



**John Eek**

*Interview*

February 17, 1998

Length: 59 minutes and 43 seconds

[*The interviewer is not introduced, but it can be assumed that George Jackson is speaking.*] George notes that interview is being recorded in Florida. He will be talking to John Eek about his early days in the Bradford Marsh. John's earliest memory of Bradford is the spring of 1939. In that spring, John arrived in the marsh on March 39, 1939. John's dad was Bill or Billy and his mom was Ann or Annie. John's family came to Bradford because he had an uncle named Phil Valentine\* there (his wife was John's dad's sister). They were living in Kingston at the time and his uncle said it was a good time to move to the marsh. John's father came to Canada in 1929. There were five people in John's family including him and his parents; his brother was Jerry and his sister was Marie. His Aunt was Mrs. Valentine that was his Dad's sister. They did not have any other family in Canada at the time. When they came to the marsh, they lived on the land where Jerry's daughter lives now. [*They look at a map.*] They lived on the south side of King Street or Davis Street. The Davis boys lived on the north side and owned the corner property.

Jerry lives in Bradford on Maplegrove now and his daughter lives on the farm. After Hurricane Hazel the home had to be replaced. When they arrived on the marsh, the land had already been broken by Caesar\*; John can't remember who the land was bought from. The Davis family owned the southwest corner of King Street and the 4<sup>th</sup>. They were neighbours to John. Lou, Charlie and their father were the people living in the Davis house just off Canal road. John's uncle built the house to have it ready by the time they got to Bradford from Kingston. Charlie said that they made roads in the marsh by dumping stumps in and then covering it in





clay and making it into a road. They did this instead of clearing out the marsh land because it was cheaper that way. On their farm, John grew potatoes, carrots, celery, and other vegetables; it was all grown by hand. They did not own a tractor. The most advanced tool that they had at the time was the wheel barrow.

John never dealt with Bill Fuller. When harvested, the crops mostly went into bushels and bags. John started to help with the harvest at around six or seven years old. The fertilizer they needed to use would be bought and brought to them by the church transport. Around 1946 to 1947 they started using things for weed control. John's family would hire kids from camp to help out on the farm. John's family increased the farm size by five acres by buying land from Frank Robinson which was right across the road from them. Frank owned five acres and his mother and father lived right next to John.

When they started the Co-op storage, John's family had shares in it. John's dad bought shares for everyone, although John wasn't a farmer. After he was married, they wouldn't let John keep his shares because he wasn't a farmer so they paid him off. John went to school at #26 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Line; it was north of the Dutch settlement. It was where the seniors hall is now. His teacher was Madeline Nolan. John believes Dan Blake took over for Madeline after she left to get married. When their family arrived, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Line was a pretty well established road. Across the Graham Sideroad there was a wooden bridge going across the canal that had planks for where the wheels went to let carriages go across it. There were about 30 or 32 students in the class at a time. John never went to high school. George comments that it was common for many boys to not go to high school, especially when they reached the age of 16. John agrees and claims that he had a driver's license when he was 14 because his father signed for it.

John got his first tractor in 1943. It cost about \$908 and was a Ford tractor. He got a few parts with it like a disk that would cut crops. He bought a cultivator that would make rows for potatoes. Then you would plant them by hand and the machine would later be used to weed them. John was 19 when he left the farm in 1952. John's dad was the supervisor for the drainage commission and had a hand in it from the beginning. One of the big problems with the drainage was trying to keep the river clear. John doesn't know what the solution they came to was, but his





dad would often stay at work overnight. When turning on the pumps, it would take two days for them to drain any water off the land. John remembers that in his first year there they couldn't sell their carrots and had to dump them in a pit. They couldn't afford straw so they gathered the dry carrot tops, put them on, and shoveled dirt on top.

[*George shows John some pictures.*] John identifies some of the people in the photos: [*First name is inaudible*] Watson, Tom Evans, Bob, Joe Magani, Scotch, Bill Horlings\*, Bill Stewart, Art Evans. [*George shows John a picture.*] It is of a 'parade' of trucks going to Toronto, but John doesn't remember that event. George explains that it was put together by an organization called The Growers that took truckloads to Toronto to promote the Bradford produce. They gave the produce away for free as a way to advertise. John identifies one of the trucks as Kapisak's and one as Johnny Usenko's\*. [*George shows John two more pictures.*] One is of the 400 highway being built. The next is of the [*inaudible*] Research Station. These pictures are said to be from around 1948. [*Tape cuts out*]

[*Tape resumes*] John's home had an outdoor bathroom. They had a woodstove and soon after they got an oil fireplace. John's family property did not have many roots and was mostly marsh so it was easier to farm. (*They look at various photos.*) The photos are of the marsh from around 1948. Most hay was cut in the northern part of the marsh. Ditches were dug by hand and John dug some. John never dug them from scratch and had to dig to about three or four feet. When weeding, John's family did three rows at a time. There would be one row between your legs and two to either side of you. If it was sunny, the weeds would be thrown on the ground and would get dried up. If it wasn't sunny or if there were many weeds, they would be thrown into a bushel. The first years living on the marsh, they didn't make enough money to get through the winter so his father worked in an aluminum factory. He would hitchhike out to it and come home every few weeks. His brother Jerry worked at [*inaudible*] for \$50 a month.

[*They look at a picture of a property.*] It is a picture of the [*inaudible*] property. John says it was covered in bush and trees which he helped to cut down; mostly Tamarack and smaller trees. Ford came out with attachments for their tractors; saws and even snow plows. There were no roads near John's family farm for quite a while. [*George shows John another picture.*] This





one is of Holland Landing from 1919. The only road out of Bradford at that time was a toll road. It's now called Bradford Street.

John got a job driving a truck to Toronto with Hawkrider\* for Loblaws. At the end of June is when they would start shipping things like lettuce and carrots. John drove a 14 to 16 foot truck. After that job, John bought his own truck and hauled cement blocks out of Maple; it was all loaded and unloaded by hand. [*Tape cuts out and then resumes*] From cement blocks he went into gravel for about a year. Then he took over the Imperial Oil dealership before Jim Dodge did it but John did not like that very much and only stayed for about three or four years. From there he went back into the gravel business. He started with one truck which was an 'International 180' (the truck that he used for the cement blocks was a 1952, 3 tonne Ford). The weight of what he hauled was usually about 10 or 11 tonnes. He hauled out of Stouffville and Holt. He did a lot of work for Beamish and Millers, or wherever he was needed. It was in 1975 or 1976 that they started to expand and had about four or five trucks. Paul Admachuck\* had the first farm on the 6<sup>th</sup>, west of Simcoe Road and they worked together for a bit. [*Tape cuts out*]

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

