

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mrs. Jean Miller in her home at 1787 Stevensville Road, Stevensville, Ontario, and the date is August 13, 1985.

R.H: Good morning Jean.

J.M: Good morning.

R.H: Where were you born Jean?

J.M: I was born, I'm not sure whether it was my grandmother's house or the house next to it but it was one or the other in this area.

R.H: You weren't living in this house though?

J.M: No, it wasn't this house. It could have been part of this house. My grandmother's house was between here and the house next door. That was my father's and my grandmother's house was in there. When we were married in '47 we took part of my grandmother's house and moved it over here. Of course we've added on to it. I'm not sure if I was born in that house or the one next to it.

R.H: But, this is the street where you were born, Stevensville Road?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: It's quite rural, was it always like this?

J.M: Yes. There was my father's farm and gran's farm, when I was small. They were the only two farms that I remember. Marr's were down on Bertie and then my uncle had a farm back in, which was later sold. Later on it was Mr. McCulley's when I was younger.

R.H: So your father was a farmer?

J.M: Yes. He worked for Kraft cheese. My grandfather was a brother to the Kraft boys mother.

R.H: So you are related to J.L. Kraft then?

J.M: Right.

R.H: Where was Kraft cheese located when your father worked there?

J.M: Well, my dad, he ordered the cheese from... I'm not sure exactly where he got it from but they used to send the cheese here, then he peddled the cheese all around the area. He got it directly from Kraft, well, then of course it was bought out by somebody else. No longer was it Kraft in later years. My dad sold Black Diamond cheese and things like that on the Niagara Falls market. He peddled around in Fort Erie and Stevensville, and Ridgeway, to the stores.

R.H: Did he have a horse and wagon to do this?

J.M: Well, he had a truck.

R.H: A truck! So that was later then?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Did he do that part-time?

J.M: No, he did that... well, he did farming and that.

R.H: So he had two jobs at that time?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Did you do any of the chores around the farm?

J.M: Yes, I used to. I remember one time my dad sent me up the field to Harold and we had a tractor and I was driving the tractor, and of course you know it was getting so we were turning a little short. All of a sudden it started smoking, I stopped the tractor, got off, and came screaming down crying "The tractor's on fire". I had been riding the clutch, and it was just the oil on the clutch that was burning.

R.H: So what other chores did you do?

J.M: Well, I occasionally had to milk the cows.

R.H: Did your dad have milking machines?

J.M: Well, we had a milking machine, and then I used to milk by hand. It wasn't a lot, I used to help... George worked on the farm before and after we were married for a while, and he also worked part-time for the highways, so when he wasn't here, why-I used to have to help out a little bit. I wasn't that crazy about it, It wasn't my...

R.H: What school did you go to?

J.M: I went to the public school in Stevensville and high school in Stevensville.

R.H: Where was that located?

J.M: The high school?

R.H: No, the public school.

J.M: Where it still is, on Airline Street.

R.H: How far is that from your home?

J.M: Oh, about a mile there.

R.H: Did you have to walk?

J.M: Yeah. Well, dad made arrangements with the schoolteachers at that time, Avis Lichtenburger, and Eva Sherk... he used to pay them, and I'd ride to school with them.

R.H: They were your teachers?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Who was the principal, do you remember?

J.M: I believe Florence Gilmore was. She taught the entrance class because I was in grade seven and she put grade seven and grade eight through in one year. We had to go to school early in the morning, and stay 'til 4 o'clock or after at night. She put us through... like, I took grade seven and eight together.

R.H: When you said your dad made arrangements for you to go with them, did they have a car?

J.M: Yeah, they drove back and forth. One lived in Sherkston and the other lived right up here on the Ridge.

R.H: Did they pick you up at the house?

J.M: Yeah.

R.H: You didn't have to walk then?

J.M: No, but later on I had a bicycle, and I rode the bicycle. I didn't walk too often.

R.H: What about entertainment as a kid, what did kids do then?

J.M: We used to go swimming down at Lake Erie. My uncle used to get in his rumble seat, and he'd take us swimming. That was always great fun. We'd go to Crystal Beach or something like that. I don't really remember what we did do, I guess we made our own fun.

R.H: Was there a lot of skating in the wintertime?

J.M: Yes, the creek was just down here and we used to go skating and that sort of thing.

R.H: Have you heard of Duck Pond? I heard that someone used to freeze it over for the kids to skate on, is that right?

J.M: There was in Stevensville, there by the Stevensville Garage, Edgar Heximer used to flood that. We had skating there. It was real good skating and he had it lit at night, like floodlights on and everything.

R.H: That was where?

