schoolhouse.
- Q. The rest of that farm was yours then.
- A. Yes, the rest of it was mine. I had that and a quarter west of it.
- Q. That's pretty good land there.
- A. That's good land. That west quarter I had was just a dandy quarter. There was no stones and not too many roots when I cleaned it. Was trees on it but they were far apart, kinda open-like.
- Q. Tell me, how did you get to town because that road that goes there now, that pavement, it wasn't there in 1930?
- A. The first time that we went to Athabasca after we moved there in the fall, not the first time, but I remember in the spring, first time in the spring after it thawed out, you know, there was no road. Mrs. and I and more brothers were going to town and, oh, the road was bad.
- Q. Well, it was mostly swamp. Which way did you go, did you go through Colinton?
- A. It was all swamp. At one time, we had to go through Colinton. Well, I made one trip around by Colinton. But I never made that again.
- Q. When did you get your first car, Mr. Lennie?
- A. Our first car? Well, the first car I had on the homestead, I had one in Tofield I bought in 1927, I guess, and here I got my first in '45.
- Q. I see, did you have a truck before that for the farm?
- A. This was a truck. I didn't have nothing before that, just horses.
- Q. Let's just go back to the schools for a little while. Did you have, do you remember any of the activities or social functions that they carried on in the school at that time?
- A. Well, we used to have dances and we'd have box socials, and sometimes we'd have a picnic and we'd have a dance afterwards.
- Q. Meetings, I suppose the school was used for meetings as well?
- A. Oh yes, used for meetings and they used it for church. You wouldn't know him, I guess, Archdeacon Little, he used to come out there. He was the one started the services there and prayers.
- Q. Oh, of course we know him. You people never did have a church there, did you?
- A. No, we talked about building one one time and then we'd of had to go into quite a bit of debt and there was only two or three families there and -

Q. Well, times were hard then.

A. Times were hard.

Q. But people had enjoyed themselves when they got together, didn't they?

A. Oh, yes. I know my family, they all enjoyed it. They all look back on it now. At the time we thought it was hard, you know, but you look back on it and know all the good times we did have, why, it kinda offsets the bad times.

Q. It was quite an adventure alright, wasn't it? Did you build a new house, after you built the little one?

A. Yes, I built the old homestead house and we lived in it. Besides doing all the farm work and stuff, it took me about two years to build that house. It was a log house and I had to saw, kind of sawed off, you know, on each side, and I built the new house like that.

Q. How did you get the sides cut off like that, with one of those buzz saws?

A. Big saw mill.

Q. Where did you take the logs?

A. I had them done right there. Sawmill coming through, sawing lumber there and so I had them move over and do my logs for me.

Q. Who was the fellow that -

A. Calvert, Herb Calvert.

Q. Would that be a relation to Floyd Calvert?

A. He was a brother to Floyd.

Q. So after two years of building, working on that house, I guess you just didn't have the time to spend.

A. I didn't have the time to quit. I was farming and all the other work that goes on at the farm, you know, and trying to build this house at the same time. It took me two years before I got it done.

Q. Where would you have to buy windows and doors?

A. I bought them from Fowlers in Athabasca.

Q. Other than that, what else would you have had to buy for your house? Shingles?

A. The shingles I got homemade, Russell Kostik, he had a shingle mill and he made them.

Q. He had a shingle mill? I've never heard of a shingle mill.

A. Oh yes, he had a good one. He made good shingles, darn good shingles.

Q. What did he make them out of, what type of -

A. Any kind of wood. I got mine made out of spruce.

Q. What did he charge you for the shingles?

A. Two dollars a pound, I think.

Q. So then after you moved in, when did you get your first radio, for example?

A. Well, I got that the year I moved in. No, I got it before we moved in, in the old homestead when I bought the first radio. I don't know just what year that was now.

