



## Fred C. Cook

### *Interview*

February 13, 1974

Length: 54 minutes and 55 seconds

Jack Coleman introduces himself and Peter Moran from the Simcoe County Archives who are at the residence of Fred Cook on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1974 to talk to him about the history of his family and of this area and other matters as they come to them. Mr. Cook has been a prominent person in this community and for this reason they want to interview him and retain this tape at the Simcoe County Archives.

Fred was born in the village of Bradford; they didn't go to the hospital in Newmarket for births in those days. He was born the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, 1901 and he has lived in Bradford ever since. His father's name was John Gibson Cook and he was born in Bradford (as far as he is aware). His mother's name was Caroline Mills and she was born in the Township of West Gwillimbury just about two miles north of Bradford. Fred had three siblings. One brother died in infancy before Mr. Cook was born. He has another brother (younger) and a sister (older). His sister still lives in Bradford and his brother lives in Windsor. Fred is married; his wife's maiden name was Leone Miller\* and she was born in North Dakota, USA. She came to Creemore in Simcoe County when she was just a child and she came to Bradford when they were both about 20 years old. She grabbed him and he hasn't gotten away since. Fred has no family (children).

Fred attended Bradford Public School, which was previously known as the Bradford Model School. He also attended Bradford High School. Both were situated on Queen's Street in Bradford. Peter asks where the term 'model school' came from. Fred says these schools were in place before they had the College of Education to train teachers. You would go to one of these model schools where you would train (he doesn't know how extensive it was or what kind of





degree they got). That was where they produced teachers in the old days but those types of schools were fairly scarce. When Fred attended school, it was just called the public school. After he completed public school in 1915, he went to the high school and was there until 1916. That high school was burnt in 1923 and the present one was built. Fred finished at the high school from what would be known as grade 11 now. It was known as a 'high school' back then as well. At one time it was called a grammar school but it was always known as the 'high school'.

Following his graduation from the high school, Fred started an apprenticeship with the local druggist and thought he was going to be pharmacist. In those days you served about four years at an apprenticeship and you then went to college for about a year and after you got your degree that was it. Fred thinks the system is different now since you have to go to college for much longer; but then you need to know a lot more now. At that time, W. L. [William] Campbell was running the drug store; whose brother was Dr. L. H. Campbell [Lewis] and they made quite a team. Dr. Campbell was one of the outstanding doctors in the community. He was the doctor on the job when Fred was born. He doesn't remember that but that's what his mother told him. Fred stayed at the drug store for about a year. He didn't like it very much and he had bad health about then so he dropped out and he wanted to do other things. Finally he settled into the insurance business in which he was engaged for almost four years. He started in the insurance business in around 1920.

Jack asks Fred to give some history of the area. Fred says Bradford is situated at the southern edge of the County of Simcoe and around them is the Township of West Gwillimbury, with other townships around that. As he understands it, the first white people to cross the Holland River came in 1819. The first three men to come were Lewis Algeo, Robert Armstrong, and James Wallace and they settled on Concession 6 of the Township of West Gwillimbury to the west of what is now Bradford. Shortly after that, the Selkirk settlers left because of the *[inaudible; assumed he is referring to unrest in that area at the time]* of the Red River in Manitoba and eventually settled along the southern part of what is now West Gwillimbury in what has been known for years as the Scotch Settlement. Fred thinks the beginning of Bradford started in this field behind us that's now being built up. A fellow by the name of Malloy\* built a





tavern at the crossroads where the road north forked to go down to the Scotch Settlement. Subsequently, that part was changed to part of Highway 88. Fred clarifies that they are having this interview at 135 Barrie Street which is just south of Queens Street on the east side. The area that he was talking about before with the road north and the Scotch Settlement was known for years as the [inaudible] Farm which was owned and operated by the Stoddarts. In the early 1900s, there was a flour mill of some size here operated by Samuel Lukes. There was a lumber mill that employed a considerable amount of people. In the latter part of the 19th century, there were saw mills of considerable size just over the bridge on the Holland River in the northern part of the County of York; this area was once known as Amsterdam. Peter asks if there was originally a plan to have the major settlement as Amsterdam, instead of Bradford. Fred says that could be true, but he doesn't know. It was certainly built up and developed and their industries were ahead of Bradford's.

