Fred Apperley

Interview Two

March 7, 1974

Length: 56 minutes and 44 seconds

It is Wednesday March 7, 1974 and Jack Coleman and Peter Moran are in Cookstown interviewing Fred Apperley for the second time. In the first interview, they discussed his background, the history of Cookstown, and a part of Tecumseth Township. They also talked about his municipal career and current events. They would like Fred to tell them about his life as a boy. Fred is 94 at this time and has a fantastic memory about everything. Fred started school at five years old and was living at the old Sheldon Patterson farm on the 14th Line in Tecumseth Township. He attended Ross's School* and it was built of log on the Ross farm and that's how it got its name. It later moved to a different farm and never changed its name. Fred would attend school for the full term. When he was old enough, he would stay home during the summer to help on the farm and get most of his schooling during the winter time. The school was heated by a wood stove and some of the boys including Fred would be in charge of firing the stove and would receive $6 a year to do it. The school had to buy the wood to fire the stove and would buy it for about a dollar a quart and would have it delivered for that price as well. A quart is 8 feet long, 12 feet high, and 4 feet wide; that is a full quart.

Besides going to school, Fred helped on the farm from the time he was able to lift a fork. Steam tractors were used in the early days. The first one was brought by Thompson Fisher to thrash in the community. There first tractor used on the land, according to Fred, came in the 1920s. The first tractor that he remembers had a broken front foot. The steam and gas machines from that era would be used for other things than thrashing and ploughing. Fred says his clothing was made by his mother and she would even make him straw hats. Mitts and socks and trousers were made by his mother, but they had to buy their boots. Haircuts were given by the mothers

and fathers of the children. Fred's mother would make her own bread and butter and would put down own preserves into the cellar. Fred says they used to hollow out a log and shave a barrel and put it onto a stand with a slopping platform with glue in it and pour hot water in it and it would then go out into some other container where they would add fat and it was a formula that Fred didn't know, but it would make soap. Fred explains that it was a soft soap that would be used for washing yourselves and clothes.

Fred says that meat would be pickled. He doesn't know how it was done but it would allow the meat to be stored in the summer. Lots of farmers would also smoke their meat in smoke houses to preserve it. When asked, Fred doesn't know how beef was processed to keep it. In the winter it would be hung outside to be frozen and would be stored in a shed until it was needed. In the summertime farmers had an icehouse where they would store their meat. Fred's family belonged to a beef ring. There were 20 members in the beef ring and they had to have beef up to a certain standard. Each family would get two pounds a week and they would pay the butcher to butcher and dress the meat; the family that supplied the meat had to pay the butcher. Each man had to put in so much meat each season. Each family would have to take their turn taking the meat in. Each member of the beef ring would get a turn at having each cut of the meat so that the entire carcass would be used and there wouldn't be one family getting all the steak. There were certain delicacies that people don't eat today such as beef heart and beef tongue. The wood would be cut in the winter and dried during the summer. A wood bee was when neighbours were invited over for thrashing and bringing cross cut saws to cut wood.

Fred says that nobody was ever prepared for winters and they seemed much more extreme than they are now. There was no road clearing equipment. Neighbours would go out in teams with shovels to clear roads. Fences along roads would keep snow along them. During the wintertime roads were changed and people would go through the empty fields instead of on the roads. The cutters and harnesses had bells and Fred just took it for granted that it was the custom. They would use the same horses to haul sleighs in the winter that would haul buggies in the summer. Some farmers would have what they would call a driving horse, which would do that. Road horses were the most common of them. Doctors would make house calls at this time

and would drive for miles to get to people. The doctors during Fred's day were Doctor Norris*, Doctor Nichol, and Doctor Buchanan. Fred remembers that everybody had a saddle and it was easier to ride a single horse than to hitch it to the saddle. The horses would have multiple uses on the same farm. 100 acres was considered the standard farm size and each farmer worked differently but some would have six horses and have them in teams of two or three. The machinery pulled by the horses would be small and the horses would be bigger. Jack remembers that Fred had a wonderful team of Percheron horses; they were maybe 1500 pounds each and were general purpose horses. Fred got them from two different districts but doesn't remember from whom. Jack notes that Fred once had a bad accident with a binder and asks if this team of horses was involved. Fred says no, it happened several years after he sold them.

They grew all the different grains on the farm like peas, oats, wheat, and barley. They grew "roots" too which consisted of turnips, mangles, and carrots. Mangles are a type of vegetable belonging to the beet family. These were used as stock feed, and sometimes eaten by the people. Almost every farmer had a "root house" where these vegetables were stored. They would grind it into a pulp and mix it with salt and ... for the feed. Wheat was supposed to be the cash crop that would be sold to make money. They would milk the cows and make cream from it by putting the milk in the cellar in special pans. A "creamer" was a cup that would hold five gallons; you'd put it in a well or a vat with cold water, and the cream would rise. When the cream separators came in, they used those. Cream wasn't sold, it was churned into butter which would be sold or traded for provisions.

Jack asks Fred to explain what a drover is. Fred says drovers were cattle and hog buyers. They would come to your farm, size it up, and buy it right away. There were public scales to weigh the animals (these were operated by Henry Coleman at one time). They would get the stock to market by foot. They had a stock yard down by the station and the drovers would drive the animals in there. The stock wasn't inspected. Peter asks how the meat compared to todays and Fred says there were some skinny animals back then. He can't remember how the meat tasted but he said it was questionable. His father was a poor stock man. Every farmer knew how to butcher his own animals.

