

*see also cassette # 18
accession 85.295*

ATHABASCA ARCHIVES

Interview of Al Cramer

Done by Vi Kowalchuk

September, 1989

VK: This is September 15, 1989. I'm going to attempt to interview Mr. Al Cramer this morning, and we'll see how it goes. So, good morning, Mr. Cramer. How are you this morning?

AC: Oh, feeling all right.

VK: All right. Good, good. I understand you celebrated 103 years in June.

AC: One hundred and three years June 17.

VK: June 17. Well that's marvellous and I congratulate you. Well you must have some interesting stories to tell us.

AC: Oh, yes.

VK: Yes. Were you born in Canada, Mr. Cramer?

AC: In Pennsylvania.

VK: Oh, in the United States, Pennsylvania. What year?

AC: Eh?

VK: What year? Well, we could figure it out with 103. Yes, well that's fine; we know the age, so we're OK. Where did your folks come from originally?

AC: Eh?

VK: Where did your folks come from--your mother and father?

AC: I was the youngest in the family.

VK: Did they come--were they born in the United States?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Oh, they were.

AC: Pennsylvania.

VK: Your parents--your mom and dad?

AC: I forget.

VK: You forget, eh? Oh yeah. What did your father do there?

AC: He was crippled.

VK: He was crippled. Oh. How did you manage? How did the family manage to survive? How did you manage if your father was crippled? He couldn't work?

AC: Yeah.

VK: What, what. How did you survive?

AC: Well, you walk around--one side is crippled.

VK: Uh. But how, what did you do for money?

AC: Eh?

VK: What did you do for money?

AC: Eh?

VK: For money? How did you live? What did you use to buy food and and. . .

AC: You couldn't take no medicine for that.

VK: No. Did your mother work?

AC: Yeah.

VK: She did. I see. When did you come to Canada?

AC: Eh?

VK: When did you come to Canada? When did you come here to Canada?

AC: To Canada? I forget now. For 40 year.(???)

VK: Well, how old were you when you came here?

AC: I was 23.

VK: Twenty-three. What made you come here, Mr. Cramer? Why did you come here?

AC: I was heading for the Peace River.

VK: Were you? For the Peace River Country.

AC: (???) were building a bridge across the Athabasca River.

VK: No. It would be the Edmonton bridge across the North Saskatchewan.

AC: Well, I come to Athabasca.

VK: Oh, you did.

AC: I was trapping two years and then I filed two homesteads in Alberta; one in Lac La Biche and one in Wandering River.

VK: Wandering River? I see. Lac La Biche and one in Wandering River. How long did you stay up there?

AC: I don't know. I proved up there two homesteads.

VK: What did you have to do to prove up homesteads?

AC: There's so much land under cultivation.

VK: So much land under cultivation, yes.

AC: Yeah.

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VK: Yeah. You came alone? You came by yourself here?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Oh, by yourself.

AC: Yeah.

VK: And then...so how long were you up there?

AC: Eh?

VK: How many years did you stay there?

AC: Three years.

VK: Just three. And did you come to Athabasca then?

AC: I held the homestead to Athabasca by Wandering River.

VK: Oh, I see. So you had one here too.

AC: Yeah.

VK: I see. So when did you come here?

AC: I forget the year now. I was headed for the Peace River.
Just built a bridge across the Athabasca.

VK: Oh, up at the Peace River, you mean.

AC: I got a fellow there to push me across, come to Athabasca,
went trapping two years, filed a homestead at the mouth of
the La Biche River and first one to file on the river.

VK: And so when you came here, you stayed here.

AC: Yeah.

VK: Yes. So did you...you farmed quite a lot then, did you?
You farmed for many...did you farm for many years?

AC: Yeah.

VK: You did, eh? What do you remember about Athabasca when you first came here?

AC: I forget now the year.

VK: What was the town like?

AC: Up the Athabasca was prettier. I was heading for the Peace River ??? country. Just building a bridge across the Athabasca. I got a fellow named Percy Cross. He homesteaded the La Biche River. I ??? I went trapping two years.

VK: Do you remember the town of Athabasca at all? What was it like?

AC: I filed a homestead at La Biche River.

VK: Do you remember the town at all? Do you remember Athabasca town?

AC: There was a fire in the valley.

VK: Fire in the valley.

AC: At that time they had a fire patrol ??? river south. After the fire was out I built a homestead there and I filed at Wandering River. Later on...

VK: Who did you marry, you were married, Mr. Cramer?

AC: Never married.

VK: You never married? So you have no family. How come? I didn't know you were single all your life. When did you quit farming? When did you quit farming?

AC: I forget how many years ago. When I was paid a pension.

VK: When you got your pension. Then you moved into Athabasca?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Whereabouts did you live?

AC: I forget. Homestead. I rent a room on the south-side. I forget the number.

VK: So have you travelled much, Mr. Cramer? Have you seen much of the world? Have you travelled?

AC: Twice yeah. I was crippled, fall down and couldn't get up alone.

VK: When did that happen?

AC: I come to the hospital.

VK: How many years have you been here now? How long have you been here?

AC: I forget how many years. Three years.

VK: So you don't mind living here; its pretty nice here.

AC: Yeah

VK: Well you still have some pretty interesting stories to tell us of when you farmed? Can you tell me some interesting things that happened to you during your lifetime?

AC: I had two farms on the mouth of the La Biche River and the Wandering River.

VK: Can you tell us anything more? Can you tell us anything more about your farming days? Anything interesting happen while you were farming?

AC: No nothing interesting.

VK: No. How about when you were trapping? How about when you were trapping furs?

AC: I did a little trapping besides.

VK: While you farmed, eh? Did you bring your furs into Athabasca?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Who took your furs?