Jack notes that he has heard about the marsh hay; cutting the hay and bringing it into Bradford for sale in the early 1900s. Fred doesn't know how far back it went but before the marsh was drained, there was a substantial industry in the growing, cutting, and selling of marsh hay; it was taken up by about 3 or 4 people. Ben Collings, whose son is still in Bradford, was a large operator of marsh hay. The hay was processed so it could be used for packing and also to make mattresses. Collings also had a mattress factory of some size. Peter says when people of his generation look at the marsh they see it as a flat, drained, productive market area. He would like Fred to describe it before it was drained. In Fred's time, people didn't live on the marsh. They may have lived on the edge of it but not in it; there was the odd building on it that the marsh hay people would use. You could look at acres and acres of hay that would grow on its own. Ben Collings made some kind of a shoe that they would put on a horse so they could walk on mucky ground. There were many Tamarack trees on or near the marsh. Peter says the only other marshy area of prominence that he can remember in Simcoe County is the famous swamp at Minesing. He asks if it was anything like the wild nature of the Minesing swamp before it was drained and cleared. Fred doesn't know much about the Minesing swamp and he doesn't think that he would use the term 'wild' to describe the Bradford marsh. He knows that some people





went duck hunting on it but he doesn't think there were any wild animals on it. The bigger part of the marsh was mostly grass and the edge was covered in Cedar and Tamarack trees. Jack says that Mr. Watson told him that they did go down to the marsh and cut trees there for firewood, but that was about the only use they had. Jack asks if there was any fishing industry. Fred says in 1914 to 1920 there was a fellow named Spencer that had a fishing business of considerable size. He used to specialize in Carp and they could be sold alive.

Jack notes that at one time, the marsh was all in the County of Simcoe but around where the Holland River runs south, it was taken over by the Region of York and that became the boundary between the County of York and the County of Simcoe. Fred isn't sure about that, and he is wondering if they are confusing two Holland Rivers. There is one that runs between York and Simcoe, and there is a branch of the Holland River that runs into Newmarket to the south. The river separates the two regions now. Jack asks Fred who he thinks is responsible for the beginning of this industry which is now one of the largest industries in the Bradford area. Fred says there may have been several people, but in his opinion the man that deserves much of the credit for it was Professor W.H. Day who practically gave his life. He worked hard and had a seizure one day; he thinks that actually happened on the marsh. There were various people that pushed it in the first place, but Day was the one who really started to develop it. William H. Day was a professor of physics at the Ontario Agriculture College in Guelph. In 1923 he resigned his position at the college, moved to Bradford, and began an energetic campaign to interest the municipal council in the drainage scheme for the Holland Marsh. Two years later his efforts were rewarded when the council of Bradford, the council of West Gwillimbury, and the council of King Township signed a contract for the drainage of the Holland Marsh. The first crop on the drained land was grown in 1927. Fred thinks the crops they grew were quite similar to what's grown there today. One of the big problems that they had to overcome with the first crops was that there was no market for them. Of course there have been fortunes made since but of course Day didn't live long enough to benefit from it.

Jack would like to discuss how the marsh was drained. Fred says they built a dam across the Holland River, just south of Bradford and just west of where the bridge is over Highway 11.





Then they dug a canal all the way around the marsh up to Schomberg and back in. Pumps were installed and they would pump the water down into the canal, over the dam, and into the Holland River which would then flow into Lake Simcoe. The entire marsh was all surrounded by this canal at one go. If you want to go by the definition that a piece of land surrounded by water is an island, then they made an island out of it. To dig the canal, they built a huge scow and at the opening they had a dance on this scow. It had heavy machinery on it. After they built the dam they went all around the marsh and dug this canal; the earth was just piled along the side of it. Jack says around 1931-1932, as a relief measure the Township of West Gwillimbury went down to make a road along the canal in the West Gwillimbury portion. They did this with men in teams during The Depression. They were paid a very meagre amount. Fred doesn't remember, but he thinks that's probably right. This canal now serves the purpose to irrigate the marsh.

Peter asks how hard the Bradford area was hit during The Depression and in what way. Fred says people lost money, but he doesn't think anybody really suffered to the extent of going to bed hungry. The percentage of people on relief during this time in Bradford was fairly high because they only had about 800 or 900 people, so if you had 20 or 30 families it was a fair percentage. Jack says there was no direct relief in the 1930s; there were relief measures certainly in the municipalities and they were given a budget for vouchers. It was particularly hard for women (including widows). In those years people simply tightened their belts and said, "We are going to make the best of this", they didn't have relief back then as they do now.

The marsh has created the best industry there is in the Town of Bradford now. Most of the industries developed from the marsh are just of the outskirts of Bradford. Fred doesn't know the exact number of people who work in these vegetable plants but he would say it's anywhere from 500 to 1000 people. The most of it was over the river in York County but there are still 2-3 large plants in Bradford. In the 1920s there was a factory that employed a considerable number of people and they worked making furniture; subsequently it became a hockey stick factory. That particular building was built for a factory where they manufactured doors and sashes before 1914 and they had developed a considerable trade with England and Europe. World War One





put an end to it. The baby carriage factory took over the building after that in about 1920. Fred would say that Bradford was mainly dependent on the marsh.

