



Art Janse

Interview

November 13

Length: 1 hour, 35 minutes and 38 seconds

George Jackson introduces himself and says he will be interviewing Arthur Janse from the Bradford Marsh. He also mentions that Dawn Saunders* will be sitting in on the discussion. Art says he was born in Chatham. The Verkaiks came from Chatham as well so there was communication from Chatham to the marsh. Jack Israels (Art's uncle) was there a year before they came to the marsh so there was also direct communication that way. They came to the marsh in the spring of 1944; his uncle was about 42 or 43 years old. The Verkaiks had come in 1938. They heard about the big potential of the marsh and Art's dad always wanted to farm. He farmed for a while with a friend of his in Sugar Beach around Chatham, but it didn't last very long because those were poor times. During The Depression his dad had a job with CIL fertilizer, so he had a job throughout that period. They thought the marsh's potential was worth a try, so the family moved. When they arrived, Adair had the farm off of 27 Highway between 3rd and 4th Concession and the corner farm from the town line (Highway 9 today) and Canal Road [*They refer to a map.*] Jack Israels knew the Adairs, and that is the first place the family went to. Then they had a chance to rent the house off of Ralph Davis from Schomberg. That was on the 8th Concession at King Township and Aurora Sideroad. Mrs. Hutchings* had a farm right across the road.

They bought 10 acres of land which was the 3rd place east of River Road, on the south side. River Road is the road that goes to what they now call Springdale; it's the extension of the 5th Sideroad. Art knows the story behind the naming of River Road. Jack Israels found out that Verkaik wanted to name the road. Back then, it basically went that the first person to put a sign up on the road got to name it. Verkaik had the signs all painted to put up, saying 'Verkaik





Road'. Somebody saw this and didn't like it. Jack and Chip Rupke got together at midnight, painted the sign River Road and put it up. Once it was posted, that was the name of the road. Art is not sure how Hillview Road got its name. Webber Road was unnamed when Art was in council. A very nice gentleman named Mr. Webber lived on the road and they decided to name it after him.

Art's family bought 10 acres of land in the marsh which was just grassland when they first moved in. There was part of the marsh that was bush and closer to the river there was a grassy meadow (which is where Art's family moved to). There were no roads at that time so they had to carry everything in on their backs. His dad carried the fertilizer on his back, down the 10 acres [*they look at a map while George explains where the 10 acres were*]. The Holland Marsh Road Act came in 1955. The Janse family did not have a tractor. For five years, they lived in Ralph Davis' house on the 8th Line. When they moved there they didn't have hydro or water. Ralph Davis showed his dad how to wire plugs; Davis was a farmer and an electrician. Before they moved out, there was electricity in the house. Then his dad bought 15 acres of land from the Verkaiks because they were not interested in clearing it. The Janse family cleared it and built a house on it. This piece of land is on the north canal, west of 5th Sideroad; this was part of Verkaiks' 90 acres. Hadus* lived right beside the Janse family.

To clear the land they had to chop the trees down, try to get the roots out, and try to plow it. They had a plow, a crawler tractor, and a wheel tractor in front of that (which wasn't safe). After the war, you could only get a tractor if you had 100 acres of land because there was a limited amount available. Their family had a tractor because Ralph Davis bought one and gave it to them. It had rubber tires and you had to crank it for it to start; it could go up to 15 miles an hour. Also, if the tractor wasn't running well you could repair it yourself.

In terms of the trees they cut down, there wasn't much cedar. It was mostly Tamarack, Elm, and scrub bush* which was five or six feet high. They piled up the bushes and burned them. The ground was rough and not very good for seeding; it took about three years to get it settled down enough for seeding. The canal bank at that time could best be described as a cow trail with trees on both sides and grass in the middle. It was very narrow. [*Tape cuts out and then*





resumes] If you want to see what it was like, go down to Keele Street and go east back into Rosenberg's; that's the best example of what the canal bank was like. It was just a single path through there. Eventually the town put a bit of gravel down. There was more traffic in the spring and as a child Art would pull out cars that got stuck for one dollar.

