

DRYDEN AND DISTRICT MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH ELEANOR ALLEN

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Interviewer: Natalie Nachtman, Archival Coordinator (NN)

Interviewee: Eleanor Allen (EA)

NN: I'll just start off with where were you born?

EA: St. Emile, Manitoba.

NN: And what year did you, did your family decide to move into this area?

EA: 1938. They left in June.

NN: And how old were you?

EA: I was two and a half. My sister was a year and a half.

NN: And how did your family move to this area?

EA: It was during the depression years and there was no work to be found and so between the three families, they decided they'd travel and try, go till they could find work along the way or find a permanent place to stay if there was work available.

NN: And what were the three families? So it was your mother and father...

EA: Yeah. Marie and Joe Delorme, my grandfather, Freadman and Adele Marion and my mother's brother and sister, Bertha and Pat Marion.

NN: Okay.

EA: And my grandmother's brother, Willie Roussin and his wife Albertine with their baby daughter Alvina that was three months old about.

NN: Okay. And what year was it when you...so what was the deciding factor to stay in this area?

EA: When they left there, they travelled and hit all the different places where they took work, and when they got to Kenora, my grandfather and grandmother went into the town and met up with a fellow from Quibell. Crowley was his name. The conversation began that they were looking for work and so he told them about opportunities in Quibell where you could get homesteads or you could get woodlots...cut wood, ship it away. And by this time it was September, so we pretty well had to get off the road and find a place. So that was...

NN: That was it?

EA: That was it.

NN: So when your family came to Quibell, did they have, did they choose a lot to farm, or was it wood chopping?

EA: Yeah. They rented a home, a house. Most of them stayed in there, and then my aunt and uncle took, rented a different place. And they cut wood in the bush that year...rented this house, cut wood in the bush and then they loaded it on boxcars. I believe it was firewood, but I'm not too sure on that. And then they would ship it away. And they did that for the first year that they were in Quibell.

NN: Yeah. And what followed after that first year? What did they decide to do?

EA: Let me see. They rented a different house down a mile out of Quibell...had a great big house...had a big barn and a big yard for a garden. So my grandparents and my parents, the rest of us all lived in that place. And my great uncle and his wife got a job at the...looking after the school. So they lived in the upstairs apartment at the school.

NN: What school was that?

EA: Quibell.

NN: Okay.

EA: Quibell Consolidated.

NN: Okay.

EA: And it was not a very good set up for them because the rooms they sleep in and that were upstairs...two small rooms. The kitchen was in the basement and to go to the washroom...the washrooms were on the ground floor. So...[laughter].

NN: Up and down all the time. So did you go to the school in Quibell then?

EA: Yeah. We went to school in Quibell. For one year my parents were at what they called a spur between Niddrie and Quibell. And they, there was no place to get, get off there except for the railroad. There was no station, no anything. So that year my sister and I stayed at my grandparents and my parents stayed there. We walked to school, but we only went to school four days a week, because we caught the local on a Friday. It took us all day to get to the spur. They'd drop us off. We'd spend the weekend and then we'd travel back by this local that stopped at every little place and returned home. So that way, every second weekend, we spent with our parents.

NN: That's nice. Yeah. Do you have any fond memories of school?

EA: I loved it.

NN: Yeah.

EA: I loved it.

NN: Did you have a favorite teacher?

EA: Mr. McArthur was ideal, ideal.

NN: Yeah. And it was a one-room classroom?

EA: No. It was two rooms.

NN: Okay.

EA: Senior room, junior room.

NN: Alright.

EA: And my sister and I started together cause my mother didn't want to split us. Yeah, he was the first adult I think that I met that would take a child's viewpoint and listen to it rather than, well...

NN: Yeah.

EA: Blow it off. He was great.

NN: Yeah. Just to back track a little bit. Do you have any memorable stories about when your family was travelling down the caravan?

