

DRYDEN AND DISTRICT MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ALPHONSE ROUSSIN PART 2

Date of Interview: March 20, 2019

Interviewer: Natalie Nachtman [N.N]

Narrator: Alphonse Roussin [A]

Note: Part 2 recording cuts off beginning part of interview when I ask AR if he knows anything about the mercury dumping at the Mill, and if he is willing to talk about it. He starts off by saying 'when he worked there in 61, 62 or 63 a friend of his work at the chemical plant.

A.R: also knew from north Dryden, he went and worked at the chemical plant it started at that time, eh. Probably '62 it probably started. So, and, and I knew him a little bit. He was a couple years older than I was but he was in high school when I was there and he was, goi-, north Dryden he was one of the residents there eh. So, he said sure, he'd, he liked the job. It was a chemical plant. They needed some of that stuff to feed, to work with the paper I guess, eh. So, but, not, nothing came out actually. Until, maybe ten years later even. In that time I had already went to BC and came back. I was gone from the company for about three years from April of '64 until the summer of '67. And then when the company here bought Colenso out, the mill, the sawmill there, well we got to - asked to go make a sp-special orders there because they had big timber. So we were skinning and cutting wood along the Wabigoon River, of course this water goes right into, and we were finding dead deer on our, on our landing and on our strips, eh. Actually, we had found about five and my partner was really one that was an outdoorsman, he liked fishing and hunting, and we were curious, why are these deer dead like that? And so we packaged one up one time and we put it in a bag and, and uh the ministry they used to come and check the wood limits, eh and uh so, we gave it and we made it a kind of a big deal in the camp eh that we were going to do this. And we wanted to know why those deer were dying like that. They took about a couple years to get an answer but finally we did, and it was mercury positioning. So, and that was about the same time as the Natives further down were having trouble too, eh. But then it was, you know, the word was getting out, eh that, that mercury was coming from here, eh. Course the company was denying a lot of the stuff. They were saying "Oh that's natural mercury" and apparently natural mercury is made when water is raised, like it was here, and it has something to do with the wood that gets flooded, eh. And it creates some kind of a natural

mercury. But this was definitely from the chemical, from the chemical plant here. So, and then of course lately here, just a few years ago that one guy who was working at the mill, he showed them where they had buried a bunch of that mercury and that was seeping into the, into ground, eh. And that's eventually coming into the.. and they found a lot of it in the bottom of the rivers you know, all the way down the river, the English river system. You know at first, it was good because i-you know, the chemical plant was there you know. It made new jobs and the people working there liked to work there but you know, it had it, if, if they wouldn't have dumped it th-th-the mercury or their waste like that and poisoned the river system it wouldn't have been bad, edh. Cause see the river system wasn't in very good shape cause they'd had been dumping ever since they had built the mill and the fish were, that river was polluted. Like where it was going through my properties there, my farms, you couldn't eat the fish. And there wasn't very many fish left in, around there, eh. But there was some you know coming along. It was flowing river through there so some of them would come from Eagle River or the Swanson's Creek or anth- uh, the Mclane Creek[?] was coming in there and also uh, the Beaver Creek uh from Minitaki. So, you would get a few fish in there sometime, but nobody wanted to take a chance on eating them. Which was probably a good thing, eh. We had to go, we lived right by the river but we had to go away from it to, to catch our fish, eh. Yeah, that was the ol- that was the days. And there wa- later on I knew there was, uh, and this was more recently, maybe twenty five, thirty years ago there was you know people still working there and they liked the job and they knew there was a problem but I think they must have quit dumping into the river. They, they couldn't get away with it forever, that's for sure, eh. Yeah.

N.N: And when you said they've been dumping things forever, it's just like their garbage and other chemicals?

A.R: The- Even the town, the town sewer was going right, flushed into the river system here too, eh. But, just below the dam, eh. Yeah, and the, the other side well everything was getting thrown into the river eh, flushed right into the river. And that included everything, eh. At times you could tell and it stunk like crazy going through the subway. This, this town was known to be a stinky, stinky town, [laughter]. Sometimes you couldn't even hardly stand going underneath the subway there. You know it stunk so bad, eh. And that was coming from the mill.

N.N: And wasn't the old swimming place just right outside the mill?

A.R: But see, that was above, above the dam though, eh.

N.N: Okay.

A.R: See there had been rapids in there eh, where the dam was, eh. But, and there was two channels. The s-uh, the, the channels where the dam is now, that was the bi-, main channel. And there was another smaller channel on this side. And what they'd done is they had dammed that channel to make a swimming pool, eh. So there was a nice swimming pool there. All that water would go down stream and it was clean water coming in, eh.