Hadus* was at the end of the travelled portion before the Janse family was. Most of the traffic went down River Road down to Highway 9. Highway was an open road by 1944. Looking back at the history of the marsh, when they dug the dike they put the road through the marsh. Once they dug the canal, they had the road; it followed the contour of the marsh. It sunk and they spent a lot of money raising it for the first couple of years. That was always known as the Town Line that would take you to Newmarket; it was very rough. Actually it was 1930 when it became a road. George says the problem was that the section starting at 5th Sideroad was dug all through the marshland. Some of the land where they built the road was all peat and muck so it would sink. They've probably spent one million dollars trying to build a road on top of muck. The last time they widened Highway 9, there was 6 feet of peat taken out since it was constructed in the old canal bed.

There were 11 members in the Janse family; there were seven boys and four girls. One sister passed away at two and half years old from a brain tumor (the same as her brother has today). They were both born on March 28th. Art's mom's name was Hendrika Israels and she came from Holland when she was 16 years old. Her family had a clothing and furniture store in Holland but times got tough in the 1920s, so they moved to Canada (Art isn't sure of the exact date, his mother is 94 now). Art's dad came in 1927 and they got married in Chatham. Art's other brothers and sisters are Effie Gerdima*, John Henry, Jim (who moved to London), Raymond, Doreen*, Kenny, Harriet (who passed away), Bob, Nancy, and Marvin. His sister traced the family tree back to England. Art and John live on the marsh right beside each other. His older sisters have retired and live in Innisfil. Bob moved to Orangeville and has a paint store called Sinclair Paint*. Kenny and Raymond are plumbers in Innisfil.

Art was six years old when he had to crawl up and down onion fields to clear weeds. A problem they had was that there would be Cutworms (white grubs) which almost wiped out half





a crop in the first year. The marsh would dry out if they had a dry season (in the 1950s it was very dry) and there would be deep cracks in the ground. Another thing they would do is jump off the roof into the ditch to see how far they would sink in the muck. It was about five years after they arrived that they bought the other parcel of land and started clearing it. His dad did most of the clearing. It was hard work, because there were so many roots in the ground. The grassland was easy because everything was smooth. The bush had twigs, roots, and stumps which would stall the tractor sometimes. Some of the roots went three feet into the ground, and they would be like concrete.

Art's family grew cabbage, lettuce, onions, carrots, and celery. He remembers going to Toronto in winter and selling vegetables door to door. Lettuce usually went to the market and the wholesalers there with a trailer on the back of the car. Once they delivered it to them, the wholesalers would sell it on consignment. If the market was good you did well but if it was backed up, they'd send the lettuce back. If you had a good broker, you didn't do too badly but if you had one who cared more about himself than his farmer, then you would have problems. This is why they went door to door with a six quart basket; Art was nine or ten years old at the time. His dad would drive the car down and would go to one side of the street while Art went on the other side. They would go to the same area of the suburbs. In their first year the onions were stored in their home's living room. The carrots were stored in the pit. Art can remember digging the pit in the winter time and closing it back up. George mentions a diary that was kept by Mr. Curry* in which he talks about potato pits. Art says he talked to Hal Phillips* who could remember that if you didn't do the pit right, the whole thing would just collapse and consume itself.

One of Art's neighbours was Arnold Winters. On the other side there was Smythe*, and Zweep* was down at another end [*they reference a map*]. Steve Toth was a Hungarian who lived there as well. These people would have come in from Highway 9, from the West Canal bank road. Zoots* also had a piece of land [*they point it out on a map*]. In the summertime, the kids and wife [*believed to be referring to the Zoots* family*] would be on the field barefoot. On a Saturday night they would hit the town and they would drink. The wife was a hardworker.





The Verkaiks owned a substantial block of land which was managed by the three brothers named Pete, Harry, and Jake (George was on his own). The Verkaiks also owned some buildings in Bradford. Art's family did not work with them; everyone worked independently. Jake Verkaik went to a market in London and Jack Israels, Chip Rupke, and John Rupke went to a Hamilton market. Harry and Pete ran the farm and Jake was the salesman. Art says that 90% of Verkaik's workforce came from Holland, with some locals like Rebansky*. They built houses for the families and set up agreements for them to live and work on the farm for one year. George says they came over in ships from Holland and then the Canadian National Railway would bring them to the farm town. The Canadian National Railway had an immigration service. Art's family also had a house on their farm with a family living in it.

