

Vaaletta Sturgeon

October 3, 1991

Length: 47 minutes and 37 seconds

The interviewer does not introduce herself.

An unnamed woman begins the interview by noting that they are at the Bradford West Gwillimbury Public Library where they will be speaking to Vaaletta Sturgeon. She lives on the 14th Concession in West Gwillimbury; this Concession is now in the township of Innisfil. Also present are Florence Blanchard (Vaaletta's daughter), Anne Coffey, and Irene Moriarty. They will be discussing her husband's family history and life in the community she has lived in for the past 70 years. Vaaletta says she was born in King Township and lived there until she was eight years old before moving to Nobleton. Her family farmed on King Creek for six years then moved to Vaughan for three years. Then her brother got married so they moved back to Nobleton. Their family was split up between two farms. They bought a farm in Kleinburg and her mom, dad, and two sisters went to that farm while Vaaletta and her older sister stayed at the farm in Nobleton for one year. In 1921, they moved to Kleinburg and were all together; she lived there until November.

An interviewer notes that Vaaletta's name is unusual and asks why her parents gave it to her. She says the name Vaaletta dates back to the Boer War. A neighbour told her mother that she had a good name for her daughter. Vaaletta says that her mother had many girls and had probably run out of names. The neighbour said her name should be Transvaaletta*, referring to Transvaal in Africa where the English were at war with the Boers in the 1900s. Vaaletta was born when the state of Transvaal was taken. Her mother had 13 children and Vaaletta was the youngest, born in 1900. There were four boys and nine girls in the family. One of her sisters died at age 16 before Vaaletta was born. Her father was born in Canada but his father came from Scotland in 1796.

Vaaletta met her husband at a friend's home after he came back from overseas. Her husband is William Sturgeon. Vaaletta was at her friend's house for an anniversary service. The friend was seeing William's brother so William was invited to the gathering in 1919. William and Vaaletta courted from when she was 19 in July 1919 to November 1921 when they got married. It was difficult for him to see her in the winter but in the summer they had a car. In 1919 William had returned from overseas and came back to working with his father on the farm. William's parents were Mac Sturgeon and Eliza Jane Tegart. They lived on the 14th

Concession where Linwood Sturgeon lives today. When Mr. Sturgeon (her father in law) was younger he went to school at The Hollows and William went to Steele's Corners for school. The Sturgeons came from Ireland. They lived in New York City for 11 years before buying land in West Gwillimbury in 1838 on the 14th Concession. They had three boys named Linwood, William (her husband), and Leland (who became a doctor). Linwood and William both farmed on the 14th Concession. Mr. and Mrs. Sturgeon also adopted a girl named Sarah. They went to church at Coulson's Hill on the 11th Line in West Gwillimbury. It was a Presbyterian church.

Starting at Steele's Corners coming down to the 14th Concession there was Mrs. W.J. Steele, "Granny Steele" (who lived in the little house that was torn down), a blacksmith's shop belonging to Mr. Steele, the Ricthies, and then Linwood's farm. The Peachmans lived across the road in what was actually an old Kneeshaw farm. The Peachmans only had it for two or three years before Harold ... (*last name is inaudible*) bought it in around 1923. Then there was Vaaletta's family farm which has been in the Sturgeon family name for about 150 years. Further up on the hill was the Moriarty farm. At the corner, just west of the blacksmith shop, was the school house called Steele's Corners (now it is someone's home).

It was not too hard to get to know everyone living around her but it took a long time to get acquainted with the community as a whole. The interviewer asks Vaaletta if she did outdoor work on the farm. Vaaletta says she milked cows and looked after chickens for many years. To do laundry, she had to bring water in from a well and use a washtub and board. It was difficult to dry the clothing in the winter. They had a well close to the farm. The water would have to be heated on the stove before washing the clothes. She did not make her own soap after getting married but did when she lived at home. To make one kind called soft soap, they would use hard wood ashes; Vaaletta never made soft soap. For another kind, they would save all grease that they didn't use and mix it with lye. For washrooms, everybody had an outdoor toilet in those days (it was very cold in the winter). For guests there would be chamber pots and basins with pitchers in the room. Guests would not have to go outside to use washroom. To store food in the summer they would keep it in bags in the cellar. They grew most of their own food and butchered their own meat at that time. Vaaletta did not belong to the beef ring but William's father did.

Vaaletta had five children named Florence Blanchard, Robert (who was counsellor for years in West Gwillimbury), Dice*, Jean, and Margaret. Florence was a teacher for about 10 years and married Ken Blanchard from Alliston. Robert worked on their home farm and then bought the Kneeshaw farm west of Bradford and farmed there from 1950-1974. He married Doris Pane* from Aurora. Dice* works on the home farm and looks after Vaaletta. Jean went into training to be a nurse after high school. She worked for the County of Simcoe as a public health nurse. Margaret worked in Toronto as a nurse and still does part time nursing; her last

name is now Britton*. An interviewer notes that Jean has passed away but was married to Robert Doubt who also worked for Simcoe County.