Q. Probably in the late '30s, eh?

A. It would be late thirties, or more likely, in the '40s.

Q. And that I suppose you purchased in Athabasca as well, eh?

A. No, we sent to Eaton's for that.

Q. Did you buy a lot of things through the Eaton's catalogue?

A. Oh yes. My wife wouldn't buy anything in Athabasca if she could get it in Eaton's. She'd always send a mail order.

Q. I suppose everything from clothing to rubber boots to bedding.

- Q. What would you have bought in Athabasca, your groceries?
- A. Bought my groceries and we bought some clothing there, of course, and sometimes we didn't have the cash to send away but I could take some wood to town and trade it off for clothing, you know, at the stores in town.
- Q. They would do that, eh?
- A. Yes, they would.
- Q. Would they allow you to charge up groceries?
- A. Oh yes, they were good that way. Some of them were, as long as you kept your note clean.
- Q. That means at the end of the month you had to pay?
- A. No, generally in the fall after harvest.
- Q. Where did Mrs. Lennie get her first washing machine?
- A. That was from Eaton's.
- Q. Well how did they ship that, by train?
- A. They shipped it by freight on the train and shipped it to Athabasca.
- Q. What would it cost you to, what would you have to pay, would Eaton's pay for it or did you pay the freight?
- A. No, Eaton's paid to deliver it.
- Q. Must've been a gasoline motor on it?
- A. Yes, I'll tell you a little story about that gasoline engine. We had some sheep, you know, and the mother to this little lamb had died so we raised him on a bottle, and we always kept him in the house. In a box there in the house. When it got on in the summer time and he was jumping around and around, and he'd run outside and he'd come back in. And the Mrs. she wanted to wash clothes one day and she put all the clothes in a pile, laying there, and he hid in there. So she started the gasoline motor on, boy! that lamb went out of there. He never come back.
- Q. You talked about having several children when you came to Athabasca. Were they born at home or were they born in the hospital?
- A. Some of them were born in the hospital and two of them were born at home.
- Q. Did you have a midwife?
- A. No, a doctor used to come out, Dr. Law from Tofield.
- Q. Oh, you had the other doctor come.
- A. Yes, he'd come out from Tofield.
- Q. Well, why wouldn't you have had Dr. Myer?
- A. Well that was up here. This was at Tofield.
- Q. Oh, but I'm saying once you came to Athabasca.
- A. Yes, I had, Myers was here after I come to Athabasca, he was the only doctor here.
- Q. So then he would come up to the home, would he?
- A. Yes, Law used to come up and take care of them right there in the house.
- Q. Did you have any problems with illnesses or anybody get hurt that you had to take them to the doctors in Athabasca?
- A. Well, I had my eye poked out first thing.
- Q. Oh yes, how did that happen?
- A. Driving a team of horses through the bush. This willow caught on part of the harness, you know, and darn thing broke off and flew back and went right in my eye.
- Q. Nothing they could do to save the eye?
- A. Nothing. Took it right out.
- Q. Right here in Athabasca?
- A. That was out on the homestead there.

Q. Did you have to come into Athabasca?

A. I came to Athabasca and I spent, that's when Dr. Turnbull was here, and he kept me there for a week and then they let me go home. He thought it was going to get better but I told him later on that eye will never get better, I don't think there's anything there to get better. I think that eye's all outta there because it was swollen so bad you couldn't tell. So this Saturday morning I told Mom, I says, why we didn't have money enough to run to Edmonton. I took every darn cent we had in the house when I went and I went to Edmonton and I got in there Saturday morning. No, it was Friday morning cause Saturday morning they did the operation and cleaned it up.

Q. But as far as the children were concerned, no bad illnesses or anything?

A. No. They had no bad illnesses.

Q. Other than I suppose the regular measles and chicken pox?

A. Regular measles and mumps and all that stuff and bad colds.

Q. What did you do for the kids when they were ill like that with colds and so on? Did you have any good -

A. We had our own remedies. One of them was electric oil. Electric oil would cure anything as far as my wife was concerned. They still had it down here in the drugstore about five years ago. I don't know if they have it there yet or not.

