

## Irene Turner and Ernest Brown

June 4, 2002

Length: 1 hour, 8 minutes, and 13 seconds

*The interviewer is not introduced, but it can be assumed that George Jackson is speaking.*

George notes that he is recording a second interview with Irene. After the tape cuts out briefly, he also notes that he is speaking to Ernest Brown (*although it is not stated, we can assume this is Irene's brother*) about the first tractor that the Browns had. This tractor was similar to the ... where they took out the rear transmission. It had large wheels with gear reduction drive. George asks if they sold the lumber or brought it back to build more structures on the farm (*it can be assumed that he is referring to the Brown family*). Irene says there were many chicken houses, garages, and a woodshed built on the farm. Ernest says the lumber was brought back to the home for their use; it was their lumber supply. The wood was not planed, it was rough. It was stored in the loft of the "driving shed" and would be left to thoroughly dry. Whenever a project came up (like building a hen house or repairing something in the barn) they would pull out whatever lumber they needed from that stock. George shows them aerial photos of the marsh and West Gwillimbury from 1946 that he got from the township offices.

To power the sawmill, Ernest says they used a steam engine with the slabs and waste lumber for fuel. He thinks they also had an engine running on distillate fuel instead of gasoline. The Ford Ferguson tractor had hydraulic accessories. On the front lift, Clarence built a buck rake (*they look at photos of similar tractors*). Looking at one photo, Ernest notes that the man is dumping a fork load of manure. George remembers that he would be exiting school at the same time as the farmers were spreading manure on the cornfield. Ernest goes back to speaking about the buck rake. He was away and did not see the Ford Ferguson tractor in action, but knew they were using it. The first buck rake he built (*it can be assumed he is referring to Clarence*) operated by cables with a lift and tilt mechanism. George asks if they brought it in the barn and used slings to put they hay up. Ernest says they used the slings with the wagon when they were hauling with horses and wagon but he's not sure about the buck rake. Irene says the slings were laid on the floor before the buck rake went in.

George asks Ernest what the biggest change was for him since he went into service in 1941. He went into the Merchant Navy and from there went to work for the Department of Transport. He never got back to the farm except for holiday visits so he never worked on the farm again. When he left, everything was horse drawn and they used manual labour. That first tractor was being built when he was in his last year of high school. He remembers Mr. ... (*name is inaudible*) coming to help them fit things or taking pinions back into town. When the pinions

wore out, Clarence used a welder to put brazing on the face of the pinion and that would make it last a while longer. They didn't have an electric welder in those days; they just used a torch and brass. In the later years, Clarence had his own electric welder (they got hydro in 1945). Irene says they had so many appliances that when the first bill came, people from the hydro company had to come to the farm to have a look because the bill was so much higher than average. Machines using hydro were the milker, iron, ... , stove, washer, radio, and more. Their favourite radio station was CFRB. Irene comments that they used the Eaton's catalogue regularly. Ernest says they would make a spring order and that's when they got new overalls, work boots, and so on. Irene says there were more than two orders made every year. Ordering from the catalogue was cheaper than going to the shops in town.

George asks about the orchard and if they sold the apples they grew there. Irene says they had barrels and bins in the cellar that were used to keep the apples in; they didn't sell them. They didn't have a furnace in their time. Everything was heated with the wood stove. Ernest remembers seeing the remains of a furnace that had rusted out but he doesn't know if his father ever used it. The cellar was unheated. In the kitchen there was a cook stove and in the dining room there was a combination cook stove and heater. There was also a coal heater in the parlor. The bedrooms were heated by stove pipe. There were three stoves altogether and three chimneys. In Irene's room, the stove pipe was up near the ceiling so the room was usually very cold because there wasn't much circulation. Irene says they took irons and stove plates with them to bed. They bought coal by the tonne, not through a farmer's club.

Ernest would like to speak about social gatherings. When his father's two brothers were on the farm next to them and the children were still young, they would have celebrate Christmas together and have frequent visits. His father would play the organ, Uncle Frank played the violin, and Uncle Harry would play the mandolin. His father's sisters all sang and played the organ. Ernest has been told this happened, but he was not old enough to remember the evenings of music. Irene and Grace learned to play the organ. Ernest made an attempt at it but was never very successful.