J.M: That was right beside the Stevensville Garage. There was Stevensville Garage on one side of the creek, and Moon's store was on the other side. Before Moon's had it, it was Robinson's. They lived in the big house right next to it, and both those buildings are still there.

R.H: Was Robinson's a house or was it a store?

J.M: It was a store. They sold everything from soup to nuts. Drygoods, buttons, and any kind of sewing material you wanted, and food and everything.

R.H: Was that area you're talking about, was that the business area?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: What street was that?

J.M: The store was on the corner of Main Street and Stevensville Road. They called it Victoria and Sodom but it's been called a number of things.

R.H: What kind of businesses were there?

J.M: Oh, there was the hotel on the corner...

R.H: The Stevensville Hotel?

J.M: Yeah, where it still is. Mr. Hawkins had that. His son still lives in Fort Erie, Ed Hawkins. There was Climenhage's Funeral Home, and Lloyd Wales Plumbing, and the Planing Mill, and the Cider Mill. Mr. Phil Lichtenberger used to have an implement business and also Bob Morningstar's father sort of... I guess they started their mill down on where Bob Morningstar lives, on Baker Road. Of course it got bigger and bigger and Lloyd and Bob got in together, and formed the one that's there now. That's the Morningstar brothers.

R.H: So Lloyd is one of the brothers then?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Lloyd and Bob?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Do they still have it now?

J.M: Yeah, it burned down here a while back, and then they built it up again.

R.H: Was it in the '40s when it burned down?

J.M: No, I don't think it was that long ago. I've got pictures around but it would take me a while to gather them up. The office part wasn't burned, but the mill part was pretty well burned down.

R.H: So would you say this was quite a busy town before...?

J.M: Yes, I think everybody... Like going back, I've heard my aunts talk and so on, and they used to have plays... Well, we did in our church, we put on plays and we really had some good times, and they used to do it years back. Where Lloyd Wales has his plumbing shop now, there was like a... they used it for a Town Hall or something. They had the upstairs for putting on plays, and I heard my aunts talking about.

R.H: Where did they hold the square dancing?

J.M: They had the square dancing at the Catholic Church, that's where

I met George. We used to go square dancing out there and they had those every week, I believe.

R.H: Where is that church?

J.M: It's in Snyder.

R.H: Is that St. Joseph's?

J.M: Yeah.

R.H: So that's where they went for the square dancing, did they?

J.M: Yes. When we went to school that is. Everybody went there I guess.

R.H: Did you work at Wales Plumbing?

J.M: I started out working at Wales when I left Business College. When I started, I think I made \$12.60 a week. I worked there until I was married and after I was married, I worked in Collard's Insurance office in Ridgeway for a little while.

R.H: Collard's?

J.M: Collard's, A.W. Collard's. Then I decided... Mrs. Young who had a woolen shop in Fort Erie, she asked me if I would help out there. She used to play the organ in our church.

R.H: Was that Young's Drygoods?

J.M: Oh yeah, at the South End. So she asked me if I'd like to work there part-time, so I did. I can't remember how many days a week I worked but I used to work there and I rather enjoyed it. She was really a nice person, real comical, she was very funny. Jack McGregor came in one day and asked me if I would like to work in the insurance office in Stevensville. The children were off to school then so I decided, well, maybe I would. It seems every day that I had to work in Fort Erie, there was a bad snowstorm coming home. It seemed like something was trying to tell me something. So, anyway, I started with Jack McGregor, I think it was in 1960 and I worked there... He sold the business to a couple of chaps. The one fellow bought the other one out and the fellow that owns it now, Wally Wagner, I worked for him for a few years. Harold Hill worked there at the same time. I left there, and went to work at Rich's in Fort Erie, I worked there for six years.

R.H: Oh, you worked at Rich's, did you?

J.M: Yeah, and I just left there in May.

R.H: You had a lot of jobs, didn't you?

J.M: I got around a little bit, I guess.

R.H: Did your family have a car?

J.M: Oh yeah.

R.H: So, when you went shopping and the car was available, did you...?

J.M: The first car I remember was a 1926 Ford, I think. We used to go visit my grandmother in Springville.

R.H: Where's Springville?

J.M: Near Hagersville, about four miles west of Hagersville.

R.H: Is that in Pennsylvania?

J.M: No.

R.H: Is it in Canada?

J.M: Yeah, it's up around Hamilton. It was quite a little trick to get in the old car and take off for the weekend. My mother's people lived right next door to us but my father's people lived in Springville.

R.H: What was the prime industry?

J.M: Well, I think perhaps the Planing Mill, the Planing Mill I think, was there the longest, and there were people who worked on the railroads. There was stations both at the C.N. and the Michigan Central.