Jack would like to discuss some of the merchants on the main street or in Bradford, and what they sold. Holland Street is the name of the main street. One of the outstanding events in the history of Bradford is a fire on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May in 1871 which practically destroyed the town. It started up near the corner of Moore and Holland Streets and burnt both sides down to where the town hall is, with damages of upwards of half a million dollars, which would be the equivalent of 5 or 6 million dollars nowadays. It was re-built almost right away. Fred has some of the names of people in business immediately after this fire: The Abbott brothers' owned the Esteemed Tannery, Smith and sons owned sawmills, Ben Barnes\* was a general merchant and worked in insurance, William Belfry was a teacher (and he was one of the few capable of teaching at the model school), John Bingham was a butcher, H. S. Broughton was editor and proprietor of the South Simcoe News, Gibson Cook (Fred's grandfather) had a store which dealt with groceries, grain, and insurance, Joseph Deacon was a druggist, [first name is inaudible] Porter was a dentist, and John Stibbs was a baker. The estimated population was 2000, and it began to shrink after that. This was in 1872 or 1873, about a hundred years ago. Fred does not know why the population was so high and then went down at this time. Peter wonders if it would be the lumbering; Nichol\* and Diamond. Fred thinks Nichol\* and Diamond were still there in World War One, but the big mills over the Holland River that was known as Amsterdam were gone; so that might have been it. Fred has some more names of people that were in business in 1892: [name is inaudible] was a tailor, W.L. Campbell was a druggist, James Mills was a butcher, Kilkenny and son were cabinet makers, upholsters, and undertakers. The Kilkennys started their business in Bradford around 1837 because they had their centennial in 1937. [Tape cuts out]

[Tape resumes] Peter says Fred mentioned that a man who ran a cabinet business was also an undertaker. This seems to happen quite often in the old histories. The people that were cabinet makers were also the undertakers. Fred does not know why this was. He thinks it was probably because undertaking did not make enough of an income to do that on its own; to make a living and keep the amount of equipment they would need. Also, they made their own caskets







so since they already had the furniture-making equipment, it would be logical to build other things as well.

Fred started in the insurance business in around 1920; that was 54 years ago. Webb was the butcher and Kilkenny was the undertaker at that time. W. L. Campbell was a druggist and R. F. Green had a grocery business and also the central telephone line. This was all on Holland Street. R. F. Green was George Green's father, and he was an uncle of Fred's. George and Fred were in business together and they were first cousins. George was the son of the eldest in his father's family and Fred's father was the youngest, so they were more like an uncle and nephew than cousins. Jack asks about the implement business and who was selling implements then in Bradford. Fred's father had such a shop, but not at that time. By that time he had finished; he left the local agency to become what they call a 'blockman' and subsequently became ill and wasn't working.

Jack would like Fred make note of the names of some prominent people of this area. Looking at this area, Fred says there would be Sir William Osler who was born in Bond Head. His father was the director of the Bond Head Parish. Sir William Mulock was also born in Bond Head. Bond Head is six miles from Bradford; it is well within the Bradford area. Newton Robinson is another 2 to 3 miles north from Bond Head. The Honourable Earl Rowe lived there and he was a Member of Parliament here for years, and Lieutenant Governor. Fred can think of a numbers of folks who distinguished themselves through their education. Balmer Neilly, the son of Andy Neilly who had a jewelry store in Bradford, was a governor of the University of Toronto and an engineer. Peter notes that Mr. Art Evans is living in Bradford right now and sits in the Provincial House. Fred says this is true, but he was born in Beeton.

Jack would like to discuss Fred's career in the Masonic Order, Orange Order, and Anglican Church of Canada. Fred says over the years he has been heavily involved in the area of Christian education. For several years, he was the chairman of the Board of Religious Education for the Diocese of Toronto. He was president and chairman of the Board of Management of the Ontario Council of Christian Education, and he was an executive member of the Department of Christian Education in the Canadian Council of Churches. He thinks this





has spanned from 1920 to 1963 or 1964. Most of the organizations that he mentioned don't exist anymore, which creates a problem because a lot of them are wondering what the future of Christian Education is. [*Tape cuts out*]

