

Consent Form

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Signed

Mrs McElrea
interviewee

Signed

Kevin Frost
interviewer

Date April 18/79

Interviewee- Mrs. Helen McElrea. She owned a farm in
Huntingville. (Brickyard Road)

Interviewer- Kevin Frost

Were you in the Eastern Townships during the period of 1939
to 1945?

Yes I was.

The date and place of birth?

I was born in the Brompton Roads in the municipality of
Warford in Sherbrooke.

Were you married at that time? During W.W. II?

Yes I was.

How about a little of your family background?

Well my father was of Scottish ancestry, my mother was Irish-French.
Her parents were all born in the Quebec province. My father's
grandfather McCloud came from the Isle of Louis in Scotland.
Grandmother McCloud was Elizabeth Moe. Her father was the
United Empire loyalist and one of the first settlers in Sherbrooke.
So your family background is all from the Eastern Townships pretty
well, like your parents?

Yes it goes back several generations. Grandpa Bennelli's grand-
father was from France. He married Margaret Miller from Scotland
and they moved to Canada and were the original people at
Bennelli's Mills.

What was your occupation during the period of '39 to '45?

Well I was a housewife and farming.

Where was your farm?

The farm was near Huntingville just up from about a mile out of Huntingville.

When did you first move in to the farm or started on this farm?

We started on the farm in 1928.

And you were pretty well settled there during this period?

That's right.

What was your basic salary from what you earned off the land?

Well, really we were able to just manage from the farm so the work on the railroad helped to buy us extra essentials that we needed and helped to pay for our farm.

So Mr. McElrea worked on the farm? I mean on the farm as well as working for the railroad?

Yes. When he had time off.

So most of the income came from working on the railroad?

Right.

And the farm you broke pretty well even?

That's right.

How about....

When W.W. II had begun had the Great Depresseion ended in your area? And were you able to recover from it or had it affected you at all?

Well it had affected us quite a bit yes because we hadn't made much money, but we were able to finish paying off the farm eventually.

In what way did W.W. II most affect you?

We were concerned for our friends and relatives then, of course, there were shortages of supplies of sugar, and gas.

You mean the rationing situation?

Well we had to have so many tickets to get sugar and gas then we just get along. For a couple of years we didn't drive a car at all because it was too difficult to get gas and we weren't making enough money to manage.

Do you remember what you were doing when you heard that the war had begun? Or how did you hear of the war's outbreak?

I think it was on a Sunday, I heard it on the radio. And then we saw it in the papers. And, of course, all our friends were soon all talking about it.

Did any of your family members or relatives volunteer for overseas fighting?

Yes, I had several cousins and friends that immediately got at it. And then we had a fellow that worked for us that joined.

He volunteered for the army?

Yes.

What were living conditions like around the farm and in the area?

Like your source of income.

Well, we worked pretty well from daylight until dark so we didn't have too much time for recreation.

How did you manage financially during this time?

Well, we received enough money from our milk and eggs to pay the feed bill and a few groceries and I made over clothing for the

children and the children helped milk the cows and helped in the garden. We received a loan from the Quebec Provincial Government so they took over the mortgage of the farm so we only had to pay $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ on our money.

When did they take over the mortgage, like at the beginning of the war was it?

It was just before the war. Around 1934 or 1935. We only had to pay so much a year, but we had to keep an account of everything we had gotten.

Did the rationing problem affect you in any way? Do you remember what things were rationed or what problems rationing proposed for you?

Well we were rationed on sugar and gas. That seemed to be the things that stayed in my mind the most.

Did you do a lot or make a lot of preservatives on the farm so sugar must have been quite a problem then?

Yes, that was the chief problem because it ... we had to have a certain amount when the fruit was ready. Sometimes it was hard to get, so we had to learn how to put it away without too much sugar.

Do you remember if there was a black market in the area? To buy things off of?

There were black markets, but we didn't buy off the black markets.

Did the change male-female ratio affect social life in your area? The farming community?

