

Henry, John S.

2023-01-26

**Westman Oral History collection**

<b>Interview Date:</b>	<b>1983-02-03</b>
<b>Narrator (interviewee):</b>	<b>John Stan Henry</b>
<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Oak River, Manitoba</b>
<b>Transcriber:</b>	<b>Marshall Northam</b>
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The following is an interview taken at the home of Jean and Stan Henry at Oak River, Manitoba. Stan was born on this farm in 1909 and he spent his entire life here. He and Jean are still active on the farm, but the management is left Denise and Cameron. I would like to elate part of the early history of the Henry Family and talk about some of the conditions they had to overcome. Mary Tate and William were married in Scotland about 1854. Dumfries was the area. They, like many others in Scotland at that time, couldn't see little future in their native land. About 1856, they decided to immigrate to Canada with their only daughter, Elizabeth. They settled in what was frontier country in Ontario at that time not far from Mitchell in around Cromarty, which was in Perth county. They farmed there until 1881 and during that period they grew into a family of 11 children. Gran...grandfather William died at the age of forty-two and, uh, left Grandma Mary, with this huge responsibility of caring for their family. The future for...for their, uh, growth looked bleak, so she decided to follow her brother to...brother-in-law John to the Pettapiece District in Manitoba, where he'd taken up a homestead in 1878. The arrived there, uh,

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late in the summer of 1881, having travelled by train to Winnipeg and onto Brandon, which was as far as the line was built at that time. Homesteads were f...filed in what became known as the Municipality of Blanshard. Due to the late arrival, the family stayed at Uncle John Henry's over the winter [clears throat] which meant twenty-two of them occupied a log house that first winter. Next summer, Mary and... Henry and her family built a house on 6-14-21 and they became known as the Sixes [?] Henries. A larger house was needed, so they decided to build it of stone. Large stones were hauled from the riverbed two miles west and these stones, uh, were loosened and put on blocks before freeze up, so they could be hauled to the site, uh, on sleighs during the winter. A large two-story house was built and the farm became know from that time on as the Stonehouse. All was not easy going on these ten-dollar homesteads. Early hazards were dry conditions, grasshoppers, prairie fires, and gophers, who often ravaged the small c...crops. Disaster struck early in 1882 when Alec (?), w...one of the boys was thrown from a horse and he consequently died of injuries. The Riel Rebellion also caused much concern in 1885 and families were quite uneasy for a time. 1886 was a dry summer and a big prairie fire blackened this part of Manitoba. Many buildings were burned and feed supplies lost. Mary Henry and the boys had to winter most of their stock north of Newdale, close to Sandy Lake. The, uh, municipality revoked some taxes [00:09:51] to those badly hit and also issued small grants of cash so they could carry on. There was very little natural growth other than grass in this area. Due to these prairie fires, which, which meant fuel and building supplies had to be hauled from the north too. This was done during the winter, which took a lot of hard work and under very cold conditions. Money was a scarce commodity and s...and supplies were always needed. So ex...so extra work had to be found by the older boys and one winter in the late 80s, my dad Charlie, Uncle Jack, and Uncle Ned spent the winter in a [railway] tie camp at Boggy Creek which is in the Shell Valley. There was over a hundred men in this camp, and they all came from this area. Some of the names I recall from listening to tales where Ernie [?] Anderson, who was a cook, and, uh, his duties entailed baking a bag of flour a day which was needed to satisfy their appetites.

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Watty [?] Forsythe was another one of the gang and I remember seeing him, uh, quite a small man and he, over the years, had lost one of his feet and he had a wooden foot, which, uh, clattered quite a bit when he walked. He was also quite a character and, uh, was involved in a wager when he was over 80 years of age which entailed driving a Massey tractor from Rapid City to the Calgary Stampede, which he accomplished. Bill Pearson from Hamiota was another character, whom I had met and, uh, was of 80 years of age, was still a rugged individual. I also heard a story about him having bought his first car and received a lesson or two in town before taking it home. But when he got to the garage, he like many others, forgot the lesson and ended up through the end of the garage. Life in these camps were pretty plain compared to today's standards, and by spring, there was always lots of extra company to keep them happy and busy in the form of body lice. Logs cut for ties were, uh, cut into eight-foot lengths and trimmed on both sides with a twelve-pound broad axe. I've heard it said that Uncle Ned could trim 300 ties a day if someone set them up. These ties were hauled to the riverbank and piled ready for the spring drive. After the highwaters had gone passed, they would be dumped in to the stream and followed by a crew, uh, which lived on a large craft. These men had to walk the shores and keep, uh, all stray logs keep moving with the current. Uncle Char...Uncle Jack tells a story about their cook who decided to clean up a bit on one fine day and he washed his pants along with other things and, uh, hung them on the railing of the...on the back of the raft. Unknown to him for some time, they were blown off and he spent the rest of the drive cooking in his underwear. I can also recall Dad s...saying that they worked all winter for their board and tobacco, as the contractor disappeared and left them stranded in the camp. It took them three days to walk to Russel in the spring break up and all they had to eat was soup made from a [00:04:51] few bones. Another summer job my dad relates was on the Air [?] Ranch, which was between Wheatland and Brandon. It, uh, it was a dry summer and the land being light, uh, crop was very poor. They, uh, put in 1100 acres of wheat and only took off 1200 bushels. The ploughing that spring was done by 22...two horse teams with walking ploughs. Eh, in the late, eh, eighties, the Henry brothers bought a

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threshing outfit. The engine was drawn by horses, as well as the separator. The separator, was a handfed type, grain was bagged by hand and the straw bucked away from the carriers, uh, by the use of a bucking pole. All grain at that time was cut, st...stooped and stacked before thrashing began, which meant that threshing was done under some very cold, backward conditions. The sheaves were forked onto a table where they were, uh, cut and, uh, placed for the man who fed the cylinder. This was a dusty, dirty job, which required a great deal of skill and, uh, endurance to do a good job. My dad always helped at the feeding and said that it was here that he started chewing tobacco to counteract the excessive dust. Renumeration for thrashing was very small and the rates charged were five cents a bushel for wheat and two or three cents for oats. Board was supplied for man and beast. Other expenses were low as laced leather for belts, some, uh, grease and oil for this thrasher, and some steam cylinder oil for the engine. Good water was definitely needed for the boiler to avoid leaking fluids [?]. Thrashing, uh, went well into the winter in order to cover all the various homestead which had started up in the late 80s and the 90s. The town of Oak River was, uh, originally built on 34-13-22, but was moved to the present site after the railway came in in 1891. The municipality was formed [clears throat] in 1884 and council meetings were held at Mary Henry's up until 1910. Early church services were also held there and it was a polling booth [clears throat] in election time. The Henry brothers all remained in this district along with three sisters who married local homesteaders. They all led good sized families. Consequently, many people are related to the Henrys and about 300 of them attend a 100 year reunion in 1981. Their homestead have grown to larger farms and are now run with modern machines. Over the yeas, they have a contribution to the, uh, growth of the district, serving on council, church boards, school boards, and all other organizations, which make a district function. On our own farm, Scot and Marney [?] are the fourth generation of Henrys to live here.

**End of interview**