EA: Yes. Yeah. I've, I've written it from, from my parent's viewpoint. They got as far as Winnipeg and they found a place to put all the caravan and just before they got into Winnipeg. But the next morning the police came and told them that gypsies weren't allowed in the city limits *[laughter]*. So after they explained that they were travellers looking for work, they did allow them to stay there. Actually, they, I suppose went in the newspaper archives. There was a newspaper came and took pictures of the caravan.

NN: Oh, wow.

EA: But I've never went and looked for it. I should.

NN: Yeah. Definitely. So besides schooling, what did you do around the house? Like what were your daily chores?

EA: When I was a child?

NN: Yeah.

EA: When I was a child I was a tomboy. I was the oldest one and I worked with my dad outside. My sister was the helper in the house. Yeah. And sports was...that's why I loved school. I loved learning but I also loved all the activities.

NN: Yeah.

EA: I was part of the boy's team. That's all there was to it.

NN: What sports did you play in school?

EA: Pardon?

NN: What sports did you play in school?

EA: Baseball was my favorite. We had pom-pom-pull away.

NN: Oh, what's that?

EA: Prisoner's base...*[laughter]*...they're old ones.

NN: Yes.

EA: They had a football, but we didn't do too much. Baseball was mainly what we did.

NN: And where did you go for high school?

EA: I never went to high school.

NN: Oh. Okay.

EA: Well, I took my grade eight in Quibell. Then the year after my father was at the spur we moved to Amesdale, so I took my grade nine in Amesdale. And the next year we moved back to Quibell and I took my grade ten in Quibell. The next year we were in Perrault Falls and I tried taking grade 11 correspondence.

NN: Okay. So what was the grade eleven correspondence? Was that sort of just like at home schooling or...?

EA: They allowed me to go to the Ear Falls School.

NN: Okay.

EA: But I could not ask the teachers any questions. It was just to have a desk. There was a family...I mean I had four siblings and to try and learn something in the small home, at home.... I was lucky there.

NN: Okay. So sort of just studying at the school is what you did?

EA: I went to the school with my program. But it was the first year, I believe, they had grade eleven correspondence. They went up to...thing. So they only had English comp., which I was good at; algebra, which I was good at; and then they gave you...what's that science one that's really hard?

NN: Physics?

EA: Yes. I thought it was not a nice...I never got through that one.

NN: Yeah.

EA: Never got through it.

NN: So what did you do after your schooling?

EA: I was home to babysit my brother and sss, brothers...and my mother had one more baby boy. And then I left and went to work at a, a tourist camp. I was fifteen and that was my first job.

NN: Where was the tourist camp?

EA: The other side of Perrault Falls on...Scout Lake off of Lac Suel.

NN: And sort of, what were your jobs there?

EA: I helped in the kitchen. I served in the dining room and I cleaned cabins. And I think I got sixty dollars a month plus my room and board. *[Laughter.]* Yup.

NN: Do you remember any interesting stories that happened while you were working there? Did you meet any interesting people?

EA: I met my husband. *[Laughter.]*

NN: Oh yeah.

EA: Yeah. That's where I met my husband and I was married that...in fact I was married that following year.

NN: Was he working there or just visiting?

EA: He was one of the guides there. Yeah.

NN: Okay.

EA: Yup.

NN: And how long did you work at that tourist camp?

EA: Just that one year.

NN: Oh. Okay.

EA: That one year, then Ted and I were married in the fall. I got married the day after I turned sixteen. *[Laughter.]* And that's what we did then. The next year we worked at another tourist camp.

NN: Okay.

EA: We did that for quite a few years. Then I had my first child in 1953. We were married in '51. I had my daughter in '53. I was all of seventeen. *[Laughter.]* But I was the oldest of the family so therefore I was used to looking after babies...used to work. Work was not a problem.

NN: Yeah. And when you had your first child, did you settle down somewhere or were you constantly moving to the tourist camps or...?

EA: Yeah. I worked. They found us.... No I stayed at home with the baby when she and then when she was...and my husband would come and visit me on the weekends. When she was three months old, he said "They said if...they'll give use a room to stay if you'll come and help out." She was a good baby. I worked all summer with her.

NN: Okay.