R.H: Where were the stations located?

J.M: One was right near the tracks... The Michigan Central was just right along the tracks on the north side, right close to the tracks, I remember. My aunt married a Mr. Baker, and I think Mr. Baker worked in the... His father... she married Hugh Baker, and his father Art, was the station agent here for a number of years. I remember my dad's butter and cheese coming in to the C.N. Station, and we would go up there with his truck and load it up and... but I can't remember too many of the names of the station agents there, 'cause I was only small then.

R.H: So, a lot of people worked for the railroad, what other industries were here?

J.M: A lot of the people farmed.

R.H: And of course the Planing Mill employed a lot of people, right?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Did Stevensville ever have it's own newspaper, do you know anything about that at all?

J.M: No, I don't. Well, not when I was younger, it may have had one earlier on you know. Oh, Mr. Hendershot had the... yeah, I remember now, Frank Hendershot had a printing shop. He might have put

out a little newspaper, I don't know about that. Hubert Hendershot could give you all that information.

R.H: Do you know anything about the Fire Department?

J.M: That was all volunteer. I think that Edgar Heximer... Mr. Hendershot could probably tell you more about that... made the first fire engine that they had and kept it, I think, in the garage there and looked after it.

R.H: Was that in Heximer's place?

J.M: Yes, in the Stevensville Garage. I'm not sure if he kept it there or if... he had a lot to do with it, I remember. I think he built it.

R.H: What about doctors, who were some of the doctors in Stevensville?

J.M: Dr. Buell was the doctor here. He had his offices and lived in the same house. He has a daughter living in the Senior Citizens Home I think. I'm not sure if she's in... I believe maybe in the Senior Citizens Home in Ridgeway.

R.H: Was Dr. Buell here a long time then?

J.M: I remember he was supposed to deliver me, and the minister in the United Brethern Church at that time was expecting too, and she started going into labour first, and I ended up with another, I think, Dr. Stackles in Ridgeway delivered me.

R.H: You mentioned that the minister at the United Brethern Church was a women, was that unusual?

J.M: No, no, it was the minister's wife that was having the baby. They had a lady minister there a few years back, long before we had. We just had a lady minister at our church too, but this lady was there 10 or 12 years ago. It's still relatively new.

R.H: Did you ever go on the ferry boats at all?

J.M: No. From Crystal Beach to Buffalo was the only... we went on the Crystal Beach boat. That used to be an annual...

R.H: The Crystal Beach boat?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Where did you pick that up?

J.M: At Crystal Beach. It landed there, and then we would take it over to Buffalo and spend the day over in Buffalo looking around, and what have you, or go to a show or something, then come back on the boat. That was usually a summer entertainment. My aunt usually took me over for an outing in the summer. That was always quite

enjoyable to go over on the boat.

R.H: And wasn't the customs right there?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Did you have to go through the customs when you came back from Buffalo?

J.M: Yes, and going over too.

R.H: Was there a name for that boat that you took?

J.M: All I know, it was the Crystal Beach boat, that's what they always called it. I'm not sure if it had any other... George might be able to tell you that. On Sundays they used to have a three hour trip around the lake that you could take too.

R.H: Was that like a pleasure trip?

J.M: Yeah, a lot of the kids used to do that I guess. A lot of them felt that they could get their first beer there, and so on.

R.H: So they sold liquor on that boat then?

J.M: I think so. It seems like a few of them came off that way anyway. Whether they took it with them or just got it there, I don't know.

R.H: Was there dancing on this boat?

J.M: Oh yeah.

R.H: Was it called the Canadiana?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Did you go on that boat?

J.M: Oh yeah. We used to go, a bunch of us usually would go.

R.H: Was it nice? What was it like?

J.M: It was nice, we really enjoyed it.

R.H: And the bands, do you remember the bands at all?

J.M: Oh, the big bands in the ballroom in Crystal Beach?

R.H: Crystal Beach bands?

J.M: Yeah, I can remember it was a beautiful ballroom.

R.H: Did you go there?

J.M: Yeah, and later it was changed to a skating rink, and I used to roller skate there. It sort of spoiled it, I think, when they did that with it. It was such a nice time to be able to go out there and listen to them. I would have liked to have got out there this summer, but I haven't made it yet.

R.H: What about the bands, can you remember anybody that appeared there.

J.M: No, I can't. I can't remember any of that stuff.

R.H: You had to use tickets to dance, didn't you?

J.M: Yes, we did.

R.H: So before you went on the floor, you had to buy tickets, right?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: And each time you went out on the floor you had to hand them a ticket?