N.N: Okay

A.R: Except for the wa-, you know they, when they were logging they were moving the logs up on the water. Sometimes you'd get some dirty water in there from the logs, eh. But it wasn't from the mill. And every once in a while they c-, they could flush that swimming pool. You know, just drain it and it would gravity flow would come back in, eh. They actually had a, they had a pipe underneath the road, under the uh the road the Duke street road like. And they fill it up in no time, eh. I remember swimming there quite a bit there when we were kids. Was a place to go. They had a pond for the kids, the smaller kids. There was a little swimming pool and the dock was more for the big kids, eh. And they had it set up with diving boards. It was quite a nice, nice place to go. And then there was boat houses all the way along there. It wasn't kept up very well but people wanted to park their boats and they, they could lock their boats up, eh, and just leave them there. And there was a little bit of fishing along there too, eh. You know, there was good fishing all the way along as far as that goes, eh. People would fish quite a bit just off the shore. Yeah. And now with the mercury, as far as that goes, they, they found spots and they're trying to decide how they're going to clean it up, eh. But, they're afraid to disturb it more than, but it's never going to be clean if it's not cleaned up off the bottom, eh.

N.N: uh huh.

A.R: See I guess it was settling and it was, for the deer, when it killed the deer, it was getting into the plants growing where the, and the deer would go and eat those plants, eh. And apparently it would damage their brain. So, yeah, I guess it must have damaged them enough that they just died, eh. They weren't wolf kills they would just die. Everything was there, eh, just rotting away. Yeah. I think a lot of that was the company knew ahead of time but they didn't want to say, eh. They, they denied it as much as they could and even some of the, even, even the officials, you know, like the Ministry, I think they were, they knew better too but they were kind of going along with what the company said and to heck with the people downstream. And of course the people that were working at the mill, they didn't want to say too much either because they'd lose their job if the mill ever shut down. [laughter], so you're kind of stuck, eh?

N.N: Yeah.

A.R: And here, we're working for the company. I've [?] along the river. We're questioning why those deer are, but we didn't get fired or anything. They just kept working but I think, by that time, they were improving things at the mill and not dumping so much into the river. Well actually it was in uh, '68 when they were doing that sewage treatment plant. So, they wer- there was pressure there to stop dumping, eh, so much stuff into the river, there was no doubt about it. Even town was doing the same thing so how could they pressure, how could the politicians pressure the mill when the town is dumping their, their, all their sewage into the river, eh? So when they got it cleaned up, and then they got the mill, ever since then they got those settling ponds, eh. And there is supposed to be clea- cleaner water coming through there and getting dumped. They're still dumping what is overflowing from those ponds into the river and it's supposed to be cleaner and they're supposed to be testing it to make sure that there is no toxins going in there, deadly toxins, eh. And hopefully they're right. But every- everything has taken its course. Like even the Japanese they had the same problems inside of their places, eh. Like, like the Natives down in Grassy Narrows. Well you can't blame them for raising a stink they're, they got- the, some of their, there's probably three or four generations of people there now, that are really having health problems, eh. Too bad, hopefully that don't happen too often. And shouldn't but it's still happening with the mines. A lot of the mines event up north, they're leaving some of their, their barrels of uh, pollutants and, and some of that stuff has been there for maybe seventy five years, eh, and its seeping into the ground and going into the little rivers and creeks. And in the wintertime they're not even freezing over they're so polluted, eh. And they've been long gone, just leaving all of their, their pollution behind, eh. Crazy.

N.N: And what company was it that was denying the mercury dumping?

A.R: Well, see, it was.. it was uh Dryden Paper. Well it was Angle Canadian and Dryden Paper, eh? And then, Reid Paper bought them out, eh. But it was mostly Dryden Papers when, when the uh chemical plant was built. And then, later on, Re-Reid Paper also. Cause Reid Paper bought Dryden Paper in the late '60's, eh. So, they were, would have been at the tail end. When we were at Calanso, when I first started at Calanso I was working for Reid. Actually, when I st-, wait a minute. Wait a minute. Am I mixed up now? They took over in the 70's sometimes anyways. It might have been still Dryden Paper. When I started working for the union, I remember, I had a Reid..I had worked in the bush for Reid Paper because I had that sticker on my car there.

N.N: It's hard to say, in this book..

A.R: But you know there's been so many companies since then. And there's s-, there's been so many companies doing that too, eh. Like you take even the cash, the settlement that Wabigoon Reserve got, eh. Because that, their land, their reserve was flooded eh. And that was back, probably in the '20's, eh or maybe even 1915 or s-, when they, when they raised

