

**Westman Oral History collection**

<b>Interview Date:</b>	<b>1983-05-19</b>
<b>Narrator (interviewee):</b>	<b>Joanne Titus</b>
<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>Jesse White</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Wellwood, Manitoba</b>
<b>Transcriber:</b>	<b>Riise Dunseath</b>
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Narrator: Today is May 19, 1983. The following is an interview with Joanne Titus at her home in Wellwood Manitoba. She has lived in the area since she was born. Living with her parents on the farm until she was 17 years of age. She received her education at Wellwood consolidated school, later going to Brandon University where she completed her teachers training course in June 1960. She taught at Dempsey school Greg, Manitoba for two and a half years approximately two and a half years at Wellwood and the last seven years at R.J. Waugh School in Carberry. Joanne married the local post master and she will speak about their experience in the post office and the general store at Wellwood. This interview is conducted by Jesse White for the Westman Orals Association Project, Voices of Yesteryear.

Question: Could you tell me how the mail was first brought to Wellwood?

Answer: In order to answer this question I will quote from the history of Wellwood district written by Barry Graham and H.G. Turner in a book entitled, The Carberry Plains 75 Years of Progress. This book was published in 1959, I quote, "From about 1890 to 1901 a stage was run from Carberry to Neepawa which carried mail and supplies." End of quote. According to the same source, the railroad came to Wellwood in 1901, quote, "When the CPR ran a branch line from MacGregor to Awhy [unclear] around which the Village of Wellwood was established. And the first train came along this line to Wellwood on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1901." End of quote. I would presume that soon after service to Wellwood began, that the mail arrived and was picked up by train, but I could not find any information to indicate an exact date. Later mail was trucked to the Village of Wellwood. We could not establish a definite date but we estimate the late 1950s.

Q: Could you give me a resume of the previous postmasters and the years they served in this position?

A: According to the information that I have Cyrus Turner was postmaster from 1881 until eighteen ninety two. Foster Graham was the next postmaster from 1892 until 1898, followed by Michael Young, postmaster from 1898 until 1901. In 1902 G.R. Black became postmaster and held this office until 1911. In the Carberry plains history book to which I previously referred, G.R Black, who was also a lumber merchant, was called the father of Wellwood because of his endeavored [unclear] fatigable efforts to advance the interest of the village. Mr. J.H Harry Caldwell was the next postmaster from 1911 until 1915. In 1916 Clarence Baldwin, later, better known as Ty, Titus, became postmaster and served in the capacity for the next 35 years, retiring in 1951. His son Jack Titus took

over after his fathers' retirement and served as postmaster until June 1982, when he retired.

Q: Was the Post Office always located in this building?

A: The Post Office was not always located in the building where we live. In early times the post office was located in people's homes, but as more business places developed in Wellwood the post office was later moved to public building. Mr. Caldwell operated the Post Office from the Wellwood Trading Company store. One Mr. Titus took over as postmaster the Post Office was moved to the building where we live. The post office was at first part of the General Store. In about 1935 Mr. Titus added a small room and a warehouse to the North side of the store. This small room was the Wellwood Post Office until 1982.

Q: What can you tell me about Grandpa Ty?

A: Clarence Edwin, C.E. Titus, was the first son of Theodore Ewin Titus and his wife Clarissa Sherwood of Saint John, New Brunswick. This branch of the Titus family originally came from Abbotsford, Wales and settled in the New England States across the Atlantic coast, later moving to the New Brunswick area of Canada in the 1800s. C.E. Titus was born July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1880. He left Saint John, New Brunswick and came to Portage La Prairie Manitoba in 1900. His wife to be, Annie Cogan, followed him to Portage La Prairie, and they were married there on January 7<sup>th</sup> 1902.

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They moved to Wellwood in 1904 where Mr. Titus began his grocery business. He was first in partnership with Mr. Dalton and Mr. Calbot, but later went into his own grocery business in 1907. As previously mentioned he did not become postmaster until 1916. He and Mrs. Titus lived above the store and as their family increased in size they built more living accommodation behind the store.

Q: Jack was one of a family of 13. Could you tell me something about the family?

A: Yes, Jack was one of a family of 13 children. Four of his brothers, Donald, Charles, Reginald and Raymond died in infancy, or early childhood. The following is a brief resume of the remaining 9 family members. The eldest family member is Edwin Titus who lives in Brandon and Celebrated her 89<sup>th</sup> birthday on Dece-, December 19<sup>th</sup> 1982. Theodore Clarence Titus died in Vancouver in 1951. Marjorie Jean died at Gretna Manitoba in 1937. Clarisa Alma, better known as Clara McKinnon, spends her summers in Manitoba and her winters in Mesa, Arizona. Harald Titus spends his winters in Arizona too, and most of his summers travelling through Western Canada. Gerald Robert was reported missing in action during World War two. Winnie, Mrs. Harry Lee, is retired and lived in Carberry. Jack is retired in Wellwood and lives in the same house in which he was born. Olive, the youngest family member past away January 28<sup>th</sup> , 1983 in Vancouver. So only five members of the Titus family are still living. The Titus children grew up in Wellwood and received their schooling there. I have heard many stories about their father whom they affectionately called, Papa. Clara tells of seeing the smoke from the train engine. She would run to tell Papa so he could get the mail ready. But it seemed Papa was never in too big a hurry to get the mail ready. Jack verifies this fact,

that Papa never had the mail ready for the train and that many times the engineer waited until Jack ran over with the mail on the sleigh or the wagon, depending on the season of the year. Jack says "I still have dreams about that."