[*Tape resumes*] On March the 14<sup>th</sup> of 1962, Fred was presented with the National Citation for Distinguished Service in the field of Christian Education by the Department of Christian Education of Canadian Cultural Churches. Fred was the only Anglican ever to receive this and one of about 12 or 13 people altogether. In his local church, Fred has been a lay reader for over 35 years. His local church is the Trinity Anglican Church in Bradford; the whole parish covers Bradford, Holland Landing, and Coulson's Hill. A couple of years ago, Mrs. Cook and him completed 104 years of service between them in the church school in Bradford; that's 52 years each. Fred was superintendent of the Sunday school for 50 years. Mrs. Cook was the organist for over 35 years and also assisted in the Sunday school. In the Citation he received, it states, "In all these positions he has been supported with matching dedication by Mrs. Cook". In the local church, two or three years ago he was given permission by Bishop [*name is inaudible*], who was the main Bishop of the Diocese of Toronto at the time, to assist in the communion service. At the present time, Fred does the sermon at Holland Landing on the first Sunday of each month and he does a full service here on the third Sunday, assisting in various ways all along the trail. Jack notes that Fred acts as the minister's assistant. Fred thinks it is broader than that because as a result of his activities in Christian Education, he gets around quite a bit with other denominations. For some years he has done services in the United Church here when the minister takes his holidays. Over the years he has been criticized a bit by some of his own crowd (not in Bradford) about being too broad minded, which did not bother him. Fred is in favour of the ecumenical movement. Fred has attended senate for about 15 years. He has taken a very active part in that as well, being the chairman of several sub-committees.

Fred has been a member of the Masonic Order for over 35 years at the Simcoe Lodge in Bradford. He was master of the Lodge in 1947 and was elected as District Deputy Grandmaster for Toronto District C\* in 1956 which he held for a year. In regards to the Orange Order, he belonged to Cypress Lodge\* which was located in Bradford at that time. Now the four lodges







are one and they meet in Newton Robinson under the name of Centennial Lodge. He has been a member of the Orange Order for over 50 years. Peter asks if Fred thinks there will be an Orange Order 50 years from now. Fred responds that it is hard to say; the only thing he knows for sure is that if there is an Orange Order 50 years from then, he won't be a part of it because he would be 123 years old. Fred was Master of the local lodge. He was also District Master, County Master, and finally in 1943 to 1945 he was Grandmaster of the Orange Order of Western Ontario. The only positions higher than that would be Grandmaster of Canada and Imperial Grandmaster of the world.

Peter asks about Fred's municipal career. He was on the council here in 1929 or 1930; it was the year they put the first waterworks system in. Then he was out of public life until about 1958 or 1959 and he has been Deputy Reeve of Bradford since 1961. Jack notes that this is a long time to be a Deputy Reeve because it seems that the Reeve and Deputy Reeve positions change quite frequently. Back then, a Reeve could hold office for 10 to 20 years without much difficulty but now it's different. Peter notes that Fred played a role in the Simcoe County Archives as well. During the years that he was Deputy Reeve up until 1973, he was a member of the County Council. As such, he served on the Health Unit and at the time the County Museum was built he was on the Museum Board. He was the chairman of the Museum and Archives Board.

Peter would like to discuss the sports in this area, particularly the history of lacrosse. Fred says he doesn't know too much. He wasn't much of an athlete himself and he was only about eight or nine years old when Bradford won the National Championship. At one point, Bradford was one of the top lacrosse towns in Canada. There were two or three fellows from Bradford that went overseas with the Canadian team that played in Australia and so on. Lacrosse is still very popular with the older fellows because that seems to be the only thing they know; but they're getting fewer all the time. They always played a bit of hockey but they never reached the tops in hockey.

In terms of recreation, they would go downtown on Saturday night and buzz around. It was a big night like the CNE on the street. On Sunday they would go to church and then for a walk; this was before they had cars. The church played a big part with regards to recreation





during those days. The recreation would be held in the church, the town hall, or people's homes because people did not have means of transportation to get around. If they did have transportation, it was a horse and buggy and going to Bond Head and back was an event. A few people had a boat and travelled on the river, but they were few.

Jack asks if Fred remembers when hydro first came to Bradford. Fred says yes, they had a few lights on various corners and they lit the place so well folks would go out for a walk just to have a look at them. Then slowly but surely all the stores and homes in Bradford had lights in them. Equipment came afterwards. Bradford was part of Ontario hydro; the town didn't have its own company.

Fred also represented the town of Bradford on what is now known as the South Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority. He was not a member of the Rural Hydro Association, Marsh Association, or School Board; his career has been spent entirely on the Municipal Council. Peter asks what Fred thinks is the single greatest change that he's witnessed in his life, in Bradford. Fred says, without question, the draining of the marsh was the greatest change. Jack asks what the highlight of Fred's municipal career has been. Fred says he will have to think about that. He enjoyed the time spent on the Health Unit in Barrie. He was also part of the group of five men who put the first waterworks system in Bradford, about 40 years ago. The museum was built in his time and he was on its board for the first 12 years of its existence. Jack asks what Fred would do to improve County Council. Fred says he will have to think about that too. Jack and Peter thank Fred for his time. [*Tape cuts out*]

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