Q. Well, how would they take it?

A. You drank it, or you rubbed it on or whatever.

Q. I've never heard of it.

A. Well, it's the stickiest darn stuff, you know. It was in a little bottle. That was all our main medicine mostly. Another thing was cranberries. Take the juice and get them to drink it, you know.

Q. Any others that you can think of?

A. They had this pain killer, they called it, and it was just for colds. It was strong, I don't know what was in it, I think it had a lot of whisky in it.

Q. Did anybody around there make whisky?

A. Oh, there was lots of it, yes.

Q. But then people didn't drink at dances or anything -

A. Oh no, no. Just in their own homes.

Q. You talked about working in town, doing some building. Did you earn money in any other way, did you do any trapping, for example?

A. Oh, I've trapped some, yes. Not a great deal but I have. Rats and weasels and -

Q. What would a muskrat bring you in the '30s?

A. About two dollars, it wasn't a bad price in them days.

Q. Well I should say, that's quite a lot actually.

A. We was gettin darned low on flour and bread and stuff, and I had this little collie dog. She was a good cattle dog, I never thought she was good for hunting, you know, but I went out hunting squirrels this afternoon and she come along with me. And when I was going back, we come over this old beaver dam, there was all water in it, and she come over through the bush there and by god she smelled around the ground there, and pretty soon started digging. I says, what the heck is the matter with you? what are you digging there for? I tried to coax her home, it wasn't very far from the house. So I went over and had supper and by golly she was still barking and digging down there. I went back down and took an axe with me and she was just about out of sight. She'd dug in this beaver dam so far

you couldn't hardly see her. So I got her outta there and I went at it with the grub hoe and the axe and dug it out. And I found this rat den down there. So I was pretty lucky, I got 15 rats outta that den there. If that dog hadn't been down there, I'd never knew they were there. And they were two dollars apiece then.

Q. That was good. You just trapped mostly around your own -

A. Yes, just around - I never was a trapper out in the bush, you know. Just around once in a while trapping rats back north there in the spring.

Q. Were you a moose hunter at all, or a deer hunter?

A. Oh yes, I was a moose hunter and a deer hunter.

Q. You almost had to do that to have enough, provide enough meat for your family.

A. Sure, I had to. I went out one morning, Russell Kostik who had a shingle mill, he was working out there and I come back that evening, and he said, do you want to get some meat? And I says, you darned rights I need some meat. Well, he says, I seen one big old bull moose up here tonight come over the road. So if you wanna go with me in the morning, you can ride up with me that far and you can get off the sleigh and walk. So I went in the morning and come up there and I just got off the sleigh and went 50 yards when this old moose jumped up. I was closer to him than I thought I was. He jumped up and he run and I watched him through the bush and he stopped. So I took it pretty quiet around there and before I got to him, I happened to look up and here was a moose looking straight in my face. Set me back a little bit, boy! I pulled up the old rifle and I knocked that one down. And I went to go and cut his throat and here there was two more standing there. So I got all three of them. So we had meat then.

Q. What did you do with the meat?

A. The Mrs. used to can it in jars, and then I would slice up a lot of it and dry it and smoke it. When that got dry, why it was kept forever.

Q. Now when you say dried, do you mean just in the sun? or in the oven?

A. No, no, just in the sun, outside where the air got at it.

Q. And smoking it, how did you go about smoking it?

A. Hang it up. I made a canvas stand and put a lot of little rods around on it, and I'd build a smoke down in the center of this thing and it would all go through the meat, you see.

Q. How long would you smoke that meat?

A. Oh, it took about three days. I never smoked it all at one time. Smoke it a little bit for a day or two and let it rest a while, that was better meat.