EA: The following year we worked at a different tourist camp and same thing happened. They were short of help so I went and worked. But I was lucky to have a good, a good baby. *[Laughter.]*

NN: Yeah. You mentioned that your uncle sent you a letter?

EA: Oh, I forgot to bring that. Yes. I did. Yeah.

NN: So...

EA: That was during the war. He got called to the...called, called in.

NN: Yeah.

EA: And, yeah. He wrote me a letter when I was nine years old and I've still got my letter.

NN: What did the letter say? If you don't mind sharing?

EA: I can't remember. I'd have to reread it again. *[Laughter.]* I've reread it a number of times. But I will bring it in to you.

NN: Good. And was that when you were living in Quibell?

EA: Yeah. We were still in Quibell. Yes.

NN: Did any other family members serve or was it just your uncle?

EA: No. My Aunt Bertha that came with us...

NN: Okay.

EA: ...she joined the, the army. She trained for a cook in the army.

NN: Okay.

EA: And she was a down-to-earth person, so when they decided to put her cooking for the upper class men, you know, the admirals and whatever, she said "No way, if you...I'm gonna cook, I'm cooking for the private men." So they put her there. *[Laughter.]*

NN: And when she was a cook, did she stay in Canada or did she go overseas?

EA: I don't think she went overseas.

NN: Okay.

EA: I'm sure she didn't. My uncle did.

NN: Yeah.

EA: For a short while.

NN: Do you know where he served overseas?

EA: No. I can't. I do know he brought home a piece of shrapnel that was red hot and landed beside him.

NN: Oh wow.

EA: He had it as a souvenir that he brought home. *[Laughter.]*

NN: And so, what did kids do on the home front during the war period? Like...

EA: At my age we didn't do anything. No. I was think...I was too young. I was nine I think...

NN: Yeah.

EA: ...just before it finished...'45, so yeah, nine. I don't remember...I remember people talking about knitting stuff and that...

NN: Yeah.

EA: ...but I remember anything too much.

NN: So you also didn't notice any change, like with food rations and...?

EA: Oh yeah. There was that. Yeah. I remember that part. Yeah. We had to...yeah.

NN: So after the, working at the, well at tourist camps, you mentioned that you went to work at the Tree Nursery?

EA: Yep. That's...yeah.

NN: So, what...

EA: I had four children and after I lost my last son, my youngest one, I went to work at the Tree Nursery. Partly because we were so far in debt with doctor bills cause my son was sick for two years before...and there was no coverage at that time so...*[Laughter.]* I went to work and paid doctor bills off. But I enjoyed it. It was outdoor work. It was my type of work.

NN: Yeah. What were...what did they have you doing there?

EA: Started out pulling trees...out of the thing...*[indiscernible]* the thing.

NN: Like little saplings?

EA: The trees grew in the ground and when they got to be what, two years old, then we would pull them...

NN: Okay.

EA: ...and they would be bundled up and sent away to...to be reforested somewhere else. Then after that they put me on a trans-planter which was a different little thing. You had to be quick with your hands. That was good. And then I took over...one of the men was leaving and they gave us women a chance to apply for it. So I looked after irrigation, running the pumps and tractors and different things.

NN: Okay.

EA: And irrigated all the fields. That was...one of the other ladies and I did that.

NN: And how long did you work?

EA: I worked...the last year I worked I was sixty-five. Instead of quitting, I went to work to make enough money...I wanted a big party for my fiftieth anniversary. *[Laughter.]* So I worked one year past my sixty-fifth year.

NN: Okay.

EA: So I was thirty years there.

NN: Oh wow.

EA: But I was seasonal.

NN: Yeah. So it was only during the summer time that...?

EA: Mostly in the summer time. A couple of years we worked till almost Christmas. They put us on different jobs with the guys. The reason it was so good, I liked the outdoor work, but we were also paid equal to the men. There was no difference between men and women out there as far as payment. So I made a lot better money there than I would being a secretary for somebody. *[Laughter.]*

NN: Yeah. And did the job come with like benefits at all or?