AC: I put a ??? timber out Athabasca beside the river. I built a store there.

VK: You built a store? Oh, tell us about that. What kind of a store?

AC: I had all kinds of groceries, machinery.

VK: Right in town? You had a store right in town? Right in Athabasca you had a store?

AC: Yeah.

VK: On the south side or the north side? Which side of the river?

AC: Well, I got the timber out. I sold building for Johnson. He's dead now.

VK: Fred, Fred Johnson?

AC: Yeah.

VK: I see. You sold lumber for him?

AC: Yeah.

VK: But how long did you have your store?

AC: I forget how many years. Three or four years.

VK: And then you shut down?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Why? Not enough business?

AC: I had one fella build the lumber ??? off the shore up.

VK: Do you remember the boats coming down the river, Mr. Cramer?
When the boats used to come down the Athabasca?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Tell me about that.

AC: Well they took the timber up the river in scows motorboats;
two engines...

VK: Two engines. How far north would they go? How far north
would they go? How far north would these scows go?

AC: Up the La Biche River forty miles river. Two engines
pulling the scow.

VK: Were there a lot of Indian people around in that time?

AC: Yeah.

VK: What did you think about them. Tell us about them?

AC: I forget now.

VK: Did you ever trap with any of them?

AC: I ??? trap besides for a couple of years.

VK: But did you ever trap with any of the Indian people around?
Did you see a lot of them around? A lot of the Indian
people were around?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Would they come to your store to buy anything? Did the Indian people buy any goods at your store?

AC: I forget now.

VK: You don't remember, eh? What have you been doing since you retired? What have you been doing since you retired?

AC: I lived in Athabasca a couple of years ??? hospital.

VK: And you've been here since, eh? So you haven't got any good stories to tell me; anything happen in your lifetime? What kind of stories could you tell me about your life, Mr. Cramer?

AC: I forget now. I remember???

VK: You remember what? What do you remember? You don't remember any stories you could tell me?

AC: Well, I had two homesteads on the mouth of the La Biche River at ??? and fire patrol up river up south.

VK: Fire patrol. You worked on the fire patrol?

AC: Yeah. No. I got the fire out.

VK: Oh, you got a fire out. I see.

AC: I ??? the homestead there. Fire burned valley ???

VK: How much education did you have, Mr. Cramer? How far did you go to school? How long did you go to school?

AC: I forget now.

VK: Did you go in the States? Did you go to school in the States?

AC: Sixteen.

VK: 'Til you were sixteen. I see. And then you came to Canada, of course. Well I was hoping you could tell me some good, interesting stories about your life. What was the worst thing that happened to you, Mr. Cramer? Did you ever have a bad accident.

AC: No. Not very bad.

VK: Never had a bad accident. What was the most exciting thing that ever happened in your life?

AC: Fingers smashed. My brother ??? used a powerful hammer I just yuch.

VK: Oh. Wrecked your finger a little bit.

AC: ???

VK: How many brothers did you have? and sisters? How many brothers or sisters did you have? Brothers or sisters; did you have brothers? How many in your family?

AC: I was the youngest in the family.

VK: You were the youngest. How many older ones?

AC: The old man was crippled. He could walk around with a cane.

VK: Did any of your brothers or sisters come to Canada? Did any of your brothers or sisters come to Canada?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Who? Where; did they come to Athabasca?

AC: I get a pension.

VK: No, but your brothers. Did you have any brothers?

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AC: Yes I did, a long time ago.

VK: Did they come to Canada to live?

AC: Yeah.

VK: They were in Canada?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Where? Where did they live?

AC: I forget the date.

VK: You forget. You don't...they didn't come to Athabasca though, did they? Your brothers didn't come to Athabasca?

AC: Well, yeah.

VK: You had brothers here in town?

AC: Well I was heading for the Peace River at Bow Head (?) country; just built the bridge across the Athabasca, I came ??? Whitecourt, Percy Cross ????????? went trapping two years, and??? homestead La Biche River and filed Wandering River; first one.

VK: Have you got any pictures; any photographs, Mr. Cramer?

Have you got any photographs? pictures with a camera? Did you ever take any pictures with a camera?

AC: I have no family.

VK: No, no, no. Do you have any photographs of your life? No pictures? no photographs of your farm or your trapping days?

AC: ??? homesteads; never married.

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VK: Never married, no. So you don't have any photographs, Mr. Cramer? do you have any photographs? Did you have a camera? Did you ever own a camera?

AC: Yeah.

VK: Yeah, camera. You know, to take pictures with? You never had one? You don't have any photographs?

AC: No.

VK: Oh, I see. Did you go to the war at all, Mr. Cramer? Did you fight in World War...did you fight in the War?

AC: ???

VK: Tell us about that. Tell me about the war.

AC: The navy.

VK: You were in the navy? For how long?

AC: Went to camp near Frisco and ^{Yerba Buena} ??? Island. I finally get the boat and start for Europe...six submarines ??? we get to Panama ??? finally got discharged.

VK: So, did you see any action? Did you see any action in the War? Were you where the fighting was?

AC: Yeah.

VK: You saw fighting?

AC: I was a navy fireman.

VK: A fireman. I see.

AC: Aboard the ship I served alone down in the basement.

VK: Well, Mr. Cramer, I think maybe I'll let you go. You can't tell me any more stories about your life, eh.

AC: No.

VK: What else did you do besides being in the war. Can you tell me anything more?

AC: I forget what year it was. 1919 wasn't it?

VK: 1914 to 1918. Well, what else can you tell me, Mr. Cramer. Can you tell me anything more about your life? Can you tell anything more about your life?

AC: I guess so.

VK: What else can you tell me? Can't remember anything much more, eh? No, well maybe then we'll stop. And see what we can hear.