that dam up a little more, eh. At first it was only ra- there maybe three feet and then they raised it probably about seven feet. That's when they really flooded a lot of land and flooded the reserve. But, the government and the company at the time, I don't remember what company, but, they, they had made an agreement with the natives from the reserve and the government and that company that company was going to pay them for the loss of their land. And the government was going to see to it that it was done. But of course it took over a hundred years eh bef-, before they got some kind of settlement and the government got stuck with it, eh with paying, uh. And I know they had a couple of friends at the reserve that were band members and they ended up getting, I think it was, five thousand dollars each. There was six hundred band members, not all living there. There's only half of them live on the reserve, the others are all over the place, eh. But then they up getting, I think it was twenty-one million that sits in a fund just, even today. It's sort of like for uh, community initiatives and there's a board. There's strict rules on, on them getting a hold of that money, eh. Which is good for the reserve, eh? Good for the people that want to do something. If you want to open a little business or, you know, do something uh, that the board will let uh, will approve, you can get a bit of that money out. But they say it's pretty strict and it should be strict, eh. It's for the future generations that uh have advantage of, not so us old guys will go out and party it up and spend it all. [laughter]. Leave some for the young guys, [laughter]. So that's about it for that uh, pollution of that uh, and that's probably one of the worst things that happened in Dryden you know.. was letting that go on for so long. Dryden got a bad reputation for that, eh? And maybe that's why a lot of, lot of other industry wouldn't come to Dryden, I don't know, you know. It's too bad. And when that mill shuts down Dryden's going to suffer. After taking it, taking everything out of the country. Well it's a good thing we've got a lot of wood, eh.

N.N: Yeah. And when you were working at the mill f-, representing the like unions, did you have to deal with any labour disputes or strikes? Or?

A.R: See, see when I work-, when I was uh, actually when I was seventeen years old they had asked me to be a union steward at the mill. But I didn't want to ta-, I wanted somebody older to take it. So I sat in on the committee for three years there. The union committee which is another three with the union steward. And then when I left, of course, well I was moving, eh, from place to place. When I came back they were uh, what had happened there in the, in '67, but there was quite a bit, and even when I started at the mill, that was in '61, eh. The workers didn't even have plug ins there for their cars, eh. And when it was forty below and you're finished your night shift at six thirty in the morning there were a lot of cars that wouldn't start, eh. But the office workers, they were working probably eight to five, or nine to five or whatever, maybe some of them were finished at four even. They had their extension cords all the way along the fence. But there was a fence there. But eventually some of them felt sorry for us and they would leave their extensions so we could plug in, eh. Which was kind of nice, if you could have four or five cars that would start we could pull the

other ones to get them started or, or you know, boost them eh. But eventually they all got plug ins, eh, which was nice. But you know, things were improving for the workers, I gotta say. I come at the right time. Cause before that, working for the contractors like my uncles and even my dad when he had first come, they were working in the bush for contractors. You were on your own, boy, eh. You had to go out and a lot of them would find an old building somewhere or maybe they, there was, might have been some old homestead or, close by, eh. So you'd go and fix up the shack so they could live in it. They didn't want to travel, you know, every day going back to work. They'd stay right there on the job for maybe, two or three weeks at a time before coming into town before for more groceries or, or sometimes somebody, we'd go out there and visit them and bring them some groceries and some, and the power saw started coming in so you'd bring them gas, eh. They were still working with horses then, in the bush, eh. But everything was improving, eh. When I came back, I run into a couple of union disputes in BC. And, they were, pretty big but it got settled, eh. When I got here there was uh, uh there had been some big strikes too, eh. Not so much here. But there'd been one, I think it was uh, even in the mill they had some strikes. But they would get settled after, you know, three or four months or something. But some of the others, like even back in uh, on the highway eleven, there was about seven workers got shot there. That, that was back in probably the late '60's or early '70's.

N.N: How'd they get shot?

A.R: Well, there was a dispute at one of the wood sites, eh. Some people were crossing the picket line and going to work. So, the union guys, they were going to set up a pretty big picket line and some of the workers that were going across they got scared. And somehow they had rifles in there, eh. And they started shooting at the workers and killed a bunch of them. There's a monument up there now. I never did stop to see that monument but I went by there a couple times and it kind of slipped my mind when I went through there. But that was the story that was going on in the '70's, eh. And when I started in uh, for the union in '78, we'd had, we'd had, a couple years before we'd had a strike here. And the mill workers had a strike the year before but it only lasted three or four months, eh then it got settled. One of our main issues was the company wanted us to buy our own machines, eh.

N.N: Like, logging machines?

A.R: Our skids, yeah. And, of course, that was a big issue because once you buy a bi- your own machine then you've got payments and you've got to keep working for whatever the company wants to give you, eh. They know you got payments, eh, and in most cases people would have to mortgage their houses, and you know, you'd have to work. You'd be a slave to them. They'd pay you whatever they felt like, eh. So that was a big issue with us, eh. And they didn't win that, in the mid '70's. That would have been maybe '76 when that happened, and I started working for the union in '78. In January of '78 I can remember that.

