

Westman Oral History collection

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Narrator (interviewee):	Alexander Black
Interviewer:	Stan Henry
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Question: Today is February the third 1983 the following is an interview at the home of Alex and Blanche Black in Oak River, Manitoba. Alex has lived in this district his entire life and received part of his education at Maple Wood School and the remainder in Oak River. He has operated the home farm until retiring to Oak River in 1970 (...)

Answer: Six, 75 you can say.

Q: 76, Alex I would like to um start out by asking you where your grandparents and uh your dad and uncles came from to Oak arriving before arriving to Oak River.

Q: Well, my grandparents were born in Scotland, ehh I don't know much about the history of my mothers um parents but um or my moth or my dads father but his mother was um Isabelle Smith and the Smith family lived

along the Rivers [Frey?] in Scotland and um they were croppers and at that time umm around 1840 the sheep farmers were getting more land and um they they were buying out some of the croppers and offering a higher price for the lease so when the lease ran out the Smiths couldn't couldn't keep on their um couldn't renew their lease so they decided to come to Canada and they came out to um [Glengarry?] I believe it was to start out with. And they worked there cutting logs then they decided to come further west so they came out to Grey County, Ontario. And they they um they farmed there from there till. well I don't know exact time uh it'd be uh perhaps say around 1870 they moved to Bruce and then I um grandparents and their family came to Manitoba in 1878 they came to Birds Hill and um in the spring of 1879 my father and grandfather and they had other men with them looking for land they came out and they stopped at Franklin October land there for a day and they thought it was to to open there they liked the bush land better

Q: What was there means of travel?

A: There pardon?

Q: What was there means of travel and (...)

A: Well, I think that a covered wagon, but I think the men walked most of the time they they had had some supplies I suppose with them and they (...)

Q: Like the oxen too ehh?

A: Yes, I believe so yes yes I think I think dad didn't buy any horses until he was up here a year or two

Q: This seemed to be the case for most of the early settlers that came in

A: Yes, and I think he said he bought the first team down at the [Hare?] farm, that will be the Wheatland way there somewhere

Q: yes

A: I remember we don't travel a lot there now but uh it is down oh I don't know what that fellas name is uh I know pretty near where it was you know

A: this is the first time I've heard anyone except my dad mention this name [Hare?]

Q: Oh

A: That that was the first job that he took uhh he worked on this ranch and uh 22 two horse teams and one ploughing at one time

A: Oh well you know I've heard Bob McInnis say that they used to hull grain to Bra to Brandon and the [Hare's?] would always wait till the wind got in the west and they go to Brandon, and they stay in Brandon till the wind went around to the east [laughing] and come back [laughing]

Q: Sounds like saving gas

A: Ya [laughing] that's in the cold weather I guess the wintertime

Q: I also note that your dad was the same as my grandparents they wanted to be near the bush having lived in Ontario the same way

A: Yes

Q: Surely

A: Well, I think you'd notice that uh in uh different cases now look at the [Sinclair?] farm there pretty near all bush and uh there's different farms and things like that I think well uh they looked for something like what they'd had

Q: Surely too

A: Well, yes I guess that's right yes

Q: Surely you were also must have been looking for water when you went beside this Black's Lake

A: Oh yes yes I suppose so yes

Q: Wasn't there a Black's Lake?

A: Yes, sir that's what they always knew it by yes and John Armstrong of course is one of the men who came up he homestead right there

Q: And uh this is before Oak River was established here

A: Yes, yes but after Oak River started, they used to go out this way and then go out to the quarter of our folks lived through there yard and down near where the our present farm is there's a pond right down there by the road and for some reason there was a great build up [fluid?] you remembered that I guess that pond right there by the road

Q: What was some of the other conditions that they had to put up with when they come in here in the early days

A: [laughing] well [laughing] I don't well I guess

Q: Did your dad ever mention the Riel Rebellion

A: No no well the Saskatchewan Rebellion that the second well the second Riel Rebellion no I never heard him say much about it no that was out further west of course in Saskatchewan yes the first Riel Rebellion would be before they came out here in 1870 so they uh no he didn't have much to say about that.

Q: Drought and prairie fires were another hazard

A: Yes

Q: How did these affect your people

A: Well, uh it went through, and it burnt I think it burnt um one shed or one one building anyway a stable I believe they had there I don't know how it missed all the others they must have been far enough apart that the house was saved alright

Q: Maybe some flower gardens too

A: Yes, possibly yes yes its quite likely they had yep and uh it got across um around the lake I suppose went around likely and burnt the church that was there

Q: Uh Which church was that?

A: Oh let's see First Pescetarian Church is built in this locality and it was along the road going into the [McCulley?] farm there somewhere I think they had around half way up the lane somewhere

Q: The Black family be one of the big supporters in this and that church too, wouldn't they?

A: Yes, yes they would be

Q: Do you recall who would be the first minister

A: Umm no no I don't I've heard the name of well there was a Cameron was one of the first ministers J H Cameron and I've heard some other names but I can't remember them now until uh McDermid was was one of the early ministers here and then was a [McKinnon?] and then [McCullough?] that's well he was the last [McCullough?] was the last but there was others in before that I know

Q: These early ones were several charges, and they weren't resident too much were they?

A: Em no I couldn't just (...)

Q: In the early days they moved from (...)

A: Oh ya they moved (...)

Q: One point to another

A: Yes [McCullough's?] was here for about five years I think and [McKinnon?] would be maybe something like four years but uh I heard my dad say there were there were went from one church to the other they didn't stay with their own denomination all the time either if there's a [unclear] service they went to the [unclear] service, if there's a Methodist service they went to a Methodist service and vice versa and they uh (...)