J.M: Right. I'd forgotten about that, but that's the way it worked. They had little ticket booths and...

R.H: Did you go to the Bertie Fair?

J.M: Oh yeah, the school used to... you'd take your writing down there or things to the fair, like.

R.H: So they had contests for the kids there?

J.M: Yeah, you would do some special writing and they'd take it down, or art work or whatever, you know. I wasn't an artist, so I never got around to that, but I did get some writing there, now I can't read it.

R.H: You got prizes for this?

J.M: Right.

R.H: Did the farmers take their wares?

J.M: Yeah. I just remember sort of being there occasionally, but I don't remember it too well.

R.H: Have you ever heard anything about the halfway houses?

J.M: George could tell you more about that, than I can. I don't remember that, that was in Fort Erie, right? [George is Mrs. Miller's husband]

R.H: No, I think there was different ones in different places.

J.M: Oh, was there? No, I don't remember too much about that, but he'll remember a little more about it, perhaps.

R.H: Do you know anything about the history of the Stevensville Hotel?

J.M: No, not too much other than who owned it.

R.H: But it's been around a long time, right?

J.M: As long as I can remember. One of the things I can remember, when I was a kid they used to have a great big parrot in a cage. You could go up and talk to it, and he'd talk back to you.

R.H: Do you know anything about the blacksmiths at all?

J.M: Yes, Howard Bertran used to be the blacksmith in Stevensville, and he had his business where Cline's Ironworks is now.

R.H: Did he look after the horses and everything?

J.M: Yes he did for around the area and then I guess, I don't know if the Racetrack was there then too, but he... I had forgot a lot of the things until you mentioned it, and then I remembered.

R.H: Did Stevensville have any maternity homes around here?

J.M: I think there was a Mrs. Page that had a maternity home for a while. I don't remember too much about it but it seemed to me she did. I was too young to remember too much about that, but it seems to me she did.

R.H: But when you had your children you had them in the hospital, right?

J.M: Yeah.

R.H: Have you any idea when that was built?

J.M: No, I haven't.

R.H: What about storms, was there any real bad storms that you remember?

J.M: Oh that was just an on going thing it seems when I was young. There was a lot of storms.

R.H: Were they so bad you couldn't get to school?

J.M: Well, we'd be here a few days when we couldn't get to school. We would have to stay, like I'd say there was only Grinham's farm down here and my grandfather's and us that were really on this road. When we would get snowed in, we'd go back and forth and visit each other a little bit.

R.H: Did you work at Grinham's?

J.M: I worked at Grinham's on Saturday.

R.H: Did they have a farm too?

J.M: They had a farm here, and they went to market as well. He butchered here on the farm, and then he went to market the same as my dad did. He went to Niagara Falls, and later on they bought a store in Fort Erie.

R.H: Was that in the North End?

J.M: Right. On Saturdays I helped him out just because I was neighbours with him here, and I helped him out on Saturdays.

R.H: Do you remember anything about the stores in the North End at all?

J.M: No, not too much. My uncle was the postmaster in the South End I believe, Emerson Plato?

R.H: Oh yeah, that was your uncle, was it? Was he the postmaster for a long time?

J.M: Oh yeah.

R.H: Wasn't that little post office in a store or something?

J.M: I don't remember where the post office was really. I've got some pictures I've been going through, my dad's pictures and things and I ran across the picture of him in his post office. I don't remember where it was. I just remember him saying he had his own post office.

R.H: What about the post office here, do you remember where that was?

J.M: When I was small the post office was, it's not there anymore, it was in front of an old house up on Main Street. It was Victoria Avenue on the kiddie corner where Spears used to have their garage. There used to be two garages in Stevensville, Spears and Stevensville Garage, and there were two grocery stores. The one grocery store was where the grocery store still is now, the Stevensville grocery is. My uncle owned that, Detenbeck, and then he sold it to Lake's I believe. I don't remember who had it after Lake's.

R.H: Do you remember who the postmaster was at that time?

J.M: Bert Climenhage. He had the furniture store behind and he also had the funeral home.

R.H: Was there mail delivery when you were growing up?

J.M: Yes.

R.H: Did you have a mailman?

J.M: Well, you know, it's rural delivery. A Mr. Storm, old Mr. Storm, I can't remember what his first name was, he used to deliver. After him, Charlie Hill used to deliver, and I can remember Charlie had an old 1936 Ford, I think. There's one down here for sale, it was like that, yeah, he delivered the mail.

R.H: Was it once a day, every day?

J.M: Yeah, six days a week, not like now.

R.H: Getting back to the school, what was the size of the school?

