

Leween Drysdale

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Westman Oral History collection

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Interviewer:	Dorothy Martin
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Question: Today is December the 6th 1982, this interview is being taped for the Westman Oral History Association Project Voices of Yesteryear by Dorothy Martin. The interviewee is Mrs. Leween Drysdale of Neepawa. In 1982 her husband Charles and she were presented with the century farm award certificate and a gate sign from the Manitoba Department of Agriculture. Mrs. Drysdale will give a story of the four generations of Drysdales who have lived on that farm section 321414. Their farm is located four miles east of Neepawa and became a century farm in 1980. What did the Drysdale family do in Scotland?

Answer: That's a good question to start with because we have a copy of the 1871 century of record from Saint [unclear] county Scotland, and I can read it to you. James Drysdale head of house age 42 years, farmer of 123 [unclear]. Employing three labourers and one servant. Georgina his wife age 28 born [unclear] Scotland and James his son aged six months. Wouldn't it be nice to have 3 labourers and one servant? Now by 1880 James and Georgina had eight children and their names were James, George, William, Robert, Elizabeth[?], David and twin daughters Margaret and Katherine[?]. Three more were born in Canada the youngest three were Phillip, Allan, and Gladstone. When they had the first eight children they decided to immigrate to Canada where it would be possible to own their land, we think they had been leaseholders before. Mrs. Drysdale's brother Magnus Waters was already in Manitoba, so they planned to come out to his place, with their eight children under the ten years. The youngest were the twins Margaret and Katherine about one year old. They sailed on a boat called the [unclear] and it took them six weeks to get to Montréal. Ocean crossings were not comfortable trips at that time, the boats were crowded and of course, they lacked refrigeration and fresh water and the luxuries that we

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have now. All the family had days of seasickness, so they were glad to get off the boat at Montréal. They travelled to Winnipeg by rail and from Winnipeg to Portage in a flat-bottom boat. Here brother Magnus Waters was to meet them, but he wasn't there. The family had to send word to him to come for them and after waiting two weeks Magnus arrived with his cart and oxen. The cart wouldn't hold all their baggage, so some was left at Portage, and they had to go back for it. That cart became their home until they got to Neepawa. They slept in it and under it and walked beside it all a, all a day. The log cabin that Magnus Waters had was 12 by 15 feet yes and there were 11 people to live in it. They had to build bunk bunds to sleep on and a stone fireplace for heat and cooking. There were no stores at Neepawa at that time, so they had to go to Palestine which is, which was east of Gladstone or to Portage they either walked or drove oxen. There was a Mr. Miller a few miles north of them and he ran a small store called Halfway House, but most supplies were bought at Portage. The next spring in 1881 the neighbours helped build a log cabin for the Drysdale's. These neighbours were of Scottish descent, and they were the Bryden's [?], Hunters, McClaren's, Darks[?], and Mutins[?]. These early settlers needed a school for their children and in 1883 the union school district was formed, and a school was built just half a mile south of the Drysdale home. James Drysdale was one of the first trustees, the school was also used for Sunday school [00:11:30]. Attending Sunday school was like a social event because you met all the neighbours there. The young folks in these pioneer families lived very active lives. They worked hard at home putting up buildings and clearing land, but they had their sports too. The young men of the district enjoyed shooting uh and veterans of the Riel Rebellion got a rifle club started. For a number of years, they had a rifle range in the quarter section just south of the farm. Some of the young men were excellent marksmen and were taught some competitions. Rifle clubs were very popular about 1900s. There was a Mr. Pickering [?] at Minnedosa and he donated a big silver shield in 1903. The clubs that competed for this shield were Minnedosa, Brandon, Virden, Sidney, Franklin, [unclear] and Neepawa. They held a shot-off every year for the shield and the union lad known as Neepawa won the shield the

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first six times. Usually, Franklin was second except for the last time when Sidney was second. We have a picture of the 10-man team that won the shied the first year in 1903. There are two Drysdale's in the picture Will and James and the eight others are JH Howden [?], Henry Bradigan, Jay Vance, Robert Hunter, W. Govenlaw [?], Dave Spence, W. Gothel [?] and Dean McLaren. Members of the club shot at the provincial and dominion meets.

Q: What kind of rifles did they use?

A: Well the first rifles were the Schneider Enfield and the Martin Henry. The Martin Henry was said to kick 96 pounds every shot. I imagine the men had sore shoulders after using them. They bought three ought three Lee Enfield in 1898, and with the Lee Enfield Robert Hunter propped up a total of 48 points out of 50 at 600 yards and won a meet in Winnipeg.

Question: He'd have to shoot bullseye nearly every shot to get that score.