EA: No, I never had benefits. The only thing I got was when it, they closed it, and were selling it to private we got...hmmph....you know, so many years you work they...figure it all out and then...

NN: Okay.

EA: There's a name for it, but I don't know...I forgot what it is. So I think I got ten thousand and I invested it in RSP's. That way I didn't lose anything.

NN: Yeah.

EA: That's what I lived on after my husband passed. *[Laughter.]*

NN: Yeah.

EA: Otherwise, there was no benefits there.

NN: Okay.

EA: Not on a seasonal basis.

NN: Oh, you were a seasonal basis. Yeah. You mentioned that you grew up in Quibell. How has it changed over the years?

EA: It's like a little ghost town now.

NN: Yeah.

EA: Used to be two grocery stores, the station, post office, our school, the hall...everything. The school is still up, but it's.... There's no stores, no.... It's like a little ghost town really.

NN: Yeah.

EA: Compared to.... It was a active little place when we were there.

NN: And besides going to school, were there like any other activities for children to do?
Like...

EA: Not a lot. This Mr. McArthur, our school teacher, he did call it a teenage club and one night a week, whoever wanted to go, and he'd have, in the basement of the school there was a big room, and he'd have games like maybe dodge ball or something like that and we really looked forward to that. But then the school was used for dances as well.

NN: Okay.

EA: And in those days, everybody went to the dance...the babies, the kids, everyone. So, that, we took part in that. So, it was something we looked forward to.

NN: Yeah. Would a local band be playing or...?

EA: Sometimes, sometimes, and later on in years when there was no bands someone operated a...music, and we did it that way.

NN: Yeah.

EA: Something that was, that they did at that school too that was real nice...for Christmas for the kids...before Christmas they would have a box social. You know what that is?

NN: No.

EA: The women would decorate a box. Some of them were elaborate. Like one lady one time that made a, like a, a, a lookout. They'd decorate these boxes all up, put a lunch in it, and then these boxes would be put up for auction at the dance and whoever the guy bought the box, that's who you had your lunch with. They did make a lot of money sometimes because if somebody was going steady with somebody, the young guys would try and make them pay an elaborate price to be able to sit with the girlfriend. *[Laughter.]* And this money was used to buy Christmas presents for all the school children.

NN: Awww.

EA: So then at the Christmas concert we would all get a Christmas present.

NN: And what did you do during the Christmas concert? Was it sort of like a play, singing?

EA: Yeah. The school teachers made us all do our little thing. Some sang, some made a play. Yep. I have one cousin which is hard to believe. They moved here. She was...his mother was my grandmother's sister. She was by herself and her kids. They moved here and Jim was a couple of years older than I was and he started school there. He told me a few years ago now, just in fact this past year, that until he came to Quibell, he'd never been to school and he'd never received a Christmas present and he was nine years old. So I thought...I didn't believe...you know, we had hard times, but we always had lots to eat and...

NN: Yeah. And when did you move to Dryden or have you always been not so much in Dryden?

EA: When Linda started school we moved to Dryden. We were working at a tourist camp and in order for her to go to school she would have had to travel one mile across water and I don't know how far to get to Ear Falls. So we ended up having to move. So that was fifty-three plus six?

NN: And Linda is one of your daughters?

EA: Yeah. My oldest one. Yeah. So we moved here from Niddrie when she started school.

NN: And did she go to the Dryden High School?

EA: Yep. She went to Dryden High School. Yes. Then I had three boys after that.

NN: And they all go to school here?

EA: Except for the little guy we lost, yeah.

NN: Yeah. Sorry to hear that.

EA: Yeah. And when she was twenty, I think, she moved away and so she's been in Kamloops, B.C. ever since.

NN: Oh, wow. And over the years, how has Dryden changed? Like the buildings, the stores or stuff...

EA: There's more, but of course it got so much better but then now it's been going back a little bit sometimes since the mill went. A long time ago when I was about twelve, the stores stayed open on the day before Christmas. You could go shopping the day before Christmas and sometimes they'd even stay open late. But of course that didn't last long. *[Laughter.]* But that's a different thing than there was now. I can't...I don't know. I don't know. *[Laughter.]* I don't know if I've got much more to tell you.

