

Westman Oral History collection

Interview Date:	1981-11-DD
Narrator (interviewee):	Eva Roddick Davis
Interviewer:	Effie McPhail
Location:	Brandon, Manitoba
Transcriber:	Jaclyn Matchullis
Date Transcribed:	2014-09-28
Recording Format:	Cassette
Length of Recording:	00:12:55

0:00:00-0:10:00- Silence

Question: This tape was made ah November in November 1981. When Eff McPhail interviewed Eva Davis. Who was one of the Roddick girls in the Brandon Hills. Um, well, um Eva you...we just heard the tape Harriett made when she was here last June. Ah, just what relation are you to Harriett? How does that connect?

Answer: Harriett and I are really double cousins. As our mothers were sisters and our fathers were brothers. My father was John Hardy Roddick. Who was born in Nova Scotia in 1868. The youngest son of the Rev. George and Elizabeth Roddick. And came with his parents to the Brandon Hills district in 1879. He was too young to take up a homestead, so worked with his father on the original homestead and eventually took it over. The homestead was section 17-9-18. John married Ida Johnston in 1898. She had also arrived in the district with her parents Mr. and Mrs. William Johnston from Iroquois, Ontario in 1879. Um, John and Ida had two daughters and one son. Eva married Meredith Davis. Georgina married Albert Hepinstall and she passed away in 1954. Albert married Janette Grieve. After farming for a few years he worked for years, for 25 years with Interprovincial pipelines at Gretna and Edmonton. Retired 1973 he lives in Sherwood Park, Alberta. The farm...The family had one of the first automobiles in the district and (over or older) land bought 1910. For many years my father and Uncle Rob were partners in the threshing outfit. In those days it took about 26 men to operate the outfit. Most farmers in those days had an 80, 80 acre wood lot in the Brandon Hills. After the fall field work was done

the men cut and hauled out the year's supply of wood, sawed it and left to dry until next year. Mostly...Mostly poplar wood. Some old trees were also cut for fence posts. Repairing fences was the next job after spring seeding.

Q: Well, um, humm... If you mentioned cutting the wood, now what were those old stoves like anyway? I suppose they had the cook stoves and they had the heaters. What were...Just what were they like?

A: In the later years we had a very ornate heater in the front room. It was a self heater that burned anthracite coal, that's the hard coal. You could watch the fire through the win... the mic... the doors of the heater. And we also had an old fashioned cook stove in the back kitchen, which had an oven door on both sides of it.

Q: And what about when your family moved to Brandon then after they'd been farming, Eva?

A: My mother and father retired to Brandon in 1921. And ma passed away in 1930 and papa in 1940. Their buried in the Brandon Hills Cemetery in the family plot with the Rev. George and Elizabeth Roddick. The youngest child of the...of George and Elizabeth had died in infancy in Nova Scotia in 1876. And a large tombstone erected there in what was expected to be the family plot. After Elizabeth's death the tombstone was moved to Brandon Hills Cemetery and was replaced by a smaller one for the...in Nova Scotia for William Henry Curkwood[?].

Q: Now what about the Davis family? Did they live in the Brandon Hills before you knew them?

A: Yes, Ah, James Davis arrived at Brandon Hills in the summer of 1879. Coming from Palmer, Massachusetts, United States of America. He homesteaded on 18-9-18. Returned to Thompsonville, Connecticut to marry Fanny Ponefex[?] in 1890. They raised 3 sons James, Henry & Meredith. James Junior farmed for a few years and then operated a filling station at Shoal Lake, later moving to Portage la Prairie to work at South Port during the war years. After the war he and his son Henry built their own service station and operated it until retiring in 1971. James

Sr. served as a trustee of the school board and as an elder of the Brandon Hills Church for many years he sold cream to customers in Brandon. James Jr. married Catherine Simpson of Shoal Lake in 1920. They had two sons and a daughter: Henry, Mary and Burt. Henry Sr. was a student of Brandon Collage during the first world war. He enlisted in the 196th University Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Forces. Trained at Camp Huges in 1916, he was killed in action in France in, on May the 6th 1917.

Q: Well, Eva, um, tells us about when you and your husband were farming out in the Brandon Hills.