Answer: Yes, that's right. The Graham family was one of the first families out in this area and they also shot with the club, and there's a story about Robert eh Robert Hunter and William Graham. They were both excellent marksmen and they took turns holding a small chip at arm's length while the other shot a hole through the chip.

Q: Sounds like William Tell, did they, did they curl in those days?

A: Oh yes, I'm glad you asked that. They used to curl on a slue a couple of miles west of here. There was no rink and no granite rock and no, no electric light, but they curled during the daylight hours. They cut down oak trees and sawed-off blocks about the size of a granite rock, they whittled them into the shape of a curling rock. Of course, the handles were different, to make the handles they drilled a hole in the top of the rock and pushed a peg into it. It must've been hard to get a right and left turn with that handle, but I'll bet they had fun curling anyway. To get on with our Drysdale story, James and Georgina came to Canada to farm and get land for their sons and as each one became old enough, they helped him to get land close to their homestead. They set up six sons on homesteads and left Phillip their farm.

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Some of the sons didn't stay on their land for a lifetime but left this part of Manitoba. The James [unclear] Drysdale family moved to BC after his death. William moved to Calgary; Roberts's family moved to the Roselin [?] district southwest of Brandon. But George, Dave, Phillip, and Elizabeth[?] all continued on in this area and their descendants live on in the Neepawa area. Elizabeth[?] married John McClaren, [00:06:30] Katherine married Jim Porter and moved to a farm near Edmonton. The Porter's farm is now part of the city of Edmonton. Margaret married Jeff Mcilroy [?] and they farmed in Saskatchewan. Gladstone became a lawyer and he never married. Allan was killed when a team of horses ran away. The nine sons and daughters who raised families can be congratulated on the offspring. I would like to tell more about their family but that would make too long a story, I'll continue on with the families raised on this farm. As I said before Phillip took over the homestead from his father and in 1915, he married Clarice Mitchel she was from Whales. They raised seven sons Gladstone, Clarence, Charles, James, [unclear], John, and Robert. Philip was crippled with polio when his sons were young, and they had quite a struggle to keep the farm going during the depression of the 30s. One of the big changes during Phillips's time was the change over from horses to tractors. They'd lost most of their good horses with sleeping sickness and that was when they bought their first tractor in the late 30s, I think. During World War II Gladstone the eldest son ran the farm for his dad while Clarence, Charles, and Jim were in the armed forces. John, a younger brother, served later in the RCAF. Many of the cousins in the other branches of the family also served in the forces. Robert worked at butchering for a few years. At the present time, five of the brothers have farms in the Neepawa, Carberry, and Brookdale area. Jim and [unclear] worked for the Canadian national railway and they are both retired now. Now I come to the fourth generation in 1946 when the war was over Charles bought the original homestead on the veterans land association plan and in 1948 we were married. I was Leween Singleton, and I taught school before I was married and for a short time after. We have two children Arleen and Morris they both went to union school and Neepawa high school. Arleen is a registered nurse, and she won the gold

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pin for highest scholastic mark in her nursing class. She also won a Judy Hill Memorial Bursary which took her to England for a, a year-long mid-wifery course when she learned to deliver babies without a doctor and during the course, she was required to deliver 40 babies. If any serious complications arose a doctor was called to assist. Arleen stayed on in England for one more year to work in a maternity hospital in Sidcup, in the Greenwich Nursing District. I guess some of that staunch pioneer spirit is in her blood. On returning home Arleen nursed on the Arctic Island north of Canada's mainland. She spent 14 months nursing at Cambridge Bay and Spence Bay, Kelly Bay and Gjoa Haven and other satellite stations. At some of these postings, she was the only nurse and there were no doctors [unclear] in the island. Arleen flew thousands of miles with her patients, the critically ill ones had to be flown out to Yellow Knife. The nurses up north are loved and respected by the Eskimos and Arleen was very fond of their children. She's in Edmonton now working towards a Bachelor of Nursing degree at the university and she also works at the Charles Council Hospital. Our son Morris knows what the north is like too. He's with the Manitoba Hydro and is a millwright and he has spent a couple of years at Gillam Manitoba. [00:01:30] He's now living in Winnipeg, and he still works for Manitoba Hydro, but he enjoys getting home to the farm to help us with the heavy work and we appreciate his help. Altogether there had been 20 children raised on this farm and their descendants had spread out all across Canada. We don't know why the first generation choose this land, but I think it reminded them of Scotland. It is park-like land with trees streams and meadows and grain land. Four generations over the first hundred years have enjoyed a good farm life. In 1980 we held a three-day family reunion to celebrate the hundred years in Canada. It was really great to have so many come here to see the original homestead. They came from all across Canada and from the United States too. Our daughter flew home from England to be at it. There was a group of 250 people the first pioneers James and Georgina and their 11 children have all passed away, but I am sure they would be proud of their descendants.

End of interview