And, th- I walked right into, in the fall a big strike in Kenora. And that was about the same issues, owner operator was one of the issues. And other things too. They wanted to do away with the camps, you know, they wanted to cut the wood cheaper, they want to contract the wood. And they sort of beat us there, eh. But we beat ourselves, eh, because some of the guys, they were given machines from the company so they went to work, eh. But they were sorry after that they did that. And even some of the contractors that thought they were going to make a bundle there, they were sorry later on but it was too late by then, eh. You know, there are so many machines in and around the bush that it was you know, the- we, uh after two years we walked away from it, eh. We had to. Yeah. So they, we never did get an agreement with that company except at the saw mill in uh, in Keewatin. And we weren't negotiating on very good terms because the company they, they, and even when we were, when we were negotiating here, I think it was '76, there was people brought in that like, in Prince George, and he ended up manager here later on in the woodlands, eh, and he had been a senior in high school when I was going to school, [laughter]. But it was quite, it made it more interesting for me. I was on the bargaining committee and I was also one of the strike captains, and then later on, a couple years later well, the workers wanted me to put in my resume to go, to go to work as a, as a business rep, eh. And I did, for the Dryden, the Dryden area, eh. But it was all good, very good uh, experience, eh, to go through, just to make a person realize, you know that, what the workers have achieved you know, in getting better, better wages and working conditions, eh. And of course, the companies well, they wanted to make more profit too, eh. And that was a big issue, was owner operators and contractors. And and by then, we'd had busses to take us to, to the work, to the work sites and to the camps. And we were getting riding pay after half an hour each way. They had good, good benefits for, the work was still there, mind you. But, and the company besides that, what, and what, what forced the company into looking after us better too, was two iron, iron ore mines that started, eh. One at Matabi and the other one north of Ignace. They had a hard time getting workers, eh. So they had to treat us better too, eh, [laughter]. So I sort of walked into a good timing in my work life. Yeah.

N.N: Can you go into specific details about working the railway in Eagle River? Like what exactly did you do?

A.R: Oh yeah sure, that was, [laughter], that was my first job. I think I might have told you that. You know, I was, I was uh friends with two of the foreman's daughter and son I went to sch-, the same, uh grade with the daughter and the son was a year, one grade ahead of me but we'd chum around together so, but th- his dad had said "you know if Al doesn't go back to school in September tell him to come to work, I'll give him a job. So, I went to work, eh. And uh that was my first job, I got my social insurance number with him and, and uh, but at that time it was a lot of manual work and we were there, we'd change rails, we change ties. Everything was by hand, eh. Pick and shovel eh, [laughter]. But, you know, it was still, we were, like I was used to it because my dad had moved to the farm and my dad had also

brought us to work, in the bush like, you know, on part time, on weekends. He would go get a job, a small job working and he was working at the gate, so he said he wanted extra money but he'd bring us with him. So, we knew how to work hard, eh, and we got a good taste of it, working for the railroad. But, at that time, I remember the uh, sections were five miles each eh, and in Eagle River there were two sections, one east and one west.

N.N: Sections being?

A.R: The part, five miles of the railroad track, eh,

N.N: Okay

A.R: that you had to look after. So every morning, and especially if it was forty below in the morning you had to be out there first thing in the morning patrolling the track. To find, to check and see for break, broken rails, eh. Cause they'd break easier when it's cold, eh. So, and then if it was one, well you'd have to put up flag uh, sometimes you'd call, you'd just fix it up enough and then call the, the other sections to help you change a rail. Or sometimes they might just be a small angle iron, eh, that you had to fix eh, and you'd do that right there. It only took a few minutes, but they had to be done. And uh, of course later on the steel gangs come into play. And uh, when I, in January see, they the steel, and the shops were hiring quite a few of the section men that had, that had uh seniority, they would go to work in Transcona in the shops eh, they were building, you know there, the boxcars there. And they had better, they liked, they had better wages there, eh. And some of them would go work on the gangs in the summertime, like the steel gang and the tie gang and whatever else gangs there was, gravel gangs. So, some of them would leave the section and I ended up getting a job. And I was lucky because I was one of the first students hired in September and there was about three or four came after that when they found out I got hired. The foreman hired three or four more but I had more seniority so I could stay, stay longer and then when I got bumped, well I didn't have no choice. I had to leave, it was the middle of January. But I had worked on the elevator here in Dryden at the hospital for a month. And then the f-, my buddy he, he had quit high school and he had a job in the bush in Minitaki and he said "when you're finished there" he says "come and work with me in north Minitaki there" he says "I've got it all set up, we're going to go strip cut for a month" So, until break up eh, and that was for Hoey and McMillan. So, we did that and then we knew we were going to get laid off around the fifth, middle of March so, my buddy's uh dad, he come and he says o us "you know, I could line you up to go to work, you'd go to BC on the steel gang" so we went. We said "sure we'll go". And he had lined it up you know, around the end of Mar- around the twenty, twenty fifth of March. And things were too frozen yet but it was good to work over there in the Crows Nest Pass. So, there was seven of us from BC went, and I was happy that I had already worked and I was an experienced track man. So, I was making thirty-seven cents more an hour than some of these other guys and they weren't