Q. Did you ever take wheat into town to be ground into flour?

A. Yes, I've done that, yes. Used to be two dollars a hundred. Here they just waste it, they didn't have the real flour mills. They didn't do a very good job of it. Bran was, a lot of flour in it, so we used to use that bran for porridge in the morning. But that's the thing we used to do down in Tofield. The big flour mill at Mundare, we always took wheat there in the fall, get a load ground up at one time.

Q. I thought Mundare was just famous for kubassa, Mr. Lennie? But they ground flour there too, eh? What would your taxes have been in those days in the early '30s?

A. Here? About ten dollars a quarter, I think it was.

Q. Would somebody come around and collect those or would you have to come in to Athabasca?

- A. They had to pay it to the secretary at the school. He collected the taxes.
- Q. That helped pay the teacher, no doubt. Where did you get your first television, Mr. Lennie?
- A. First television I bought - my memory's gettin bad, I don't know - we were in Edmonton, '56 I think it was.
- Q. Did you say you were in Edmonton?
- A. Yes, we moved to Edmonton. I got a job at Fort Saskatchewan, building on that bridge there. So we moved into Edmonton and had Diane and Gordon, and Sheila was going to school yet then. Diane was in Grade 12, she finished that year. I was head carpenter on that job.
- Q. Were you? Well, are you actually a carpenter by trade?
- A. Yes, yes, I was.
- Q. I see. What other things did you build? Did you build other buildings in Athabasca?
- A. Oh yes. I worked on the hotel in Athabasca and I worked on the bridge. When they built the bridge, I was head carpenter there.
- Q. Here in Athabasca? In the 1950s?
- A. Yes, yes. Then I worked on some houses around there. I built an addition on to the church hall out at Baptiste Lake where they have that, Anglicans have that church out there to have Sunday School and take kids out there on holidays in summer time.
- Q. You don't mean Camp Metawawin?
- A. That's it, yes, Camp Metawawin. They had a little building there so then they got me to build this addition on. I built all that hall and kitchen and everything.
- Q. Yes, I spent a summer there at camp when I was about 12. So when were you able to start sending or shipping cattle or hogs to market because there must've come a time when you didn't just need it for your own purposes or for food?
- A. I started, train used to take them there, one or two or whatever, and you ship them to Edmonton.
- Q. Did you ship it through the Creamery? Didn't they buy -
- A. No, they didn't buy beef or meat.
- Q. They did at one time, yes. Not only eggs and cream but they used to, you could ship hogs through them and I don't know about cattle, but I am sure, seems to me that I've read in the old Athabasca Echos. But you never shipped through them?
- A. No, I don't remember that.
- Q. Do you remember a fellow by the name of Jimmy Service?
- A. Jimmy Service, yes. He used to haul for me.
- Q. Was it livestock or grain?
- A. Livestock.
- Q. Wasn't there somebody by the name of Shewbridge as well?
- A. Shewbridge, ya.
- Q. But he had an insurance agency, didn't he?
- A. Insurance agency and real estate office.
- Q. He didn't have trucking, Shewbridge?
- A. No, they didn't have trucking, just real estate, ya.
- Q. I'm going to just go back a little bit. Can you tell anything funny that happened, anything unusual that happened while you were home sitting out there, Mr. Lennie? Any incidents that you can recall?

