

Westman Oral History collection

Interview Date: October 1981
Narrator (interviewee): Eva Nelson
Interviewer: Amy Harrison
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Transcriber: Hayley McCaskill
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[00:00:00]

There are several voices talking (possibly family members of the interviewee), and it is difficult to tell who is saying what. This is what is being said.

Family Members?: Id' like. Yeh Yeh! You see that red light? Then you pushhh... She knows that already... Oh! This one? Hey. This one? To stop it... push that... for us to make... [fidgets with cassette tape] [piano playing happy music] [adults talking in the background] [baby noises] oh there she is come on... [baby noises] da da da da da da Okay pretend you are taking into this, talk. dem dem [piano continues] [baby noises] [laughter] [piano music ends abruptly] Okay stop we gotta see if we got this... [fidgets with cassette tape] Say hi. Hi! Say hi. He wants to listen. [laughter] No, Matt you talk. Say bye. What's your name Matt? [baby mumbles] What's your name? [baby mumbles] What's your name? [tires so say name] Matt. [adult speaks] How old? One? Say Babe! [Baby says] Baba. [adult speaks] Yeah.

Grandma. Say grandma. Can you say dad? [baby mumbles] Say dad.

[baby mumbles] Say dad. [baby says] Daddy! [adult speaks] Mommy. Say boat. Say boa.. Ball [baby mumbles] Okay. [Fidgets with cassette tape]

Amy Harrison: Please tell us first about your parents and and if if you remember and your grandparents and what they did and ah how they came to be living in this country and things like that that would be of interest.

Amy Harrison: [fidgets with cassette tape] We have to leave a little spot to start with for the name to go on it afterwards.

Eva Nelson: Alright.

Amy Harrison: I don't know why afterwards when you might just as well do it first.

[00:05:10]

Eva Nelson: You can signal me when you want me to start, just.

Amy Harrison: Yeah okay... Okay now, start.

Eva Nelson: Well you give me the introduction.

Amy Harrison: Oh...This is Mrs. Eva Nelson telling us about her early days in little village of Holmfield and and some of the later history of the same village and of the people in it and um we hope you'll enjoy this as much as we are.

Eva Nelson: Early Holmfield village from 1895-1910. Uhh Holmfield had a po-paper in those days, and a bake shop and a livery barn and a blacksmith shop, Jolly Walker was the blacksmith, a furniture store by Mr. Bradly the Arlington Hotel by Cockrill's Mr. Store with Frank and Columbus and a pool room and a dress making shop with a Ms. Harvey and shoe repair and

Robertson's store with a Billy Thorp as clerk hardware store by Karon's Brothers Odds Boarding House and meat market the Maple Leaf Hotel the CPR station water tank and a- was on the river and the and later the CN railway came through with a tank on the river and the Methodist Church later United Church the Anglican Church the Orange Hall and um a four-roomed public high school. [cough] The river provided swimming, skating and fishing. Skating parties with bonfires were a pleasure. Uhh the messenger boy provided the boxes from the back of his store for the bonfires... now play that back and see what it sounds like.

Amy Harrison: [mumbling] Just a minute till we hear what they are saying. Uh this read light isn't on, oh yess [banging] Somethings wrong here. See that thing isn't right if unless that red light is going it isn't recording. [Fidgets with cassette tape] We'll try it.

[talk at same time] (Eva) Is it on? (Amy) Go ahead.

Eva Nelson: Lacrosse was played on the ro-road allowance by the young men. We had a tennis court where the skating rink now stands, a ball team and a sports day. Laurence Harrison was a pitcher and Harvey Armstrong they catcher in later years. The main entertainment wa-was walking, everybody walked. On Sunday out to what we called unkindly Stinking Lake to watched the herons and north to the cemetery. [clears throat] The railroad track was lovers lane strolling down it and attempting to walk the rails with you falling off and your partner grabbing you. Fifty rails was about the top score. Holmfield built a stone four-roomed ah-ha school. The

standard of education was high, with excellent teachers. Ahh with third class normal provided at Manitou many of the young ladies became school teachers. Ah huh, the school turned out many teachers for the rural area of Manitoba. The children from the country boarded at Odds going for home for weekends. The first church in Holmfield was the Methodist Church built by a contribution from all denominations. The minister...[paper rustles] the ministers... oh darn where am I now.

[00:10:00]

Eva Nelson: The ministers resided in Holmfield in a manse and a rectory. Mrs. Lang, one minister's wife, was an elocutionist and taught many children how to recite. We had temperance elocutionist contests in those days. We needed them we had [laughs] two hotels. The Anglican church was built later and Mr. Gus Taylor was one of the main pushers in that project contributing time, money and labour. He later played the organ and sang [unclear] at the services with his beard bobbing up and down. Mrs. Malone was a [unclear] member of the Anglican and had a sewing guild for the young children teaching crochet, sewing, etc. When faith failed we had revival meetings revival is coming for a week to revive our religious faith. Church pews were filled once more could be we need that kind of return to religion now to religion now once so few now so few attend church. My memories of Holmfield are of the western sky, the sunset was something to behold at glory provided by God alone. God is in his heaven and all is right with the world. I wonder what it sounds like.