Well, prior to this mostly men drove cars and tractors, but after the women were driving the cars and tractors and more women were getting out and helping on the farms then they had been previously. We never had a tractor.

It was all done by horse?

Yes, all done by horses.

Did your family and friends have a sense of national unity?

Oh, yes.

Did you have like community groups to work together to do things for the soldiers overseas?

Yes, our women used to get together and do knitting and write letters and so on to the soldiers.

You wrote letters to relatives overseas?

To relatives and to sometimes we would just get names of people whom we heard were lonely and write the letter.

So you were writting letters to people you never knew?

Yes, that's right.

Did you ever meet any of these people after?

No most of them never came back.

Do you remember anything about the conscription crisis? The drafting of soldiers? Were there any draft dodgers around?

Yes, there were vast dodgers around and sometimes they would come and work for a short period of time as long as they got good food and a good room to stay in.

So you - some dodgers had worked for you?

Yes, for a short period of time and then they would move on

somewhere else because they didn't want to be caught.

Did they let on that they were draft dodgers or that was your feeling?

Well sometimes they kept it covered for quite a while, but it would generally come out in the end.

You were saying something earlier about how men would make themselves so that they wouldn't pass the examination?

Yes, we had a fellow tell us that he had eaten soap so it would make his heart beat faster so that he wouldn't pass the test.

So that he wouldn't be in physical condition to fight?

That's right. He wouldn't pass when they had the examination.

Were there a lot of French people that were draft dodging?

Do you remember or were they mostly English?

Well there were French people that were dodgers.

A lot of them were the French?

Yes. A few of the English.

How did the French and English get along in your area?

Oh, we always got along very well. There was no hatred in our community at all between French and English. We were neighbors and we got along together. And we always had high respect for each other.

What did you do for leisure time during?

Well, we didn't have too much leisure time because on the farm there was always something to do. Sometimes we gathered around

the piano and sing war songs and other times we played a game of cards. (500 mostly) And other times we just listened to the radio.

Do you remember anything about military installations in this area or in the Sherbrooke area or POW camps of any kind?

Yes, they had the prisoners camp at Newington Shops in Sherbrooke, just off Bowen Avenue. We used to see the soldiers out there and they had a big round ring made in the back of their shirts so people could tell that they were prisoners.

But they were prisoners?

But they were around. They were given considerable freedom, but their clothing was marked, so that you knew they were prisoners.

You mean they were...?

Well, you'd see them out in the field and so on. They weren't hard on them. They were under guard, but they were given freedom.

Enough freedom to go downtown or anything like that?

No, I don't think so. You could just see them across... looking across near the Newington Shops. They were let out in the air so they could enjoy the good fresh air.

Do you recall the end of the war? Like V-Day or VJ-Day?

Oh, yes. We were certainly happy to hear that and to welcome those back that were able to come. It was sad to see the condition that some of them came home in.

Were there any close relatives that came back who were mentally disturbed or anything like this from the war?

Yes, several had to go to St. Anne de Bellevue to the hospital there...

I worked on the railroads through the war and we were hulling mostly pulp wood and asbestoes from East Barton to Thetford Mines, Black Lake, Cole Reine.

Were there a lot of people working for the railroad at this time?

Like a lot of people who didn't go overseas?

Oh yes, there were a lot. Quite a few crews working.

Were there any like bums that were that would ride the trains and dodgers?

Oh yes, there were some bums and we didn't know that, but we had lots of people that were riding.

Were there any security measures? Did you have to kick them out?

No except the terminal the CP police would handle them when they got into the terminal.

What would they do with them?

Well, if they catch them they would arrest them.

Did business on the railroad pickup? Was there more business before the war or during the war?

There was a lot more during the war.

Suppose hulling ammunition and pieces for war material?

Well, there was a lot of freight, of course, pulp wood, feed, and all that going down the line.

Did you hull any top security items like ammunition and so on that there was tight security on the train?

No, I didn't know anything about that.

Were you carrying soldiers or pretty well freight?

Well, we went and got a train load from Newport. The war had finished then. We took them to Quebec.

So you were bringing them back home then?

Yes.