- A. Well, let's see now.
- Q. That's something you'd have to think about, I imagine, eh?
- A. Yes.
- Q. I suppose people just worked so hard and kind of kept their noses to the grindstone.
- A. Yes, yes, kept their noses to the grindstone.
- Q. Have you ever flown, Mr. Lennie?
- A. Oh yes. I've been in airplanes.
- Q. Have you travelled quite a lot?
- A. Well no, not a great deal but some.
- Q. Do you enjoy your television?
- A. Oh yes. I enjoyed the plane. I generally fly to BC cause I have two daughters at Cranbrook. I go to Edmonton and take a plane from there and fly to Cranbrook.
- Q. Did you take part in any organizations or - ?
- A. Well, I was on the school board as long as I lived out there.
- Q. In what capacity?
- A. I was the chairman.
- Q. So what were your duties as chairman?
- A. Set a school budget and stuff, you know. Hire and fire the teacher, make sure the wood was there, pay for it.
- Q. Who usually did the janitor work?
- A. First few years I was there, we didn't have no janitor, teacher did the janitor work.
- Q. Oh, the teacher started the fires in the winter. Well, where did the teacher stay? Was there a teacherage?
- A. One year we had this one teacher, she boarded right in the school. I partitioned off part of the school corner for her, and she slept over at our place but she ate her meals over at the school.
- Q. You never actually had a teacherage there then.
- A. In later years, yes, after they formed the big school district. Then we got the teacherage.
- Q. Now when you say the big school district, that means what?
- A. That's a school division.
- Q. Before that you were in what they called Nelson - ?
- A. No, we were just outside Nelson.
- Q. You were in the Local Improvement District?
- A. Yes, L.I.D. till they formed the county.
- Q. And that was in 1959.
- A. Yes, something like that, yes.
- Q. So other than the school chairman, what other organizations?
- A. I used to take part in the church and any other organizations, they generally stuck me into it.
- Q. How about United Farmers?
- A. No, I never joined United Farmers. I never had enough grain and stuff to sell.
- Q. Did you expand into cattle rather than grain farming?
- A. Yes, I really liked cattle best, yes. I was always a cattle man.
- Q. When did you actually retire, Mr. Lennie?
- A. When I moved to Edmonton in the '50s there. Well, I quit farming before that, it was in '50 when I really quit farming. 1950, I think it was.

- Q. So most of your family isn't here anymore, not in Athabasca, eh? Gordon is here and -?
- A. Gordon and Dorothy, and Sheila's in Rochester.
- Q. And the rest of them are all over.
- A. Yes, we got four in Edmonton, two in Cranbrook, and two in Rocky Mountain House.
- Q. So they're all in Alberta.
- A. All but Cranbrook.
- Q. I should've asked you about when you got married, what kind of wedding you had. Weddings were pretty simple in those days, eh?
- A. It was a very simple wedding. We got married in my wife's parents' home, and we had a big wedding dance in my parents' home that night.
- Q. I suppose the meal was just prepared by your - ?
- A. Prepared by the local ladies.
- Q. And you started out with just a minimum amount of money, I suppose.
- A. I think I had seven dollars after the wedding was over. I had been baching you see, and I had this house to move into. I had a few groceries in there to start out with.
- Q. But everybody seemed to make out okay and prosper.
- A. Everybody made out okay and prospered and seemed to enjoy life to its fullest. They had more time then than they do now.
- Q. Yes, it seemed like it was nothing to hitch up the team on a Sunday after-noon and go off for the day.
- A. Sure, go out for the day. You don't have that time any more even if they got cars to travel with. It's a shame that people don't take time to live. I know Frances Overacker and Wilfred, they got them two children, well, they have no time to themselves. Sunday, any day, they're out playing ball. Driving the kids around, playing ball. I come out there the other day and Frances and Wilfred just come home from Barrhead. They'd been out to a ballgame out there. I don't know, it seems ridiculous to go to Barrhead to play ball.
- Q. But we're going farther and farther afield all the time.
- A. That's right. Faster and faster cars.
- Q. You know, we stuck pretty close to home in our own areas when we were young and now our kids just seem to be going farther and farther. I don't know if the families are as close any more. They seem to be just going off in every direction all the time. What, for example, would you do with your family in the old days?
- A. We'd go visit some of the neighbors or something like that. Maybe go out picking berries.
- Q. Did you play cards?
- A. Yes, we played cards in the evenings.
- Q. Did you ever have surprise parties?
- A. Card parties? Yes, we had lots of them out there at Ferguson. Crib parties.
- Q. Yes, I guess they were the good old days, weren't they?
- A. Yes. They were to me, anyway.
- Q. Our daughter was just looking at some of the things I wrote in my story that I'm writing about my family and life on the farm. She said, I don't think our lives will be quite as interesting as yours.