A: My Husband Meredith and I were married in 1931 and we operated the Davis family farm. And, ah, operated a milk business selling to Brandon customers at 16 quarts for a dollar. We sold out in 1940 and moved to Brandon where Mev worked as a motor mechanic with Reg Paron for 11 years and later with the Brandon Transit, retiring in 1967. We had two daughters and a son. Georgina married to Rev. J.W. Scott of Portage la Prairie. Shirley's married to Mike Phillips and Bill married to Dorothy Snider. The Davis' had one of the first portable threshing outfits in the district. In 1915 they purchased a larger engine and separator from the Sawyer Massy[?] Company. The price for both machines was \$3000. It was delivered directly from the factory to Martinville[?] Siding where it was unloaded. My neighbours tell me that the school children skipped school that day to see the outfit being unloaded they threshed for many years for themselves and neighbours.

Q: Well um that's um interesting. Now um a few years a go the Brandon Hills celebrated its centennial didn't it with, I think, 1879-1979. I'm sure you enjoyed that year and what did you have to do with that?

A: I happened to be on the, ah, committee that was planning for the Brandon Hills Centennial of 1879 to 1979. After about 2 years of planning the Brandon Hills Centennial week reached its

climax. The purpose of the centennial celebration was to meet pioneers present and future, to help people discover the history of the beginning of the settlement and their activities. To make people feel a pride in being part of the community. To demonstrate to the youth, the value which serve our forbearers in the eventful first century. As a lot of farmer residents were expected to plan to come home for the celebrations it was decided to have a weekend of events. A gala centennial ball in the Keystone Center in Brandon took place on Friday evening July the fifth. Tickets were limited to 600 and cost six dollars each for the dance and midnight lunch. The assembly hall was also open at the Keystone Center that afternoon for a display of antiques and pictures. On Saturday the old timers picnic was held, this had been an annual event since 1879 with the usual races and baseball games. Russ Gurr, who had entertained at several picnics in the 50s and 60s returned for the centennial. Among the songs he has written are "The blue hills of Brandon" and "There's an old time picnic". An overflow crowd filled the church and grounds for interdenominational service on the Sunday afternoon. It was a time to pause and reflect and give thanks for the good fortune bestowed upon the community in its first hundred years.

Q: Well...Eva...I um When we drive by the church and school out there I noticed a cairn, there was something special um took place there in centennial year too, wasn't there?

A: A cairn had been erected and dedicated in 1939 to honor the pioneers who had settled in the Brandon Hills district in 1879 and 1880. The inscription reads "They blazed the trail for us and generations yet unborn". Following the centennial church service the congregation gathered at the cairn to unveil a new plaque, which reads "In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Brandon Hills district 1879 to 1979. One generation passes away and another generation cometh and earth abide us forever."

00:09:55

Q: Well then thanks Eva that had been interesting and then we'll be looking forward to more celebrations next year, 1982, when Brandon celebrates its one hundredth anniversary.

[Pause]. Well Eva to close off this tape I would like to read something that the late Bessie Roddick Chapman gave me some years ago perhaps we can also tape Russ Gurr's songs. Now this is what Bessiewrote, it's entitled "My Church". "Before I was born my church gave to my parents ideals of life and love that made my home a place of strength and beauty. In helpless infancy my church joined my parents in consecrating me to Christ and baptizing me in his name. My church enriched my childhood with the romance of religion and the lesson of life that have been woven into texture of the soul. Sometimes I seem to have forgotten and then when else I might surrender to foolish and futile ideals of life, the truths my church taught became radiant, insistent and inescapable. In the stress and storm of adolescence my church heard the surge of my soul and guided my footsteps by lifting my eyes to the stars. When first my heart knew the strange awakenings of love my church taught me to chasten and spiritualize my affections. She sanctified my marriage and blessed my home. When my heart was full with sorrow and I thought the sun could never shine again my church drew me to the friend of all the weary and whispered to me the hope of another morning, eternal and tearless. When my steps have slipped and I have known the bitterness of sin my church has believed in me. And woeingly she has called me back to live within the heights of myself. Now have come the children dear to me than life its self and my church is helping me to train them for all joys and clean and Christly living. The church calls me to her heart. She asks my service and my loyalty. She has a right to ask it. I will help her to do this with others what she has done for me. In this place in which I live I will help her keep a flame and a loft the torch of a living faith.

End of Interview