NN: Well, do you have any other stories that are coming to mind that I specifically, that I didn't ask questions for that you wanted to share?

EA: *[Indiscernible.] [Laughter.]* The one thing that did happen, but I don't know if you'd want to put that in there.... My mother was totally embarrassed going through Winnipeg...

NN: Oh. Yeah.

EA: ...cause people were coming to stand around and watch and they'd stop what they were doing and some of them would follow along beside them. And then my dad had a f...we...I won't....*[Indiscernible.]* The caravan was made up. They took a car and took it completely apart and just kept the chassis and wheels and build a frame on it. So of course you had tires that had air in them.

NN: Yeah.

EA: So going through the city you had one flat tire and he repaired it and then went a little further and had one more flat tire. She had to sit there and she was so embarrassed that all these people were watching them go through.

NN: At that time other people had cars to get around, so yeah.

EA: Yeah. So these...and in, right in Winnipeg to have this caravan of horses. One little boy had actually came along with them and he pedalled his bicycle alongside of them and he found them a place to go put their horse...like to be able to camp. He says, "I know." He knew a place and stayed with them.

NN: Yeah. And I guess there was sort of cheaper to go by caravan than driving, stopping at a motel or *[indiscernible]*.

EA: Yeah. They had everything in there like this Aunt Bertine that's ni...a hundred and two. She said "That's the best trip I've ever made in my life." She says "It was..." Well, when they stopped at that...it's not on there, so just in case...

NN: I'll have the recording. It's recording.

EA: Oh shoot!

NN: It's alright.

EA: To make extra money, my grandmother was always cutting everybody's hair. So when the men at this plant found out then they came and got their hair cut. She made a little

bit of money. And my Aunt Bertine was telling me that she washed shirts, that they wanted their shirts good. So she washed their shirts, ironed them, for ten cents a shirt. That all she could make out of it. And then she had this little stove to heat up those little flat irons and that's how she made a little bit of money on it.

NN: And after the caravan trip did you still keep the horses or...?

EA: Oh yes. We had those horses, yes. There was another time in our caravan when we stopped at an uncle's place near Winnipeg, and in the evening while they were visiting some...a couple of fellows came over to visit my uncle and they had a few drinks. And when they left, they left the gate open and in the morning my uncle heard his...he had a, a riding horse, rather than a work horse...he heard it neighing out and looked out. All the horses were gone except that horse and the one old horse that was, couldn't, capable. He tracked them all day long to try and find those horses. And he finally found them and he tied them. He tied the rope on the tail of one to halter of the other and he brought them all back that way. *[Laughter.]*

NN: Yeah.

EA: I don't think I have too much more.

NN: It's a very interesting story. You don't hear too much about people coming via caravan. A lot of the times they...oh we came by train. *[Indiscernible.]* We got off or where ever...

EA: Yeah. This is what Duncan thought. Yes.

NN: Yeah.

EA: And to camp along the way, they would try and find maybe a gravel pit or some place that they could pull out. But my aunt tells me that sometimes it was dark and there was no place to camp so they would park on the side of the road as far over as they could. She says, "We'd be tilted real bad." Then they'd tie their horses behind each...unhook them so they could be kinda loose, but still tied to the, to the trailer. And then they would put a rope totally around the three vans, or whatever you want to call them, and then hang lanterns so that if somebody came along...cause there was some cars coming...they could see them. But my aunt said she always dreaded somebody would run into them.

NN: Yeah. And I assume that you went through periods of just forest upon forest when coming through. Were you ever worried about like the wild animals or?

EA: She never mentioned that at all.

NN: Okay.

EA: No. They were a big group so they probably...animals probably wouldn't come with that many people.

NN: Yeah. That's a very interesting story. So unless you want to add anything else?

EA: I don't think there's anything much else to add. No.

NN: Alright. Thank you so much for hearing your story. It was really interesting. I really enjoyed listening.

EA: Okay.

-End-