Q: How did Jack come to take over from his Dad?

A: Jack was overseas during World War two, he attained the rank of flying officer and was awarded the DFC in 1944. After he returned from World War two he bought the store business from his dad, but he did not officially take over as postmaster until 1952, as his dad had retired in late 1951. Jack married Lorna Gary in 1945, he brought his new bride to the village of Wellwood where they reside in the Stella MacAfee house, one block west of main street on the corner of railroad avenue and Kerfoot Street. They moved to the house behind the store in 1947 where they raised a family of 3 children, Gerald Ray, Karen lee, John Kimberly.

Q: Could you tell me something about his first years at the post office?

A: Over the years Jack received help in the post office and the store from his wife Lorna, and also from his sisters Clara and Winnie which permitted he and Lorna to take the odd holiday. Jack was also fortunate to have good quality clerks, residing right in the Wellwood district. Some of these gals were, Dawn Wells Graham, Phyllis Graham, now Skofield [unclear], Yvonne White, now Graham, Shirley Kennedy, now Smith, Peggy Graham, now Kerwin, to name just some of his clerks. In the late 1950s when I was completing high school, I came to work for Jack when Lorna was quite ill. Lorna lost her

battle to cancer in August 1960. Their three children, Gerry age 15, Karen age 12 and Kim aged 8 were still growing up. So, Jack's sister Clara filled in the gap once more and kept house for Jack and cared for the children. I continued to help out too, but I was away for a year taking teachers college in Brandon. Jack and I were married in 1961.

Q: Tell me about the years since then.

A: The years since then have seen the growing up of Jack's first 3 children. Gerry and Kim now have families of their own and Karen is employed as a radiographer in Vancouver. Jack and I were blessed with two children. Michelle Lynn, who was born in June of 1963 and Vaughn Jeffery in January 1969. Michelle graduated from high school in 1981 and has been employed with an oil company in Calgary since that time. Vaughn is 14 years old and is attending grade 8 at Carberry collegiate and commutes daily by school bus from Wellwood.

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Q: Was Jack able to manage the post office by himself? Or did you play a big part in the management?

A: when the children were younger I helped Jack in the store and post office, but I gradually got more involved with teaching and eventually went back teaching on a fulltime basis in 1974. We never could have managed without the help of two local wives, Fern Irwin and Freda Walker. Fern's husband was the last United Grain Growers

elevator agent in Wellwood. And after the Irwin's left Wellwood, Freda Walker became Jack's capable assistant until the store closed in June 1982.

Q: Tell me all you can about the centennial celebrations.

A: The highlight of Jack's years as post master was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wellwood post office. The actual date was June first 1981, but the celebrations were held on June second 1981 when approximately 125 people gathered to see Jack presented with a plaque, commemorating the 100 years. Patrons of the post office were there and treated to coffee, doughnuts and birthday cake on the grounds of the Wellwood community hall. We were most pleased the Mr. Harry Caldwell the former post master from 1911 until 1915 at the age of 96 years was able to attend these ceremonies. In an article written by Andy Blicq, B L I C Q, for the Winnipeg-peg Free Press, June third 1981, Mr. Blicq said of Mr. Caldwell, "Still able to deal out a sturdy hand shake. Caldwell enjoyed some birthday cake and recalled the days when local people walked, or travelled by horse and buggy to get their mail. The mail was brought to town by train. 'I didn't get wealthy, but I got along well with the people.'" Mr. Caldwell passed away April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1982 in Portage La Prairie where he had been a resident of Alliance Manor for several years.

Q: What led up to Jack's retirement?

A: Jack decided to take an early retirement, so on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1982 he retired as post master and grocer at Wellwood. The post office was moved to the front porch of the residents

of Karen and Dwight Morden. Karen Morden became the new post mistress on July second 1982. Now, the post office is operating from a local resident's home, in much the same way as it did from the home of the first post master Cyrus Turner over 100 years ago. On July 17, 1982, we had an auction sale of the store equipment and any remaining groceries. The former post office has been remodeled into a study place for me and the former store area is being converted into a family room. Jack is enjoying his new-found freedom. I think the biggest adjustment was the slow realization that he was no longer tied to the store and post office, but that he was free to take off at any hour and be away for as long as he liked

Interviewer: Thank you, Joanne, em, I'm sure Jack misses us just as much as we miss him.

**End of Interview**