Q: It seemed the early ones where very interested in supporting their some religion though

A: Oh yes yes they were yes they were faithful to their own uh to some church any way or another yes yes I'd said

Q: I understand your dad uh established a few records with being able to walk

A: [laughing]

Q: What were some of his expeditions?

A: Well he walked to Winnipeg four times and back he uh he used to walk in the fall get a job usually with CPR I think maybe all the time with the CPR and uh all they worked out at Cross Lake there where they are putting the road to be cut cut ties anyways as well as big jobs he had to start out with and uh I think he worked in a round house one year, one winter, then he uh he pardoned the [unclear] of Dufferin I believe believe maybe that's the last winter he was was downwarding from then

00:07:20

Q: This [unclear] of Dufferin is still a historic site model in Winnipeg isn't it

A: I um I guess it used to be out near the station there between the station and the hotel the Royal Alex hotel I believe at one well I've seen it there

Q: [unclear] restored there [unclear] history

A: It'd be in the they'd have it in some place now likely I think so

Q: This you you say this was wood fired ehh?

A: Yes, cord wood he said ya ya well I don't know if it's a pull length cord wood or not, but he said he threw many cord wood into it

Q: Likely well I think the steamers on the river boats were cord wood (...)

A: Yes, yes ya that's right

Q: You'd have any idea how long it would take him to hoof it into Winnipeg?

A: Four days

Q: Four days

A: Yes, yes he used to be stopping hours along the way and make it certain uh so many miles I forget how many and and I think the fourth day I think he just had to walk from Headingley um it's a short while maybe 20 miles then closer than that now Headingley's getting built out

Q: What uh politics was another uh (...)

A: Politics you say?

Q: They were pretty important part of a [unclear]

A: [laughing] yes yes that uh they were quite interested in politics alright I think my Uncle Dan was a little more concerned with politics that what dad was I mean maybe not but he took a more active part as far as getting out and and uh I've heard them say that Bill Haze and Uncle Dan could sit in the polling booth all day and when it came to counting the ballots they didn't know how many ballots were placed and they'd mark how many for each candidate [laughing] turn the paper upside down and only one or two out

Q: [unclear] all figured out

A: Ya

Q: Yes, I've heard this reported too. I guess the uh community arguments revealed a lot of their leaning which way (...)

A: Yes, yes they were more for arguing in those days alright

A: Yes, I've heard some of them say yunno that when the votes come in sometimes somebody would be crying [laughing]

Q: [unclear]

Q: The Black name was pretty well involved in all community organizations too.

A: Yes, pretty much yes they were on the school board and and they um farm movement the united or they well they called them the Grain Growers then they changed them the United Farmers of Manitoba and then of course it's changed several times since then yes uh yes they were quite interested in that.

Q: You mentioned your Uncle Dan he died on the street in Oak River doing this work didn't he supporting the United grain Growers

A: Yes

Q: If I can remember right

A: It had a carload of apples in that day

Q: Was it apples

A: Yep

Q: It was a carload of something

A: And uh dad got his apples and came on home and apparently Uncle Dan was just he got [Alex?] I think [Alex?] was hitching up the team and Uncle Dan said I'll walk over to [Him's?] meet you there and he he died just before he got to [Him's?] store I believe

Q: Ya, ya I could remember that being related at home

A: Oh yes

Q: That's that's the site I remember them saying on the street there south railway street.

A: Yes, yes he sure did.

Q: He was a stout man, wasn't he?

A: Oh yes big (...)

Q: Bigger build then your dad.

A: Big heavy man uh perhaps 240 pounds or something like that

Q: Was he that heavy?

A: Something like that yes

Q: And uh Jack was (...)

A: Yes, he was pretty much yes he was yes they were a little too heavy I guess.

Q: You dad was a lean hungry type

A: Ya that's right I remember Uncle Dan uh oh yes, I used to say my dad used to say that Uncle Dan was good at uh seeding by hand.

Q: Oh, in that early time he was he was the

A: yes

Q: one that did the seeding

A: Yes, I don't know how many years they did well they wouldn't of had a big crop to start out with anyway uh

Q: Well, if they had to seed by hand they likely had to cut by (...)

A: Yes, they cut with uh [unclear] uh no with a

Q: Saw head too eh, Saw head

A: Saw head, I guess and uh bound it by hand

00:02:18

Q: I notice mentioned several cases in there where the first crops were taken off by (...)

A: By hand

Q: In these histories yes

A: Yep yep

Q: Who were some of the do you recall then talking about any of the early thrashing outfits [unclear]

A: Umm well um Thompson's, McDonald's, and Waltman's did have a steam outfit but that would be a little later on I guess I don't know just when they'd get theirs um no I don't just in there real early day who they first em there's one thing I do remember them saying that stink weed was quite a considered a real bad weed at that time

Q: Which one

A: Stick weed

Q: Oh, oh yes

A: And uh someone used to say anybody that thrashed at Blacks or uh [Macintosh's?] and Blacks weren't coming on to their farm with the machine [laughing]

Q: Well, these are how the all these weeds were first introduced from Ontario, somebody brought them in

A: I guess likely yes and uh and uh of course now we see well stink weed was a bad weed in that time and yet now we don't even hardly consider it a weed

Q: I can recall dad pulling it by hand

A: Oh yes well, we pulled mustard by hand when it first first came in fact we got a pretty good uh we bought some seed one time oat seed that uh with a little bit of mustard went through and pulled it all and I don't think there was a bit that got away on us

Q: Ya that was another Ontario weed

A: Yes, yep I suppose [unclear] for a long time when there we never had a rat on the farm and I guess they came in from the east

Q: Ya they come in with people

A: Ya

Q: Well, I think that pretty well covers it Alex

A: Well, that's [laughs] if you get that much from a few more

End of interview