J.M: Where I started out, it was one building and I think that was for grades one, two, and three or something. The older grades were in the brick building that's still standing there. My mother's uncle helped build that.

R.H: The one you were in wasn't brick then?

J.M: Yeah, the first one I started in was just a little wooden building. That is still there and the older grades, I think from five maybe, I'm not sure what grades went there, but there were two downstairs

and two upstairs.

R.H: Did you find the teachers strict then?

J.M: I found that our teachers were very interested in the fact that they wanted to get us through school, and have us learn something while we were going to school. Whether you call that being strict or not, I don't know. We probably thought it was.

R.H: Was the strap used quite a bit?

J.M: Yes. It could be used today a little bit more. Then, I don't think it was overdone, not like they tell you.

R.H: Did you go to the movie theatre?

J.M: Oh yeah.

R.H: Was there a movie theatre in Ridgeway?

J.M: No, I don't ever remember one in Ridgeway. In Fort Erie we used to go to the movies.

R.H: So you went to the one in Fort Erie, was that the Bellard?

J.M: Yes, I think there was one down in the South End that we used to go to.

R.H: The South End?

J.M: Yeah, I think it's the bowling alley now or something. I'm not too sure about that. I can't remember the name of it or anything, but George might know that too. With my dad going to Niagara Falls, we used to go to Niagara Falls a lot too. It wasn't that far away and he went to market every Saturday, so we did a lot of things in Niagara Falls, more so than Fort Erie, really.

R.H: Did you ever travel in any of the trains?

J.M: Probably to Toronto, in my teens, but I never went that often on the train.

R.H: Did you ever travel on the Peanut Express?

J.M: No, I don't remember that. There was one that used to go through Stevensville but I forget what you called it. I think it went to Toronto and back.

R.H: What about the amusement park at Crystal Beach, do you remember any of the rides there?

J.M: Oh, they had the Caterpillar, and the Merry-Go-Round, and they were probably... They used to have farmers picnics out there. I was thinking the other day because somebody asked, "What was this August holiday", and to us when we were kids, it was always farmers

Picnic.

R.H: Every August was the Farmers Picnic at Crystal Beach?

J.M: Yeah, what do they call it now? Civic holiday.

R.H: So, it was all the farmers and their families that went?

J.M: Supposedly, but I don't think too many farmers got there. They were all busy in the fields working. They used to have races there, and contests and things. When Linda was small, I think that was probably one of the latter ones, they had...

R.H: Is Linda your daughter?

J.M: Yes, and she got a prize for being a cute baby, or something.

R.H: What about your church, Stevensville United, how old is that church?

J.M: It will be 100 years old in October.

R.H: Do you know anything about the history of that church?

J.M: No, not too much, I don't know. I just remember I went there all my life but who started it or anything like that, I'm not sure. Earl Beam, I think, knows a little bit if you interview him. He used to be on council.

R.H: For Bertie Town Council?

J.M: And Fort Erie. He can tell you a lot of the history in the area.

R.H: Have you ever heard of the medicine man that came around these parts?

J.M: No, that must have been before my time. My dad used to do a thing to be silly. He'd go through this thing about medicine men. He used to sell this stuff but that was just something to entertain.

R.H: Have you any information at all on J.L. Kraft?

J.M: Well, he was born in Stevensville down here where Climenhage... what used to be Climenhage's then, but Thompson's live in the house now. There was five boys and three girls. My grandfather and their mother, were brother and sister.

R.H: Where is the house that he was born in? Is it on this road?

J.M: No, it's on the Bowen Road. It's on the corner of Bowen and Winger. He had brothers Fred and Norm, and Harv, and Charlie, and John. Then Ivy Learn, Flo Beach, and Annie..., were his sisters.

R.H: Do you know how he started his business?

J.M: He worked in a store, I think Ferguson's store in Fort Erie. He left there and went to Buffalo and started the cheese business.

R.H: I've seen pictures of his horse and wagon, is that how he started out?

J.M: Oh, you've seen that picture, I've got one too. Yeah, Paddy was the horse.

R.H: Did he come up with the idea of packaging?

J.M: Yeah, and he also got into... Is it Lapidary or something, were they do the Jade and something like that. It is something to do with polishing stones. He also made a window in a church in Chicago where he lived, and donated it to the church.

R.H: Was that stained glass?

J.M: Yeah. I've got information around here somewhere but I have to look it up. He sent my grandmother all that information when he did things. I think we've even got around here, the minister's sermon preached at his funeral when he died. Somebody sent it to my grandmother.

R.H: That was interesting Jean, I thank you on behalf of the library. Thank you very much.