Jack would like to discuss thrashing, which he says was must have been done with a power operated machine by this time; maybe steam. [*Tape cuts out and then resumes*] [*Inaudible*] Fred says in terms of horsepower, they would have five teams of horse with two horses per team. There would be a spindle running from the gears on the horsepower up to a jack on the thrash... There was a belt on the jack that ran up to the separator; that's how they did the thrashing. That machine would have "carriers". A carrier is something like an escalator. The straw went up the carriers out to the stacks. You couldn't thrash very well without at least 12 men (14 was even better). The grain from the thrashing machine was carried by bushel boxes (60 pounds each) and dumped into bins. In those days, they didn't even have a self-feeder so it was done by hand. Jack asks how these machines were transported to different places. Fred says it was done with horses. All the machines were steam operated. The steam engines burned wood. A farmer would depend on wheat for money and would thrash enough to fill the barn. Individual farmers would not often own their own thrashing machines; more so in the later years. The person who owned the thrashing equipment would make a business out of it, renting it out to the farms. Whoever was hosting the thrashing would be responsible for feeding all the neighbours that were helping.

Peter remarks that burning wood was used for many things on the farm in those days (machines, stoves, and smoking meat) and asks where all the wood came from. Fred says almost every farmer had a wood lot; the wood never seemed to run out. This area used to be much more tree covered than it is today. Out of a 100 acre farm, about 10 acres would be used as a wood lot. In Tecumseth, they had what they called the Tecumseth Swamp. At that time, it wasn't drained. There was a great acreage and wood grew pretty tall there. One acre would supply wood for years for one man. The swamp was on the 12th and 13th Concessions. In terms of livestock, the average farmer had horses, cattle, pigs, and some sheep. Fowl were a woman's responsibility. There would be a flock of hens (maybe 100 or 200), enough geese to have about 20 goslings in the fall, and the same number of ducks and turkeys.

Christmas in 1890s was a real family day. The head of the house ensured they would have all the requirements for Christmas; they'd go to town and get everything they needed. The

families were closer back then than they are now. The neighbours were closer too and would come together later in the day. Neighbours were closer then because people needed to make own amusement and had to help each other because they didn't have the money for those things. They needed the money to just pay for the farm. Farming wheat would allow for farmers to keep their farm. In 1890 about 100 acres of land was worth about $6000 with the buildings (barn, stable, and house). The entertainment in that time consisted of house parties and house dances. A sleigh team or horse drawn carriage would take people to them. There were no babysitters then so they had to take the kids with them. Kids might be put to sleep in a certain part of the house while the parents were at the party and would then be woken when it was time to go home. Straw or hay would be on the bottom of carriages to keep them warm and there would be quilts on them as well. Lamps would be carried on the carriage and covered in a quilt which would generate a surprising amount of heat. Coal lanterns were the only form of light on the carriages. Women would cook on coal stoves in the winter and on open fires in the summer time. The ladies of the church would raise funds to have social gatherings. They had a sing-song around the organ on occasion.

Fred's area got hydro sometime in the 1940s. Coal lanterns would be used throughout the barns and houses. The open flame could start fires by cows or hens knocking them over. Fred remembers Alliston being burned in 1891 from somebody burning garbage in the street. Fred doesn't know why farmers built such big houses. They speculate that it was because the families were larger and stayed together much longer. Also, if people came to visit they would be unable to make the trip back home in the same day so they would stay for a few days before going home and the house would need to be bigger. Hired men would also live in the house but the hired men would not be able to have a family unless there were special arrangements made. Houses would have front and back stairs. Farmers in better financial positions were able to have houses heated by coal. Coal would be bought in Cookstown and then the farmer would have to haul the coal back to their house. Coal was more expensive than wood.

Ladies had to make most of their own clothes. Families would use lots of wood to heat their houses through the winter. It was because of this that it was not uncommon to see a man on

farm with two or three hired men. The farmer wouldn't have to get up so early in the morning if he had help. Fred's family did not have hired help and they would have to drive about five miles most of the time to get their wood. He had to be up at four o'clock in the morning to do his chores of feeding horses, pumping water, etc. and would have all his chores done before breakfast. After dinner, he would have more chores to do. If they could have hired help they would have had less work to have to do. Sunday was a day of rest that they always looked forward too. On Sundays they still had to feed and take care of their livestock and did other necessary chores but not as many chores as other days.

Fred doesn't like to talk about The Depression because it was such a tough time. He goes on to say that they had no money to spend on things and they couldn't sell crops or animals because nobody had any money to buy them. It meant that he couldn't farm the way he wanted to but instead had to farm any way that they could to get by. Cattle were sold for 3 cents a pound, so a thousand pounds of beef got you $30. Hogs were sold for a similar price. Grain was sold for 17 cents a bushel. During The Depression, he had a nice crop of wheat and was offered $2.85 a bag for it by Frank Robinson. Fred accepted it and after three or four days, when he went back with the first load to sell it to him, the man said he didn't want it anymore since he got a cheaper price elsewhere. After that Fred refused to try and sell to that man. The following spring he sold it for 60 cents a bushel. The tape then ends with the interviewers thanking Fred for allowing them to come and interview him. Fred thanks them for coming and explains how he appreciates getting the opportunity to look back on his life and share it with them. [*Tape cuts out*]

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