Amy Harrison: Okay.

Eva Nelson: [Clears throat] Sleigh riding and coasting down the big hill in the winter was great fun. Music was a must in Holmfield. It was there was lots of organs in homes and a few pianos in some. Mrs. Woodley Ms. Woodley came once a week to give music lessons in the homes, later professor Harks in the on the piano in Odds sitting room. Everybody sang on an evening out [cough] uh and uh the old tunes were so “singable” like ah “Carry Me back to Old Virginia,” “Annie Laurie,” and “The Old Oaken Bucket” etc.

Amy Harrison: Okay umm...The Harrison's were one of the...

Eva Nelson: First.

Amy Harrison: First families in Holmfield and ah you will tell, us as much as you can about them, please.

Eva Nelson: [Says something] [clears throat] William Sal...[mumbles and restarts] Goodness. William Salt Harrison was born in Stratford England in 1855. His father was a farmer of [unclear] farm in Stratford England. He came to Canada when a child of two on a sailing vessel with his parents. They settled in Ontario. The father later died of consumption leaving a family of four boys and one girl. The boys worked in a foundry [clears throat] later with the Massy machine company in Stratford. They learned mechanics from the company. Journey men people had settled in Ontario [unclear] bringing with them the art of milling. They built small flour mills and made their own flour. From this source William, Matthew and George

Harrison learned the construction and operation of these small mills.

William became a shareholder with the Massy company with this valuable knowledge William and Matthew Harrison came to the west with the big booming pushing the west young men the west.

Amy Harrison: Okay now uh you will tell us some more about um the Harrison family won't you?

Eva Nelson: Well this will be about the.. their life in Ontario pretty well. William came from England to Canada as an infant of a year and a half and he came with his parents on a sailing vessel, uh settled in Ontario, where the father died of consumption. His mother carried on with four sons and one girl.

Amy Harrison: Okay.

Eva Nelson: As the boys grew up they apprenticed at the foundry at Stratford. William learned mechanics from pouring a mo- molten iron up to the construction of machinery. Ontario had a... Ontario had a number of German se-settlers who brought milling art from their home country and built small mills in Ontario. From these Harrison's learned the construction and art of flour making. With these skills Harrison brothers moved west. At Wakopa at Wakopa they built and operated a sawmill and homestead of farm land. The sawmill was destroyed by fire. [cough] The old men came to home came to Killarney and built the first grain elevator. Wheat was delivered in bags. Williams heart was set on building a mill and as the project wasn't feasible in Killarney he moved to Holmfield. The first mill was steam powered fired with wood long piles of wood where in one picture we had

with the mill. George and Bill will partners in this project. It prospered for years. Lo- long lines of wagons of grain lined up to for their turn into the elevator. And it was a sight, with ten o'clock often as closing time. During the depression mill was the participant of the scant crop the harvested in those years. Farmers found it a god send to producing enough flour to last the year by delivering wheat. Commonly called gristing the flour was called a grist. What does that... ohhh I think it's terrible.

Amy Harrison: Okay go ahead.

Eva Nelson: Now let's go back the William Harrison family. Maria Wilkinson was born in Truro Cornwall England she came to Canada with a family who also stopped in Ontario. The cold climate of Canada took its toll, the father died of TB and left his wife and two small girls. She too looked to the west in her troubles. Um the older girl Maria was taken by a Quaker family named Pennales. Mother came west with the one child and stopped at Emerson a town, opening fast to receive travelers from the east. Here she found work as a cook and as a midwife to the community. She met a widower with four children and married and set out for Holmfield, [clears throat] where they farmed. The years went by Maria M- Mother redheaded [unclear] that she was left, left and came west to with the fries to her mother's home. The only work was [clears throat] working for the public. Mother at twenty working in Killarney hotel met father they courted in a row boat on Killarney lake and married in August. They only.. they had four girls tic tic tic and at last they moved to Holmfield. George and his

mother had the house in Holmfield so they were housed there. Fancy little red headed women and with four youngsters moving in with her mother-in-law. Soon Grandma Harrison died and was the first one buried in Holmfield cemetery. Two baby boys arrived at the Harrison house, Abram and Laurence. The years went by, Mary [unclear] Eva became school teachers, Abram and Laurence worked at the mill and Ruth was secretary there. One railroad is gone and the bus lines missed Holmfield and the town is al-almost gone but it served its purpose well. In the in the in the Pi-Pilot Mound old folks home, I still, I'm still here.

Amy Harrison: Is that it?

Eva Nelson: I still hear much praise for the Holmfield mill... now where is the last page?

Amy Harrison: Okay, do you wanna just start here?

Eva Nelson: became a member of the legislator and held that position for XXIII years. Laurence holding the fort at the time, he was in Winnipeg. He also played a great part in getting his home for Pilot Mound. And now I am here scribbling down this history. This doesn't really matter, we are thankful for those who struggled to open up the west. Maybe be as selfless and generous as they and watch our step that the land they gained has not been lost. Abe's son Bill still carries on at the mill making the winter flower.

[00:20:10]

End of interview