For the first three years in the wintertime Art's dad worked for [inaudible] who had the alfalfa plant in Schomberg. He would also shovel driveways by hand. All the members of Art's family had to work on the farm. When Art was 15 he worked on the farm every day. Art went to school in Schomberg. They lived on the 8th Concession and he would walk to school down [inaudible] Sideroad. After the school in Schomberg, Art went to Holland Marsh School. They were involved with the Christian Reformed Church. There was no church in Springdale, but one in Holland Marsh so they traveled to it every Sunday in summer and winter. It was difficult travelling in the winter and spring because of the road conditions.

Art says he knows how Springdale got its name. They were building the church and thinking about what to call the area so they asked everyone in the community for ideas. It was Marge Rupke (Chip Rupke's wife) who came up with Springdale and everyone accepted it. This was just before the church was built in 1952. The church brought the community together because everyone was finally going to the same church. Tony Verkaik was the architect, engineer, and builder of the church. It was built out of army barracks that came from Base Borden. The school was there for a period of time, which also brought the community together. Matt Brent* was very good to the community; the only way out of town was through his farm. This path was used extensively during Hurricane Hazel. Art got his mail at the top of the hill





from that path. The Janse family came to the marsh and built their house on the canal bank, moving into the house in 1950. Material was costly to get; they used stumps.

Art says the canal was the greatest rink a person could have; he has memories of playing hockey on the canal at the time. It was 40 feet wide and they shoveled the snow off. Almost every Saturday there would be multiple games of shimmy going on. [*Tape cuts out*]

[*Tape resumes*] On the night of Hurricane Hazel, Art was in his house with his family and they stayed in there all night. Nobody expected that the water level would come up that high; two or three feet. The dikes were not very high back then, about 723 (feet above sea level). The marsh sloped in the middle like a saucer so anything in the middle got substantially more water. His family's basement was 6.5 feet high and it filled with about 4.5 feet of water. Three days prior to the day of the hurricane, because of all the rain, the marsh's slope reversed. This caused the water from Lake Simcoe to run into Braford. . The marsh and Holland River were flat so there was no fall between the marsh and Cook's Bay, Lake Simcoe. By seven o'clock at night everyone knew there was a problem. At the north branch, it happened more suddenly when the dike broke. At the time of Hurricane Hazel, the canal was also in very poor condition; there were many trees in it and there were places where it was almost full. It wasn't maintained the way it should have been maintained. The dike broke at the north branch, right by Hadus*, and at the corner by Highway 9 [*they point out the location on a map*].

A man named Pagent* with the department of Public Works was put in the area to look after the province's money. Pagent* was a great guy who proposed to dynamite the ditches to clean them out. Art went with Pagent's* associate up to CIL factory, picked up the dynamite, and headed back. When they got back, they put the dynamite in a shed where they used to collect the time sheets from people and pay them once a week. There was a 10x10 office in the shed and the dynamite stayed there for a few days. They put five to six sticks together a foot apart in the river, set the charge off, and nothing happened. Then they cut them in half and put them in the ditch but there was too much of a charge so they ditches looked inconsistent. Then they cut them into quarters and put them a foot apart in the ditch but there wasn't enough to set





the charge off. Finally, they dug the dynamite out by hand, put it on a bushel in the middle of the road, and blew it up. That was the end of the dynamite.

George comments that Hurricane Hazel was a “once every 100 year storm” but there was one in 1921 which was quite similar. The storm started up at the 10th Line and took out Scanlon creek and 5th Sideroad. It was basically a cloud burst over an isolated area. They say that if another storm like that comes around, the roads will not be prepared for it.