- A. I remember one year my horses all died and I had a team of oxen. I went to town, had to go to town for something, groceries and stuff. The roads were bad, and you know I was gone a week to make that trip. Sheila, our youngest girl, who never rode my horse hardly, and I was telling her about this trip with these oxen. What did you do it for, Dad? I says, To put some flour in your belly.
- Q. Well, how did you manage if you were gone for a week?
- A. Oh, my family was good. They worked on the farm and kept-- it was in the spring of the year and I wasn't doing any farming yet. I camped out alongside the road. I had my own grub with me.
- Q. What would you have taken along for grub then?
- A. Dried meat and bread and butter, few potatoes, and milk.
- Q. When you got to Athabasca, did you stay in town at all overnight?
- A. Overnight, I stayed one night and next day I started for home again.
- Q. Did you stay at the hotel?
- A. No, no, couldn't afford that even if it was cheap. No, I had my own blankets and I slept right on the ground.
- Q. Well, there was an old livery barn, you didn't park your two oxen there?
- A. No. Another thing was that darn hill to climb, east hill. Went straight up that hill, the road did. Wasn't cut down yet then, like it is now. They were steers raised right on the farm.
- Q. I see, they were fairly tame then. But still, you had to harness them up.
- A. Oh yes, it's nothing to breaking oxen, though, you put a harness on them. The main thing is to get them to go.
- Q. They were easier than horses, then?
- A. Oh yes.
- Q. But the thing was to get them moving, eh? That's why the trip took you so long, eh?
- A. Sure, that's why it took so long because they were so slow. But they were powerful, boy! Oh, they were powerful. I had a lot of good horses in my day but I never had any that could outpull a team of oxen.
- Q. Is that right? So did you use them at all on the farm for any farm work?
- A. I just had them for about two years. Yes, I used them for farm work. I don't know what but horses got some kind of disease and they just died every year. I'd go and buy another one and that one would get sick and die. They used to call it swamp fever, whatever that was.
- Q. Where would you buy your horses?
- A. Oh, around the country here.
- Q. I suppose you could always buy them from the neighbors, eh?
- A. Oh yes, if the neighbor had one to sell, I'd buy from him.
- Q. You had mentioned you had raised sheep for a while.
- A. Yes, I did have sheep.
- Q. Did you use the meat, as well?
- A. Oh yes, that's what I kept them for mostly.
- Q. They were kind of miserable animals to keep though, weren't they? I'm saying that from experience because my dad kept some for a few years. You had to have such a good fence to keep them in. Did they ever bloat on you?
- A. Oh yes. You heard of Dr. Bellows? Well, I used Dr. Bellows.
- Q. Yes. That seemed to fix them?
- A. That fixed them.

Q. The reason I ask is because my father had a special little mixture that he used to use. We used to make a mixture of milk and soapsuds, and we'd pour that down their throats. Dad said we had to keep them on the run for a while and that seemed to cure them for the most part. Occasionally we lost one, of course, and then he'd slaughter it for meat. But they were miserable little creatures. Did you shear the sheep yourself?

A. Yes.

Q. And did you sell the wool?

A. Sometimes, and the Mrs. always kept one fleece for herself. She'd card it and spin it.

Q. Who used to come around getting the wool? Was there a truck or did you hire somebody special to come and pick up the wool?

A. Oh, I used to ship mine to Edmonton, that Association, Sheep Growers Association. I joined that when I assumed I had something to sell. Because you couldn't get nothing for a sheep here in town. You were lucky to get four or five dollars, you know.

Q. Where did you get your sheep from originally?

A. I had sheep when we was down in Chipman and Tofield, but when I came to the homestead I sold them all off. I got started here, I don't know if you know this old Frenchman used to live east of Colinton - he's dead now - Biault. I took out some logs for him one time and traded them for sheep.