too happy [laughter] about that, and I was the youngest one of the seven, eh. But, it was a good time. Good experience, just to go there and see th-, part of BC it was nice. And there we were replacing all the steel on a branch line that was going to a mine. And the mine was going to open up and they wanted better railroad there. So we had- they had small rails, I think they were only about thirty five pounds, and they put a hu- I think it was a hundred pound rails. We worked for two weeks and then came back and started working in Ignace. But then I left there and came back to the section because I was tired of, they want to park these box c-the gang out of town all the time. Because you know some of those wild people in the gang, they go to the beer parlours and make a bunch of r-[?] and wouldn't come to work the next day and the police wa-, and the police wanted us out of town too, eh. [laughter], and it was nicer actually cause people wouldn't drink as much if they weren't close to the beer parlour, eh. But anyways, we left and we went back to Eagle and got on the section, eh. That was the, that was the plan in the first place anyways. You know when the summer would start again, we'd get our job back. But then all of a sudden, they started cutting back. The gangs were getting, and they wanted to ship people out to Hawk Lake and Pine and, and uh different places out in the bush, eh. And the foreman said, "if you can get on at the mill" you know he says "do it, because CPR is cutting back and cutting back and you'll end up without a job. Or else you'll have to work out in the bush, eh". So by Jimminy, I got a job at the mill pretty quick. My dad's s-, I might have said that last time, eh. It was supposed to be a big secret my dad had said "oh, I but don't tell anyone they're going to hire five people", and I was lucky to get on, eh. And that was about, that was the end of my one, my one stint with the CPR. Which was good, good experience. Learned how to, how to fix rails and change ties [laughter].

N.N: So, growing up was there a strong presence of your Metis ancestry or was that something just in the background?

A.R: Well, my mom being a Marion was a proud Metis, eh. You know the Marions were, you know neighbours to Louis Reil in St. Vital and you know and actually, even now a days even some of our Metis young people think that, oh Metis life was hunting and trapping. You know, hunting buffalo and you know. But, then being, you know trading the canoes for the Hudson's Bay company, eh. But a lot of it was just you know fa-, uh you know living on the farm, having a little bit of cattle and planting you know some, some big gardens. Especially for the older who couldn't be voyagers and couldn't go out on the buffalo hunts. And, we did the same thing, especially when we were, cutting wood was a lot Metis life too. Way back in the 1800's when steamers came in, there was a lot of Metis would go and cut firewood for the steam, for the steam engines and those boats, eh. Because some of them, even in the early days, the First Nations they weren't too happy with all the white people coming in, eh. So, they, they w- they had a hard time getting white people to go and cut wood for these, firewood steamers, eh. And it was one of the Metis jobs but you know, like anybody else there was big families, eh. Maybe some were herding and some were too old

to go out and work like they used to when they were younger. So they would settle, just like anybody else along the river lots. Where, that was your means of transportation, along the water ways, eh. And you'd have big stretches, long stretches of land for your cattle or your horses and maybe chickens, pigs or, you know, it wasn't big but you had enough to feed yourself and sometimes trade with, with uh other people that had, money that had went out and worked. And you could buy, then you could buy what you needed at the stores like tea and coffee, sugar, you know. So, but, we were, we were sort of keeping up too with the lifestyle, the modern lifestyle, buying tractors, you know. And we wor-, we worked at the mill whenever, uh we could. So, we kept our farm sort of a hobby, and being so, so many boys there was two of us that was interested in farming full ti-, as much as we could, eh. The rest of them just took off and they'd come back just maybe to help for haying season, eh. Come back for a couple weeks holidays and help us make hay. But, my, one of my young brothers we stayed on and, with my dad. And that was sort of his retirement project too eh, was, and he was a farmer, he liked farming. And we got so it, it was part of, we liked it more than anything eh. But we couldn't do it, there wasn't enough money in it to do it full time and make good living. But hobby wise it was a good paying hobby, you know. Make a few bucks. I know, the young, uh guy that would come in from, he was from Oakville down East. He would come into the area and we'd, when we found out about him and he came out, he would make, do the income tax for us. Specialized in small business in farming, eh. So, he would encourage it too, eh. And I'm glad we followed along with what he, some of what he said and some of the other, some of the other old people too would, its not how much money you make this year. It's what you've accumulated for later on when you get to be too old to work, eh. And of course cattle was the same thing. We'd start with, I know, I know we, on the farm we'd start with three cows eh. And my dad, he would, he gave us all a chance to have a heifer, was a young cow. And if we wanted to keep it and raise our own in the main herd we could, eh. By, by doing that you start with nothing, with a gift, eh. That's maybe worth twenty dollars, eh. And you build up. Like in fifteen years I had thirty-five head of cattle, eh.

N.N: Mhmm.

A.R: But I remember I had bought one too. But, I remember buying mine, when my dad gave me the heifer. I was going with my first wife, and we were just still, I was still working at the mill, eh. So, I gave her the, the, I gave her, her name, eh. That was Terry, [laughter].