George asks what the main change was in Springdale since Art was young. Art says that it has changed a lot. The main thing is that they don’t have the workforce (people) that they used to. It was a tight knit community; if someone got married, everyone would be invited. Everyone would clean out the barn and sweep the floor to have the reception. Today, you aren’t allowed to have a wedding in a barn without everything being up to code. That’s the sad thing about today’s society. There were many good community events which everyone attended. There wasn’t that much drinking. Before 1950-1960, the rural communities were basically dry. The automobile and money have basically put a wedge between communities. Now that people have money and automobiles, they don’t walk over to neighbours to visit.

George was talking to Jim Verkaik who said that the big change in 1958 on the marsh was the introduction of the pallet box and the harvesters. George asks if this is true. Art says before there were chemicals to remove weeds, armies of people had to crawl and manually remove them. Onions were pulled by hand, put in a bushel and on a wagon, topped, and bagged. Carrots were all pulled by hand. It started out at 8 cents and went up to 12 cents a bushel. A good person could do 110 bushels in a day; a child could do 40 bushels. There was a lot of manual handling. Then they started to get chemicals for weeds and it changed the weeding; it reduced a lot of labour. Louie [*last name is inaudible*] was bed ridden for a year and began reading about farming equipment. Louie was probably the first person to get a combine. Everybody said that it would bruise the onion, but it didn’t and the varieties got better. All the onions were brought to [*name is inaudible*] in Schomberg who topped them with a machine he had. Then they came out with a five or six bed topper on a little trailer that you pulled ahead. Then there was the combine. Then the pallet boxes came in. At first everyone thought the





vegetables would not dry properly in the boxes and would rot. It took a few years to become popular. When the carrot combine came out, that's when the real drastic change came. By that time, pallet boxes were proving themselves and chemicals for the weeds were available. It changed the amount of labour involved mostly. Art's family rented their barn out to United Farms on several occasions. They would bring the truck; his family would unload it, pile the load in the barn, store it for an amount of time, and load the truck again for 15 cents a bushel. It was a lot of labour before these innovations came. The reduction of the labour force meant that the farmer could produce the crops for less money, while the price for the produce remained fairly constant.

George can remember that in 1954 or 1955 there would be busloads of people going up to work on the marsh who would get paid on the way home. Anyone who wanted to get on the bus to work could do so. They would have different people working on their farm every day. When Art was a child, if they got 500 bags of onions that was considered a good crop. Today that would be considered to be a terrible crop and 1100 bags is good; production has probably doubled. Farms started expanding because with the combines they could cover more ground.

George would like to speak about the Holland Marsh Drainage Commission which started in about 1928. In the records George has found, they had it arranged so that the draining of the marsh was the Township of West Gwillimbury's responsibility. Professor Day was not happy with how West Gwillimbury was handling it. He organized a committee with growers from the marsh as well as the municipalities and that became the Holland Marsh Drainage Commission. The committee was formed in around 1933 to 1935. Art says that originally the committee consisted of the three Reeves of West Gwillimbury, King, and Bradford. Then the farmers complained that they had all these costs but no voice. There was some guy sitting on Council telling them what to do with their marshland. They asked if some of the farmers could be on the commission. They originally said no but then agreed to allow two farmers in. The original commission relied on the engineer too much. The engineer was in Chatham and therefore did not know what the weather was like at the marsh. In 1970, there was another





uproar and the commission went from having three farmers to seven. They tried to get a mix of farmers from King Township and West Gwillimbury.

This commission had always recommended that they hire someone to look after the operations of the marsh; a superintendent who would look after things. They never wanted to spend the money on it until the 1980s. Up until that point, the three Reeves managed the marsh themselves with Charlie Davis (and others) hired on to be a dike walker. He walked along the dike to make sure it was alright. For the pumps, the person who lived nearest to them would look after them. On the Springdale side, pumps weren't installed until Highway 400 was put through. There were always arguments over what level the river should be at. The farmer close to the river wanted the water lower and the farmer close to the dike wanted the water higher.

When Art was a child, there was a lot of controversy over the marsh drainage. The river itself (the Schomberg River) became the main drain and it was stagnated with weeds which meant the water wouldn't flow well. This was the biggest problem. Art notes that the river can be referred to as the Schomberg River, Holland River, or Schomberg Holland River. No one was ever sure where the Schomberg River stopped and the Holland River began.