Q. Another trade, eh? I guess a lot of people did that in the old days. You almost had to when there was no money.

A. Well, you couldn't sell nothing for cash so you had to trade.

Q. Did you ever hire help for the farm? Did you ever have anyone working for you?

A. No. Just me and my family.

Q. Because I know some of the Indian people used to come by asking for work when I lived on the farm.

A. Oh yes, I did hire them one fall for stooking. It was the last fall I used a binder and I had them stooking.

Q. How many boys did you say you had?

A. Four. One was killed overseas and there's three here. Donald, Gordon, and Rodney.

Q. So there was lots of help there.

A. Yes. But Donald was the only one old enough and big enough to help me on the farm.

Q. What would you say is something very special you did in your life?

A. Being a cowboy, breaking horses.

Q. Really? You were a cowboy? In Alberta? Tell us about that.

A. Well, Dad had this big ranch. Generally kept about 500 head of cattle and 500 head of horses, and I started out working for him. He was quite a rider himself and so was his wife. So we were fooling around there one Sunday and roped this bronc. All right Alex, he says, climb aboard. That was my start.

Q. Boy, that was a dangerous thing I would think.

A. I rode quite a few of them after that. Broke them for him. I'd break them and he'd take them to Edmonton and sell them.

Q. Did he pay you for doing that?

A. Pay me? Oh yes, he paid me. Day wages, two dollars, it was part of my job.

- Q. Anything else that you look back on your life now and think that was kind of special or different? Which years were the best years of your life?
- A. Oh, I think from 17 to 25. I was good until I lost my eye. I was a pretty lucky man. I had good health practically all my life. I never had a really bad sickness till two years ago when they thought I had diabetes. They put me on diabetes for three years and then this year when I got hurt, and went to the hospital, I found out I never had diabetes. So I took all them needles and pills for nothing.
- Q. So from the time you were 17 to 25 -
- A. I was single and free and could do what I liked when I liked.
- Q. Did you wander about alot in those days?
- A. Well, I went overseas for one thing, two years. Then I come back but I didn't do too much travelling around. I'd maybe go away a hundred miles or so and get a job or something, maybe break a horse.
- Q. Where did you learn to do carpentry work?
- A. I learned that from an old carpenter after I come back from the army. He was a real carpenter and he learned me the trade.
- Q. What do you think about times today, Mr. Lennie?
- A. They're good, right now, I think. For the young people and for old people, too. Sure, couldn't have it any better. I sometimes wonder about these young fellows starting out in life, farmers, and going into all this debt. I often wonder if they'll ever get out of all that load.
- Q. Well, some of them don't. They're loosing their land.
- A. Loosing their land, that's what I was afraid of, you know. That's no good for the country.
- Q. No, it isn't, and it's particularly sad when people lose their family farms.
- A. Sure, lose your family farm and your home is gone and where do you go?
- Q. I think there're a few young people, not just farmers, that owe a lot of money.
- A. Sure, all young people are having a hard time.
- Q. But these young people seem to have money to buy boats and trailers and skidoos. What do you think about all this space exploration these days?
- A. Space exploration I think they should forget it. I think they're just spending and burning up a lot of money for nothing. What are they gonna prove? They claim to have landed on the moon, well, what good has it done?
- Q. Well, maybe they feel that some day this planet will not be, we may not be able to live on it and may have to go into space to survive.
- A. Well, that may be something, I don't know.
- Q. Thank you very much, Mr. Lennie. I think we'll close unless you have anything else that you'd like to add? Have you any old photographs?
- A. I don't know. I think Sheila's got all them.
- Q. We have a camera at the archives where we take a picture of your picture, and we'd like to put them in the archives to preserve them. I suppose I could talk to Sheila.
- A. Yes, I'm pretty sure she's got the pictures. Talk to her about it anyway, and she'll have an idea a little more.
- Q. Okay, thank you ever so much Mr. Lennie, this was very interesting.
- A. I'm sure you're welcome.