N.N: [laughter].

A.R: [laughter] And then, and then before that, of course, all girls that we knew, in Eagle River and even some in Dryden, if we had got a, those cows that were coming up eh, and the young heifers, we would give them a name of one of the girls that we knew [laughter]. And then of course, it ended up that we got- had too many, we had to give them numbers

instead and tag their ear, eh. It was fun being out there too, eh. A lot of people used to come on weekends and wanna help us just so we'd have fun.

N.N: (Yawn) Excuse me [laughter]

A.R: [laughter]. You're either up too early, or up too late last night

N.N: Up too early. So, when you were on the Métis council were there any hardships that you guys came across?

A.R: Well, there was, when I, when I fir-. See, we would always be interested in what the Metis were doing, eh. But we were doing our thing. Like, we didn't have enough time to come to the meetings and belong to the urbanization. But, some of my cousins, you know, they would let us know what was going on. So when I moved into town, and this was in '98, in the fall of '98, that's a little over twenty years ago now, eh. So, my cousin, my first cousin and his son or his nephew, they were sitting on the council here, eh. There was always trouble, you know, organizing, eh. And of course a lot of it is political too, eh. And, of course, the Manitoba Metis, they said there was no Metis in Ontario. Of course, we weren't from Manitoba. So, I went to the meeting here, they had a meeting, they gave us Dryden backed our charter. They had lost a charter for some reason or another. You know, different, different problems. And then they, the Metis Nation of Ontario was just started up in '93, eh. Just five years before. So they had their growing pains, eh. And, uh, we got our charter back and when I went to the meeting there was two vacancies on the council. That might ha-, that was the winter of '98 and '99. In March, I believe it was. And so, I got nominated to sit on the council and I accepted, and I have been with them ever since, eh. But there was definitely growing pains. You know as hard, well first of all, there was, there was another local uh, association of Metis in Wabigoon. It was called the uh, uh, the Non-Status, The Ontario Metis and Non-Status Asso-uh, as-uh, The First Nations Non Status Indians, or something like that. OMA. And of course, and at the same time, lots, we, we had been part of that. Like our president Tony Belcourt, he had been in with OMA until '93 when it was decided. And the government had it, the Ontario government had also said that as long as you stay in with the Non-Status Natives, you'll never get your Metis issues, you know, uh dealt with. So they had to break up, uh break out so they could talk about Metis stuff. And at the same time, see, some of the, some of the-the First Nations they were getting some of their rights back, eh. Where before, a native woman that married a white person and moved off the reserve would lose her rights, and her kids would-wouldn't have, they wouldn't be status Indians. Until, in '81 I think it was, or '82. With the constitution they had got their rights back and the Métis were recognized as aboriginal people too, eh. So that gave us a lift too, eh. But of course, you know, building organizations and getting set up takes time. And, uh, I just hung in there uh, I kept going to the meetings and you know, learning as much as I could about it and participating as much as I could. So, uh, I am still with them. In the last

uh, elections, I was hoping I was going to retire from it. But I happened to get nominated and, and I was the only one who ended up accepting nominations. So I stayed. And I think there's going to be elections again this fall. And I'll do the same thing. I'm probably good for another three or four years. If, if somebody wants to take the position, I'll, I'll bow out of it. If not, I'll accept it. I'll do whatever I have to. And more of it is going to different meetings, eh. Like, uh, at that time, recognition was a big problem because even the Ontario government would say "ah there's no, we're not going to talk to you" and that was the Conservatives, eh. At that time Mike Harris, "oh no, there's no Metis in Ontario. We're not talking to you guys". But, the Manitoba Metis, they were saying the same thing. And of course, they're still saying it to this day and its, there's a lot of Metis stuff happening in Ontario. Way before they were even into Manitoba they had been coming in, you know. And there were Metis settlements hundred years before on the Bruce Peninsula and they were coming up the Albany River. You know, seventeen hundreds into Lac Seul and Hudson area, into Red Lake, even while before they were even into uh, the Winnipeg area at the uh, as big uh, as big as they were in the uh, 18, 1800's, eh. So, but now we've got recognition and we've got a lot of programs going. And you know, we're looking after our health, we've got health programs, and housing. We uh, we administered the housing out of Thunder Bay and in Sudbury. So we're looking after our own quite well. And we're set up the same as anybody else, like any of the others. And we're just sort of a branch for ourselves, eh. To make sure we're looked after by our own people, eh. So, there's still growing pains there's no doubt about it, yeah. Because there's all kinds, there's all- there's all kinds of claims going on too, eh. And some of the people want money instea-, and they're actually land claims, eh. And uh, some people want, you know, they're working, they've got a good steady job working at the mill or working somewhere else. They might be teachers or even uh, you know, uh, working at the hospital but they want to be hunters and fisherman, you know. So they want their harvesting rights and they think, well the Metis is only hunting and fishing but it's a lot more than that. We come up, right from the start on the land, eh. Just in the, in the Louis Riel rebellions in Winnipeg and in uh, in Batoche in Saskatchewan, they were for land rights. They weren't to be just for hunting and fishing, it was land rights. And now of course, the, some of the governments or people involved with some of these settlements, they're really trying to buy us out with money. Where w- they should be settling the land claims from way back, you know, over a hundred years ago, hundred and fifty ago now. And there's some even longer than that in Ontario. Back in the Br-, around the Bruce Peninsula when they got crowded out as the white settlers or, you know, the settlers were coming in, well the Metis had been in there probably for a hundred years before that along the waterways. But they didn't have no title to the land so they got chased out of there, eh. They were- it was mostly, as you went you were getting pushed out eh. And same as in Manitoba only they said "Oh we're not getting pushed anymore", eh. The other settlers, even the white settlers at that time they were going to get pushed out because of, what had happened was, the Hudson's Bay was going to sell all that land that they'd acquired from the British Crown two hundred years before, eh. It was going to get