An interviewer asks if Vaaletta remembers the people in the community doing anything to help overseas during World War Two. She says they had card parties and some dances. The older ladies did sewing through the church. The interviewer says she remembers that in Gillford they would have parties where they would auction off ... Each line would donate something and have a big party. They would play Euchre and have a dance at Gillford Hall.

In the early 1940s in the winter they had to travel by horse and cutter or horse and buggy. They started plowing the roads in 1941. An interviewer remembers that in 1944 there was a bad winter and they got trapped at the high school because Highway 11 was blocked. Burt Hunt and Mr. Stevenson were bakers that delivered bread to the houses. If they couldn't make it to the house they would leave the delivery at Mr. Gardiner's. They used to store the bread in white sugar bags and one night Dice* and Lou took a loaf out and stuffed themselves. If the road was blocked by snow, they would take a sleigh to the corners. Some Saturdays, Vaaletta would take the bus from the corner to Bradford. She would take butter and some eggs to sell to store keepers. One store keeper was Archie Hammill*. An interviewer asks if there were any winters in the 1940s that were especially memorable. She says that one year, the 14th was so full of snow that her neighbour (Mrs. Moriarty) went into labour and couldn't get to Cookstown to deliver her baby. They went to the corner to get a doctor and a nurse and came to get Vaaletta as well. Little Margy* was born before the doctor got there. All Vaaletta did was get the little girl and put her beside her mother because she knew the doctor would be there soon. The doctor (Dr. Judge*) said she had done the right thing.

An interviewer asks about special events when Vaaletta's children were attending school (at Steel's Corners). She remembers that they would have Halloween parties, and at the end of the year there was a community picnic and people in the community would bring the food. They had a Christmas concert in which the children would perform. Florence remembers the school fair in Bradford where children would put their grain, vegetables, baking, flowers, or something similar on display. Florence says the fairgrounds were located where the Bradford arena is today. All of Vaaletta's children attended Steele's Corners and Bradford High.

Vaaletta had her 90th birthday party on July 22, 1990. There were 150 guests from their family. It was held at her son's home on the 14th Line (Robert Sturgeon). Mr. Ruth Owen* was there and Bud Brown* (the Reeve of West Gwillimbury) gave her a County award. There were many people who came from Aurora, King City, Nobleton, Barrie, and Toronto. A teacher named Elizabeth McClure* was there. She wrote a book on the history of King Township and Vaaletta has known her since she was eight years old. When Vaaletta was eight years old she would go

across the street to take care of Elizabeth who was two years old while her mom was at work.

Mac Sturgeon's parents came over in 1838. Mac Sturgeon's father was just a little boy at the time and he had one sister. His father was Robert James Sturgeon. They came from Ireland and landed in New York. They stayed there for 11 years. Robert was a weaver by trade and a carpenter. Then they came to West Gwillimbury. Robert's mother (who came with him from Ireland) wanted him to own land in Upper Canada because of the cheap land grants. She is buried in Coulson's Hill, Anglican Church. This was the only cemetery at the time so everyone is buried there. William James is the son of Robert. First he was married to a Garbutt and had three children named ... (*name is inaudible*), Mary (who became Mrs. Thomas Hunter and lived on the 11th Line), and John (who was six weeks old when his mother died). This Mrs. Garbutt was a sister to the first Mrs. Kneeshaw. Mrs. Kneeshaw lived directly across the road on the Bell farm. William James married again after his wife died and had three more children with his second wife. Their children were Reverend Robert Sturgeon, "Ellie" or Eleanor (who became Mrs. ... and lived in Holly which is near Barrie), and Mac (Vaaletta's father in law) whose full name was Wildridge McDowell Sturgeon.

Vaaletta's mother's father came from Ireland to West Gwillimbury to work at the Brandons* in the Dunkerron area. Vaaletta did not go to kindergarten but started at grade one. She has no memory of the school activities or teachers. She started school at the Crawford School on the 11th Line in King. Vaaletta went there until she was eight years old. Then she went to the Nobelton school until going on to high school. Vaaletta has a friend who is still alive named Mrs. Depew* who attended the New Scotland School. Another friend named Marjorie Archibald* went to school with Vaaletta in Nobleton and they still write back in forth. An interviewer asks if Vaaletta remembers any Bells who attended Crawford School. The interviewer's mother was Alice Bell and had Isabelle, Jook*, Jenny, and Jopley* as sisters so she wondered if Vaaletta went to school with any of them. Vaaletta does not remember any members of the Bell family at that school, probably because they were younger than her. She says that the Bell family moved to Lloydtown. Vaaletta's father and brother Ambrose worked the Bell farm (the interviewer's great grandfather's farm) on the 11th. Vaaletta says the interviewer's great grandfather married a Dick girl from Bolton so their family is related to the Dicks.

Vaaletta says that she has a family history of the Sturgeons which her daughter Jean did a wonderful job on. They discuss the prospect of making a copy of this history to keep at the library with all the other family histories. An interviewer asks what Vaaletta baked on the farm. She says she used to bake many things: cakes, pies, bread, and buns. Flour and sugar used to come in large bags. Sometimes the old flour bags would be bleached made into towels or pillow cases and other items. Vaaletta used to do sewing but no embroidery. Vaaletta says there was no television or radio and women didn't go out very often so there was more time to get things

done in the home. – 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.