V. Kowalchuk

SUMMARY

TAPE INTERVIEW with TOM GORMAN

SEPTEMBER 1985

Chicken ✓

Vi Kowalchuk

The first threshing machines had no blowers -- straw had to be forked away from behind the machine. Much of the threshing was done as stack-threshing in the 20's. Since a community only had one machine, that farmer would do his threshing first, then moved from farmer to farmer far into the winter, sometimes threshing as late as February. No one had many acres in those days, but while waiting for the thresher,farmers put their grain bundles into stacks.

Tom Gorman recalls threshing at 40°F(below). Moving the thresher was difficult too because of the snow.

One morning his father started their tractor and burned out the connecting rod. He was unable to fix it so he drove into town with a team of horses to get Ed Schaffrick. He put on a new bearing and stated it up. With the tractor in working order Mr. Gorman drove Ed back to town. Upon returning home next morning, he tried to start the tractor, but to no avail, the bearing was too tight and he had to put in some more shims before getting started and on his way to the next farmer's place.

Threshing was done for 4¢/bushel for wheat and 2¢/bushel for oats. Tom says that the most wheat threshed in one day with that "outfit" was at Andrew Kawulok's--1000 bushels. This was in the late 1920's, probably 1929.

Farmers had a number of ways to supplement their farm incomes.

Those with an education, for example, teachers, taught school. One particular farmer, north of Athabasca - a Mr. Finlay, would teach all day, then cleared land after school until dark and then would go to school again the next day.

Others would go down river to get telephone poles in the winter of 1930. After getting the contract, a farmer would round up five or six men and go off for a six-week expedition. Each man got $75 for the job of making the poles and distributing them along the line - real good money in those days.

Sometimes the farmer ran out of feed for his horses. He would telegraph for someone to deliver more hay. It would be a two-week trip down river. The heavy load pushed snow in front of the sleigh until the team could no longer pull it. The farmer would have to unload hay and, with the empty sleigh, break a trail. Oftentimes, he would be knee deep in water from overflow.

Pelican Rapids was a stopping place for horses and man alike. Horse blankets were dried and both were fed and rested before going on.

Another means of making a few dollars was to make railway ties, being paid 5¢ a tie.

Some freighted to McMurray before the railway came in. Again the river was used to carry loads of flour, sugar, and other staples. When they reached the rapids, they would go overland. On one such trip, Art Cullen brought back a load of tar sand. They experimented with it on roads, and it was the first time it was used.

Many farmers hauled wood to town, getting $2 per load.

Some left for Southern Alberta to help with harvesting operations - stooking and threshing for several weeks.

A few worked in the coal mines.

Ice fishing at Calling Lake brought in some extra cash as well. Fish were sold right on the lake - often to Mr. MacIntosh. At times, fresh fish were packed in ice and hauled to Athabasca at which point, Jeff Coke would take them to Edmonton to be refrigerated and sent to New York.

Once a school was established, it became the centre of social activities for the early farm people.

The hardest time was the 1930's period but people enjoyed such gatherings as card parties, surprise parties on Saturday nights with much music and dancing, and box and shoe socials. Even politians making speeches would be a big event.

In the fall, there was sometimes even a chicken raffle where dressed chickens would be sold by an auctioneer. Whether it was a "fun event" or whether it was to actually get rid of chickens is debatable; however, there was no place to sell them so it would seem that it was serious business. Dances, concerts, and picnics also got everyone in the community out and after a hard day's work--winter or summer.

It should be noted that families who homesteaded waited for schools to be built for their children. If none were forthcoming they left the area, some planning to return but never coming back except perhaps many years later for a visit. So all who left were not speculators.

The summer of 1919 was a joy - no frosts - just rains and sunshine. Farmers had fine stands of oats in particular. But it was not to last. A hailstorm in August destroyed crops in the South Athabasca area. The Soper Family found it impossible to salvage the oats even for feed. Everything was gone - even the leaves from the trees were stripped.

With pastures damaged, hard frosts through fall and temperatures dipping to 40° below zero on November 30, it was a lean winter for man and beast. Hauling feed for the stock became a major issue. Few farmers in the new country around Athabasca Landing had more than needed for their own use, so it meant searching the countryside with sled and hayrack.

By spring of 1920, some of the stock began to die from lack of feed.