sold to Canada. Which at that time was only four provinces, eh. And we were the North West, the North West Territories or whatever they called it at that time. And that's what, what brought the trouble on too. The government thought they'd bought the land from the Hudson's Bay and that any of the other settlers that were along, especially the Red River, south of uh, well south of Fort Gary, or north of Fort Gary, the-they shouldn't be there, eh. So that's what started that problem there in 1860 and uh, and later on fifteen years later again in Saskatchewan. But they were trying to shove the, the land speculators were coming in too, eh, trying to take advantage of the situation and, and they were going to make their million dollars, eh, and kick, kick the settlers out. And Louis Riel in hi-, some of his letters, even when he was in jail, we didn't want to be pushed anywhere. We wanted to b-have the same rights as anybody else as the white settlers on the land that we-that we occupied before the takeover of the Canadian government. Of course now, w-I think, I think one of that land claim in Winnipeg is going to get settled. And I think it's going to be a problem as who gets the money, [laughter]. But it's quite interesting. And it reminds me a little bit of, of negotiating for the workers, you know? You're dealing, of course, we deal with the government where with the workers we were dealing with the companies, eh. Of course, we were lucky too in this, this country to have peaceful negotiations, eh. Sometimes they get a little bit rowdy, especially with the, with labour and big companies. But there's labour laws too that the government has to step in and settle the, an-and even now with, when we negotiated with the lands and resource counsels with the companies, especially the mining companies that take up a lot of land, eh, uh, we have that right to be compensated for the impact on our traditional lands. We-we've done that much in progress. And the government has agreed to make sure that those companies do meet with us before anything happens. And the-they've set it up so they've had traditional knowledge studies of where the Metis traditional lands were, eh, and how much activity was on that land. So, when there's a mining company comes around, all of that is studied already, eh. So, w-we all know the situation. If it interferes with our traditional lands, same as the First Nations, they have qu-they have a lot to say too when that happens. Not just on the reserve, but also other lands that pertain to their traditional, their traditional hunting and you know, uh trapping areas. Now there's that big deal in Dymont about uh, the borehole and uh nuclear waste. That's very interesting stuff. Surprising how much power, how much hydro power we need to keep the lights on, [laughter]. Well everything is hydro, eh?

N.N: Yeah. And you mentioned briefly about a charter. What was the charter?

A.R: See, every counsel is a, is allowed a charter, and you're supposed to have the charter, eh, so you can act as a counsel for the Metis Nation of Ontario.

N.N: Okay.

A.R: It's just like, like the Moose or, you know uh, different organizations have uh a charter from their int-national or international uh organizations, eh.

N.N: And lastly, can you uhm, talk about Pinegrove again because I didn't get to record it, [laughter].