Ernest notes that in 1934, their grandfather Joseph Brown celebrated his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday on December 18<sup>th</sup> at the Walter Brown home. Two tables were set in the dining room with his family of 12 and 17 grandchildren. Grace (their older sister) waited on all of them. It was a potluck dinner. There wasn't much snow so the children went halfway down the lane at four o'clock to catch the setting sun and get a picture taken. The immediate family stayed on the front step to have their picture taken. That turned out to be their first family reunion which has been held most years since that time for the past 40 years. They had one just this past Sunday which was held at Box Grove Community Centre on the outskirts of Markham. 49 people attended and there could have been 30 more.

Other social gatherings they used to have which Ernest remembers were church suppers. They went to Ebenezer Church which had been a Methodist Church (the church is gone now). The dinners would be held at different homes. They went to the Kneeshaws and Hamblys because they had large houses. George mentions the Coulson's Hill Anglican Church garden party and Ernest said they went to those as well. – Tape cuts out -

Ernest resumes speaking about the garden party at Clarence Wood's and the strawberry festival. The children would be anxious to get there all day and would be allowed to go at around four o'clock. They sat down at the table and were served a dish of strawberries with cream. There was also cake and pie. He remembers eating more than one large dish of strawberries; it was a real feast of dessert. Wood's house had a veranda on the east side and everyone would sit on benches or planks on their lawn to watch a program which would be presented using the veranda as the stage. Ernest has a vague recollection of some of the entertainers. Norman and Fred McCloud would perform a comedic skit with one of them playing a woman's part. Irene says there was lots of music performed by prominent names at the time. Ernest says the singers from the Anglican Church would present a musical program. Some from Bradford would participate; the town quartet would sing. –Tape cuts out -

George notes that they are speaking about Tom Pratt and what Yonge Street looked like. George says that there was a water trough on the west side at the bottom of the hill where people would stop and fill up. They are not sure if it was the Woods, Lees, or someone else who operated it. Speaking about Yonge Street, Ernest has a story he would like to relate. In the early days, when walking was the main mode of transportation, there was tavern on every corner for every mile down that road. There was a home at the top of the hill on Mount Pleasant on the west side, across from the current cemetery. A man who lived there had gone down to the tavern at the corner of the 10<sup>th</sup> Line and had been drinking. There were four or five children whom he left at home with the door locked. Someone coming in to the tavern said to him that his house was on fire. He rushed out and it was in fact burning; he lost his children. This is one of the stories that Ernest thinks he remembers from temperance literature since Grandfather Brown was partial to the temperance movement.

Before Grandfather came to West Gwillimbury, he farmed down in Whitchurch and in his account books there is note of a gallon of whisky which was for the crew at threshing time. Ernest thinks he can recall a notation in this book from his grandfather saying that the whisky wasn't productive. From that time on, he became part of the temperance movement. Irene says it used to be normal for the men to have whisky when they were threshing. George says that many men used it as fuel for their bodies, especially the ones doing hard manual labour. George says it was an interesting period that is hard to describe. When he was growing up, there was no alcohol in the house. Today it is not an issue for the community like it was back then. Ernest agrees with George and notes that, when he was young, several of the neighbours

would go to town on Saturday nights but their family never did. It wasn't until years later when they understood why their dad would go to town during the week for groceries. They never went to town because everyone going there was going to the beer parlor.

George asks about the Junior Farmers. Irene was in the Institute but not Junior Farmers. George asks about funerals. The funerals would be held in the house with the casket in the parlor and a service at home (the Catholics may have had church services in town). Irene says that Frank Kilkenney had a room upstairs in Bradford that served as a place for a funeral if families didn't have the space at home (this building is on the corner of Moore and Holland Streets). The Kilkenneys made furniture there and Frank was the undertaker as well. Irene says people would come by in the morning, afternoon, and evening when they body was still in the house to visit. This went on for three days.

George asks what they remember about the Christmas holiday. As a small child, Ernest remembers the older kids waking him up early in the morning to go down to the tree. They would go look and then be sent back to bed. In those days, there wasn't much extravagance at Christmas but it was still a great occasion. He remembers that once he received a little red, metal truck with wheels that turned. No gift sticks out in Irene's mind as being extra special. Oranges were a Christmas treat. They always had apples but oranges and bananas were real treats in those days. George asks if they had any exposure to TB. Ernest doesn't recall getting tested for TB at school. Irene says the only time they got a needle was when Mrs. McCloud (a neighbour) contracted something and they made sure they were all inoculated from it.

