

1Westman Oral History Collection

Interview Date: 1983-04-13

Narrator: Winnie North

Interviewer: Dorothy P. Martin

Location: North's Home in Brookdale

Transcriber: Megan Holowick

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Topic: Brookdale Post Office 100th Anniversary

Type of Recording: Cassette

Length of Recording: 00:16:30

Introduction by Interviewer, start of clip 1 of 1-00:00:49

Dorothy Martin: Today is April 13th 1983. The Brookdale postmistress Mrs. Winnie North is being interviewed and taped by Dorothy Martin of Neepawa for the Westman Oral History Association project Voices of Yesteryear. After 16 years of farming, Winnie and her husband Alfred of from that and took over the custodians duties of Brookdale School in April 1967. After telling about the Brookdale Post Office 100th anniversary ceremony, she will give a short history of the post office.

[00:00:49 to 00:01:00 is silent]

DM Question (00:01:02): My first question is when did the Brookdale post office have their 100th celebration?

Winnie North Answer (00:01:10): The 100th ... the Brookdale Post Office centennial celebration was held on December the 1st, 1982 at 3 O' Clock in our hose, where the post office is located. The historical occasion was celebrated with a ceremony and a small birthday cake [Photos attached]. Mr. Al Perahootah [?] presented me, the present Brookdale Postmistress, with a commemorative plaque honoring the Brookdale Post Office 100th anniversary. As no-one was able to be present to tape the ceremony, I am going to give the speech of the master of ceremonies Mr. John Blinkiron [?] in his exact words. "Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming out this afternoon to participate in this ceremony to mark the 100th anniversary of postal service to the community of Brookdale. I am here, representing Mr. Don Swanson, the District Director of Manitoba or Canada Post Corporation. My name is John Blinkiron [?], and I am a public relations officer on loan to this district from postal headquarters in Ottawa. Nr. Perholding [?], the District Manager of Corporate Communications, usually oversees centennial ceremonies. He instigated the first one back in 1979, but he is on extended leave at present and has entrusted me with his pet program. Also with us today is own Postmaster Mr. Al Perahootah [?] of Brandon, who is responsible for postal operations in this particular area of Manitoba. Area Manager Doug Meechum [?] of Winnipeg could not be with us today as announced, he was called to last minute meeting with our National Executive Vice-President of Postal Operations who is in Winnipeg today to look into the ongoing task of improving mail service. I'm sure you agree that someone has to look after the shop this time of year while the rest of us are partying. The Post Office of Brookdale is one of the 461 regular Post Offices operating in Manitoba, but is also one of those special post offices which has earned the distinction of having provided 100 years of service or more to Canadian. Since we began the Post Office Centennial Commemoration Program in 1979 we have celebrated 61 such centennials as this in Manitoba. In the coming year another eight Manitoba offices will be so honored. The past 100 years have seen a lot of changes in the post office, it has also seen a lot of traditional preserved. If there is one thing the post office is known for, besides sending your mail to the wrong address from time to time, it's

keeping records. Often these records are the basis of a community's historical records. They tell a lot about our fore-fathers and their way of life. Before I go into the history of Brookdale Post Office, I would like to give you a brief picture about the postal service in Canada around 100 years ago, particularly in this area of Canada. It may help you put the history of Brookdale into perspective. The postal office was one of the first federal government departments, formed by the act of the first Parliament of Canada on December the second, 1867. The new department became operative on April first, 1868 by which time there was 3477 post offices serving three and a half million Canadians. The Post Office Department was to grow with the country as Canada developed and expanded her frontiers, the post office would help many thousands of people pioneer a new life. In the sparsely populated west, mail delivery was slow and before 1853, only three mails were dispatched and received each year. In that year, a monthly mail service was organized between Fort Garry, Winnipeg and Fort Ripley in Minnesota. In 1857 when the United States established the post office at Pembina on the international boundary, mail service increased to and from Fort Garry. When the Canadian government took control of the northwest from the Hudson Bay Company in 1869 and Manitoba entered federation in 1870, there were only six post offices existing in the vast distance between the Great Lakes and Rocky Mountains. The Manitoba and Northwest Postal Systems were incorporated into the Canadian Postal service in 1872 and 21 new post offices were established. Throughout the vast extent of Manitoba and the northwest, establishing changes occurred. In 1871 Winnipeg, the major settlement, had a population of 300-400 inhabitants, but by 1882 settlers had flocked into the rich agricultural lands west of the city and the population had increased to 2500. It is said that a large part of this influx in population was due to the efforts of a local organizer and business manager known as Big Jim Calliken. He set up a shack at the corner Portage and Main in Winnipeg to promote real-estate throughout the area. Many land buyers from the east received notices in the mail that the area lay the proposed route of the southern railway and they came in thousands. The chief postal inspector sent to Winnipeg to