A.R: Yeah, Pinegrove. See, Pine-Pinegrove and as-as I, I-I was in, through that area driving, when I was in Eagle and I had my Volkswagen I remember driving people into some of those, uh where the contractors were. Then the ministry started in there and, and also the company was coming in from the back end. And, of course that was a historic, through Pinegrove, well, just to the west of there, was the old trails from way back when they built the CN. They were hauling materials through there, eh. So it had a lot of history. And there was people in there uh, way back in the late 1800's, eh. Cause that was Wabigoon river was a, was a cano-canoe route, eh. You know, a smaller canoe route but it was well travelled and there was people, there's signs of people were in there way back then. And I had the opportunity to talk with an old guy, and this was in the late '60's and early '70's. He was getting close to hundred years old, but he had been in when they-they set up Sanford township. When they came and surveyed it, eh. And uh, he had a lot of history to, to talk about. And he said that there was, there was uh you know, people on that land, on the tail end of- on the Northern side of Sanford. Which was the municipality of Machin. See it included that, Sanford township. And of course, Eaton is, Eaton Rugby, eh. So, they uh, they sort of got chased out when the, when the surveying took place, eh. Because I-those quarter sections were all set aside for soldiers, eh. But of course, some of them just moved on further west and some of them even applied for some of these open homesteads later on. And of course, he said that they just fluffed that off saying "oh that, that was only First Nations uh trap lines in there". So they could still trap it, but of course they got to have permission from the land owners that have those homesteads. But of course, the First Nations, they uh, they could just move on and trap, trap further, further north, eh. But, the guy said, he said.. actually, they were, they were, they were taking the easy way out and saying it was First Nations trap lines. It was mostly, uh, [?] were in there. I imagine ther-that happened in a lot of different places. But you know, it was never very big, or even advertised, you know? The people just walked out of there, eh. But Pinegrove, that was, you know just probably a year or two after the Dryden work. The town sites were set up, that they were set up. And, being on that-those trails, where the canoe trails, but there was also a lot of walking trails in there where, you know the rivers at that time were no-would flood maybe in the spring or after a heavy rainfall and they were good canoeing. So you could go, they would go to Winnipeg, eh, or Kenora on, with a canoe. But when it was dry, and if you wanted to go north and south, you were better off to walk. And in a lot of those, even the Wabigoon River at that one spot, you could, when it was a dry season you could walk across it. And that became the trail up no-going north, eh. So it was sort of a busy area tha- little bit of activity for those-those years, eh. And of course, Pinegrove became, uh, there was just a

bunch of pine there. And, it was the area all the townships were given the right to have a school. As, you know, at about the middle of their township. So, Pinegrove happened to be right there. So, there was never any, any stores or anything there because they'd come to Minitaki to the, to the CP or close to the CPR and closer to the highway. But it was a school there and all of those lots, at one time were, supposedly, handed out to.. for settling for farmers, eh.

N.N: And when you mentioned it was set aside for soldiers, for which war?

A.R: Well, see, it was surveyed in 1896 and '97. The bor-an-they were set aside for soldiers of the Boer War and different soldiers, like there was quite a few soldiers fighting for the British, uh the British Empire back in those days, eh. So, they wanted to s-leave them some l-, give them some land, eh. They wanted to, they wanted to increase the population so they could hold this land. And it was a uh going on thing ever since the 1812 war, eh. They didn't want the Americans coming in and taking over, eh. So, it was pretty good safe. And then, of course, the soldiers thought, well they're-they're getting something. You know, for fighting for, for their King or their Queen or you know, the Crown. So, but of course, what had happened was, you know there was lands all over the place. You could, the soldiers could homestead anywhere. So they just didn't come for their land, you know.. They-they owned it but they wouldn't come and settle and build anything. And of course, the scho-the municipality couldn't be very active without any people, eh. So th-in the '20's, they opened it up they had to say "if you don't come for that land you're going to lose it", eh. So, then other settlers came and then they had to work and stay there for three years, and clear, i think it was 15 acres of land so they'd own it, eh. But a lot of that was happening on, in a lot of different places, eh. Like even here, there was schools, old schools on all of those lots, eh. Like at Aubrey in Eagle and Waldof, they were all allowed a school. One, uh there was one lot actually that was supposed to donate a school yard and a grave yard. Yeah, the old homesteaders. They had, well there were a lot of kids too that would have been coming up. And then a lot of old people who had to be buried, [laughter].

N.N: [laughter].

A.R: The time is getting to be up.

N.N: Ohh.

A.R: Just about that time?

N.N: Yeah, and I have no mo-no more questions for you.

A.R: Well that's good, [laughter].

N.N: [laughter],

A.R: You know what I'd like to do? After, my mom is celebrating her birthday and we're going to have visitors for the next week or so.

N.N: Mhmm,

A.R: I would like to come in and read her some books.

N.N: Yeah, definitely.

A.R: I-I wouldn't mind, if you do come across something from Sanford Township..

N.N: Sanford Township..

A.R: I ended up getting, that old guy that I was telling you was about 100 years old, he used to write for the Dryden paper, way back in the, in the '20's, eh. And uh, his name was W. W. Howell. His, uh, his daughters were Howells, and two of his daughters had married Davis', at Davis' store.

N.N: Mhmm

A.R: That was his son in law, eh. Yeah, well of course, that's where I met the old guy too. Cause I used to park my truck there when I'd catch the bus to go to work. And then of course, we'd buy groceries there and he was sitting around, you know. He was just an old guy already about 95 years old, eh. He had a lot of stories to tell and when he thought that I was so interested in history when he-he gave me those about three or four inches of papers of the writings that he wrote for the for the paper and then other stories too about the history of of. And then he was also around this side, I think his wife was a schoolteacher in Oxdrift back in the younger days to. But they had a house a farm in about half-way between Oxdrift and Minitaki along the highway that side. But of course they had already moved off that farm, he was already old when I run into him, and he'd probably been off that farm for maybe twenty-five years and living with his daughter, eh. And I think his wife had passed away quite a while before. But anyways, that was good.

N.N.: Good.