George asks about who boarded the school teachers. Irene says the Woods took in Hilda Mather\* every two years. Aunt Ella Brown was Irene's school teacher until Irene was in the second class and she lived in the community. Vivian Bowles also lived at home in the community. Irene isn't sure where Irma Broderick\* stayed; maybe at home because she lived in Bond Head. Ernest's teacher through much of school was Marion Evans and she lived on her home farm across the road. When Ernest attended school, he did so with about 15 other children. When Irene went, there were about 24 students. Ernest went to high school in Bradford and he walked there but people would stop to pick him up. In later years, Matt Kneeshaw would pick him up every morning on his way to work at the bank. He also drove other neighbours but had enough room for Ernest.

Ernest says one of his favourite school memories was from 1938 when Wally Field\* was his teacher. He took a group of students to do gymnastics (such as pyramids and handstands). Some of the students who attended were Ross Clubine, Lou Campbell, Jeffery, Bill McClockin\*, and Gordon Carton\*. They practiced in the school and performed at the commencement in the fall. In terms of teachers, Irene remembers having Mr. Harry and Mr. Jones. They were taught nine subjects. Ernest says Connie Nolan\* taught Latin, Ms. Mitchell taught math, and Mr. Brunt\* was the principal. He can't remember what Wally Field\* taught besides gymnastics.

George asks if their family ever had a teacher over for dinner. Irene says no, but remembers once they had Reverend Burner\* for supper in December of 1941 during the war.

Yonge Street was first paved in 1921, which was also the year of the flood. Their sister Grace used to talk about going to Bradford and the difficulty with the mud road (during World War One). George asks when they got their first telephone. Irene says it was in 1914, for 16 dollars a month. Their telephone number was 5903 which got changed to 5912. The phone was up on the wall, so you had to get a stool or chair in order to answer it. On the telephone line, there was Uncle Harry\*, the Stewarts, Charlie Bowles, the Matthews, the Ortans\*, Herb and Norman Bowles, and Jim Temperate\*. The ones across the road didn't have a phone. In the post war years, if you had an account at the bank there were not the service charges that there are now. George says there used to be a certain percentage on each cheque for a service charge if you were depositing it at a different bank. There were people who would drive for 20 miles in order to deposit a cheque to avoid the service charge. Sometimes it was just an excuse to go for a drive.

George asks about who lived to the west of their farm. Harry lived just west on the other half of Lot 14. After that was Tom Stewart's farm which Asa, the son, kept until he and his sister retired into town. The next farm was Joe Matthews and the last one before the 10<sup>th</sup> Sideroad belonged to Norman and his sister Sarah Bowles\*. On the south side of the road, there were the Woods. South of them was an empty farm that wasn't used but Harry lived in a house on the property. Across from the Browns was Uncle Edgar. Charlie Bowles\* was across from Asa Stewart ... George asks if any of those neighbours were community leaders. Lorne Hartman was on the council for a while in the early 1930s. Edgar Evans was Clerk for the township. George says Stephen\* Kneeshaw was Clerk of the township before Evans because he held the position in 1925. Ernest says Uncle Edgar was a member of the United Farmers of Ontario in 1923 or 1924. After that, in 1930 to 1945, Edgar Evans was on town council and was Reeve for a time.

Irene mentions that she would love a picture of the old Mount Pleasant Church if anyone has one. Ernest can remember when Mount Pleasant Church was being torn down in 1924; he was four years old. The Madill family had bought the church and dismantled it, saving the lumber to build their house with. They built their house on the south side of the 10<sup>th</sup> Line, across from the Nobles. Ernest remembers looking out of the window at home during a snowstorm and seeing the church with the roof gone and just the walls standing.

George asks what people in their community thought of the opening of the marsh. Through his research, George gets the feeling that people in West Gwillimbury didn't have an issue with it. Irene says they didn't want to buy any marsh potatoes because they were more wet and soggy than what they were used to. They grew their own vegetables so the people in town (Bradford) were probably more aware of the marsh than they were in West Gwillimbury. Irene says the potatoes and carrots were wetter than what they were used to and they weren't

happy with them. Ernest remembers that when he was in high school Professor Day was the main promoter and really got the development underway in designing the drainage system for the marsh. In those days there was no direct access to the marsh from West Gwillimbury because there were no bridges across the canal. They went by the Holland River. In those days, their family never went by that way at all ... – Tape cuts out -

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

*... Indicates that the speaker is inaudible.*