The Bradford Marsh was completely separate from the Holland Marsh. The Bradford Marsh had nothing to do with the Holland Marsh Drainage Commission; the town of Bradford looked after it. Today both marshes are looked after by the same person, while still remaining two separate units. Art looks after the marsh now since he is superintendent. Art has had some difficulty with the pumps; they have broken twice. Since Barrie Hydro took over they said that people needed to stay a certain number of feet away from the hydro wires. They were not allowed to lift the pump through the roof but the pump is one unit and needed to be lifted through there. Barrie Hydro said that the power would need to be shut off (for \$4000) before they could do that. They decided to get a small pump that they could handle it without a crane. The pump came from ABS in Germany.

The marsh is managed as an entity in itself. It was constructed under the Drainage Act but did not always comply with the terms of the act because sometimes there were more





important things to be done in the moment. If you are a landowner on the marsh, you pay municipal taxes on your property like everyone else, but also a drainage levy. The levy is determined by the Commission and the engineer. The engineer would recommend a charge per acre. As mentioned before, the old riverbed is the main drain which has to be cleaned and well maintained. When they first started to clear it out, they used a drag line. [*Tape cuts out*]

[*Tape resumes*] It was always a controversy because workers were taking clay out and leaving the muck. There were also places that they couldn't access to clean. The course of the riverbed didn't change over the few years because of this. They also tried using a clamp on a floating barge to clean the river. There were about 600 man-made ditches in the marsh and sediment would flow from these into the river. From the time it was cleaned, it could be plugged within two years. Therefore there was no easy method for this and there were many harsh words spoken about it. They have gone through with a motorboat before just to get a path through the weeds. In the 1960s the provincial government said they would do a study and get the right people to solve the problem once and for all, but it didn't help. The biggest problem was that they didn't have a machine to clean it out. The drag line would clean up the weeds but it would have to be a continuous thing. It couldn't be done during farm season so it had to be done in the wintertime. Then people would complain because they took out more ice than debris and if some dirt got on top of the ice, it wouldn't thaw out until June and they couldn't work the land. The recommendation from the Committee in the 1960s was to buy 100 feet all along the river for drainage purposes; that was the biggest battle.

Fights over the drains would happen because they were so problematic. Art had an experience where a person parked his truck in front of the machine, all because he didn't agree with where the dirt was being placed. Louie* started with his snow blower in 1977. Prior to that, they had drag line and in the early 70's they tried to find someone who could make a machine. [*name is inaudible*] went to Europe to look at machines but found nothing that was realistic. Louie Defalls* found a company in Belleville that gave them a price to make the machine, but it would cost \$350,000. That wasn't satisfactory. Cummings in Toronto worked around the dock area and said he could make a machine. He made it and they gave him a contract of \$50,000 a





year to maintain the river for five years. The only problem was Cummings did not have the financial resources but he made the machine before 1977. This machine went through the river; it was a bucket on a chain and it dropped in a hopper. Joe Louie's* son was helping Cummings operate the machine. He was a drinker and a farmer complained because he dropped a beer bottle in a machine and it shot out pieces into the field. Cummings had good intentions but he didn't have the money to do it properly. [*Name is inaudible*] in Aurora built the hull for it. He put spuds along the side and that worked well.

Cummings never fulfilled his contract because the machine kept breaking down. That's when Louie went with [*name is inaudible*] to get another price for another machine. The new machine was \$125,000 dollars. This machine went down the river, gathered up all the muck, and spat it out like a snow blower. Originally, this machine was supposed to be built like Cummings' with buckets. Then Art found an article about augers and gave it to Louie who agreed that it was a good idea. There was a woman working in their office whose husband made augers and they bought from him. The problem with that was black plastic and wires that were thrown in the river would get trapped in the augers. Another change of the marsh was when farmers started using plastic tile to make their ditches. There was much less erosion with plastic when compared to an open ditch. [*Tape cuts out*]

*Note: * Indicates that the word or name is written as it sounded, and therefore may be incorrect.*