report on the postal service, describe the situation there in 1882. Thriving settlements have grown up where but a short time since there was not a solitary inhabitant and the first pioneers, isolated by great distances from their nearest neighbour, have found themselves in the middle of perspective farming communities, villages, and towns have emerged where there was nothing but desolate prairie. In 1882, Manitoba had 178 postal offices and only Montreal and Toronto exceed Winnipeg's customs and postal receipts. It must be remembered that in 1882 a 100 years ago, most mail in this area was carried around by horse or stagecoach. The Canadian Pacific Railway was still three and a half years short of completion and rail service was only used to carry passengers and mail along the main line from the east. In fact, I am told the C.N.R reach Brookdale until 1904. 1882 was a rough and desperate time, only 12 years after the Red River Rebellion exhibitions, a time of frontier life on the prairies between the Northwest Rebellion of 1869 to 70 and 1885. Often temporary postal services had to be setup to suit the time. For instance an official paper presented to Parliament 1871 entitled "The Red River Exhibitions of 1870" makes the only known reference to the postal service during the exhibition, as there were no established means of communication along the route, arrangements were made with the Hudson Bay Company to place Indians [Aboriginals] with light canoes at different points. By then the mails were regularly forwarded during August and September. In 1885 when the government mobilized the Northwest Field Force for the campaign against Louis [Not pronounced Louie] Riel, a line of mounted couriers with three lays [?] of ponies and teams with covered wagons carried mail for the force and some civilian mail as well. A report of the Commanding Officer of the line of Communication in 1885 reads "I at once established a military post office where letters for a portions of the Field Force were sorted and I was glad as a courtesy for the help the malicious received from post office authorities. Carry civil mail to Battleford with our military mail." Getting back to the post office in Brookdale, it was one of 224 additional post offices established throughout Canada during the year 1882. Bringing the total numbers of offices in Canada to 6395. This was an amazing number of post offices when you consider

that we currently have 8255 post offices in Canada. The following postmasters are shown to have served the Brookdale Post Office bound through the years. Date of establishment December the first, 1882, John Mitchell, 1882 to 1885; Charles Gowan, 1886 to 1901; Wellington Mooer [?], 1901 to 1904; James M. Miller, 1904 to 1919; Frank Caris, [?] 1919 to 1920; Alfred Lenard Kurtis [?], 1920 to 1944; Margaret Olive Babcock [?], 1944 1945; Norean [?] Violet Becker, 1945 to 1952; Gordon Jeffery [? Do not know which spelling] Owens, 1952 to 1955; Beatrice Marie Fox, 1955 to 1965; Lila Viola Stewart, 1965 to 1978; Winifred North from 1978 until the present time. And now in tribute to the 100th years of postal service to Brookdale, offered by the succession of 14 postmasters over that period of time, I call upon Mr. Al Perahootah [?] to make a presentation to the current postmaster, Mrs. Winifred North.”

DM Q (00:12:55): Mr. John Blinkiron [?] gave the names of all postmasters; I would appreciate you giving a more detailed history of the Brookdale Post Offices?

WN A (00:13:09): Prior to formation of the village, the first post office in the Brookdale area was opened on December the first, 1882 in the home of John Mitchell on section northwest 10 12 16. This land is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Ed Let [?]. John Mitchell was credited with naming the village after a brook which flows from the west down into a broad vale [?] or plain to the east. On March the first, 1886 the post office was setup in the home of Charles Gowan on southeast 22 12 16, where Mr. and Mrs. Bill Jardeine [?] presently reside and farm. There it remained until Brookdale town came into being in 1902. Wellington Mooer [?] was the postmaster at that time. For a number of years, the post office operated by Alfred Kurtis [?], 1920 to 1944 and the telephone switchboard were in the same building which later became a grocery store. Sometime after, a café was opened up in the building next to the post office building. The post office was then move to it and ran by Gordon Owens, 1952 to 1954 and later carried on by Ms. Beatrice Fox from 1955 to 1965. On October the first 1965, Mrs. Lila Stewart, an assistant for Ms. Fox, then became postmistress and moved the post office into her own home. She retired on June the 15th, 1978 and I admittedly took up the duties of postmistress in my home. In June 1970 after the

closing of the post offices at Overon [?], Heart, and Englow [?], a rural mail route was established which to service the customers of those places. John Sleazak [?], an Englow resident, was a courier for the first year. After his resignation in 1971, Mrs. Joyce Frasier [?] of Brookdale residence has been delivering rural mail from my post office three times a week; rain or shine, hail or snow.

[00:15:38 to 00:15:45 is silent]

DM Q (00:15:46): How was it that you became interested in the postal service?

WN A (00:15:50): Mrs. Stewart needed an assistant and approached me about it. I consented to help her and began in the spring of 1973. I certainly enjoy my work serving the public to the best of my abilities.

DM (00:16:04): On replaying this tape, I noticed that two corrections should be made and read as follows: Fact I am told that CPR, not CNR didn't reach Brookdale till October 1902, not 1904.

[00:16:21 to 00:16:30 is blank]

End of Interview-00:16:30