



Bob and June Brown

Interview

Friday May 15, 1992

Length: 1 hour, 29 minutes and 38 seconds

[The interviewer is not introduced, but it can be assumed that George Jackson is speaking.] Bob and his parents have been in Bradford West Gwillimbury all their lives. Bob's grandfather emigrated from Ireland, but he doesn't know how long ago. His father was born in Canada. When his grandfather first arrived he went to work at Uncle Jimmy Sloane's farm (just north of Bradford) until he got enough money to start his own farm. Bob's father's name was Thomas Brown and he was born over a hundred years ago; he was 85 in 1975 *[according to this his birth year would have been 1895]*. His family came from Donegal in Ireland. Thomas Brown had a brother named Bob Brown who was a retired bank manager in Guelph and is now deceased. He had another brother named Abe Brown who lived on the "home farm" located north of Bradford on the 8th Line. He also had a sister named Mrs. Jimmy (Annie) Sloane. Bob's mother lived across the road from their home farm, on the Johnny Lee farm. The Brown home farm was on the south half of Concession 8.

First the Browns farmed up on a little piece of land which is now part of a conservation area. Then they moved north and farmed for a year just north of Highway 89; his dad went to Cherry Creek School. Then they moved down to the old Stanley Stewart farm, which was the second farm west of Highway 11, on the 9th Line. Then they bought the farm which they call the home farm on the 8th Line. Bob's dad bought the farm on the 6th Line in 1915 for \$6000. He had to build a new house on it and jack up the barn that was sitting on the ground. He got married to the girl across the road in 1919. Bob was born on March 9, 1922 and his sister was born on December 30, 1923. Abe stayed on the home farm and Uncle Bob worked at the Bank of Commerce in Bradford until he retired in Guelph. Mrs. Jimmy Sloan (Bob's aunt) farmed on the





9th Line across from what is now the conservation area. George asks Bob if his grandfather had to be sponsored to come to Canada from Ireland. Bob has no recollection of how they got here except that they came over on a ship.

Bob's mother's name was Flossie Lee and she came from a family of eight girls and one boy. Seward was the son. Aunt May* got married and went West; Clara married Bill Morrow; Isabella married Edwin Fennell; Flossie married Thomas; Mima married Paul Haller and lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Christine married Professor Hamilton who lived in Daytona, Florida; Luella married James Fraser who was a doctor in Port Oregon (he was in the army and married Luella who was a nurse in the army); Henrietta married Ken Jack from Stroud and he was an engineer. George asks about Bob's grandfather's family on his mother's side but Bob is not sure about his relatives. Some may have lived in the Toronto or Peterborough areas.

June's family came from Midland. June's grandfather on her father's side had two brothers. She knew her father's side more than her mother's side. Her great-grandmother was Margaret Armstrong and she came from the Robinson settlement in Garden Hill, Peterborough area. She married Hiram* Wilcox [*last name is inaudible*] who came from Dublin, Ireland with two other brothers. Hiram* Wilcox [*last name is inaudible*] and his brothers separated in Montreal and were never able to find each other again. June's grandmother was Ella Crawford. Ella's mother's name was Annie Dunn* and her father was Tom Crawford. They lived in Midland. Great-Grandmother Crawford burned herself to death in her 90s as a result of an accident with ashes from the stove. Great-Grandmother Wilcox was stern and didn't like that June wore dresses that weren't long sleeved and down to the floor.

June has a book about her mother's ancestry which goes back a long time but she's not that familiar with it offhand. They were English immigrants who came to Canada (Lafontaine) and had to learn French so that eventually they became French Canadian Catholics. June's grandmother's name was Alice Marchildon and her cousin was Phill Marchildon who was a baseball player. Alice married Philius Toutant who came from Manitoba and worked on the railroad.





The book about June's mother's ancestry (on the Toutants and Marchildons) was finished in 1957 and she doesn't know if they've added to it since then. Her mother had quite a few brothers and sisters but June doesn't know what's become of them. Two sisters are still living in Midland and Lafontaine. Two brothers are also living with one in Victoria Harbour and one in Oshawa. The Marchildon family is fairly well known since they were involved with politics in Simcoe County and some of them raised horses. June's grandfather worked on railroad and he taught violin, but he was older when June began to know him. He also started to go through priesthood.

How did you and Bob get to know each other? June applied for a job in Neustadt, Ontario and was accepted. Art Kneeshaw, Percy Reynolds, and Wilfred Kneeshaw went up to see her and talked her into living down there, in 1950. She got to choose whatever school she wanted, and Ken Tupling* took her out to choose her school. After a series of different boyfriends, she ended up marrying Bob because he was always there. Bob would always bring a dog and the dog kept thinking that June was a threat. The dog died the week or two before June went to live on the farm. June and Bob got married June 27th 1953. They have a son James and a daughter Susan. James was born 4th of February 1957 and Susan was born on November 30, 1960.

Bob went to School Number 4, across from Bill McDonald's. Who else went to school with you? They were coming and going, but Bob remembers Bill Martin, Donald and Isobel Sutherland, Charlie Dolton*, Frieda Dolton*, the Tartars- Bruce and Art. Later on there would be Norman McKay and Marjorie Baynes. Do you remember anything from school days? For a little while they used to have hot lunches. Marjorie Sutherland was the first teacher he went to school with. There was Edith Lloyd as well, but she was strict. Did Evelyn Ward ever teach up there? No she didn't. Did you have school fairs? Yes, down in Bradford. Bob drove a cab down to Bradford to the school fair.

Bob and June tell a story where a cutter kept hitting the horse and Jim slept the whole way [*this story is mostly inaudible*]. June just found out she was pregnant during that time- it was 1959. Did you go to high school in Bradford? Yes, there were 4 teachers. One of them didn't





teach much of anything, but she tried hard. She was only 4 feet tall but she was dynamite. There was no Miss Cook, but he had Gerry Brunt, who caught him smoking in the furnace room. He would hide in the corner if he heard the principal coming. [*They tell a story about Jim Darling in Holland Landing that is mostly inaudible*]

June, did you go to public school in Midland too? Yes, 2 different public schools because of the grading system and 2 different high schools. June was familiar with Peterborough because she used to take trips with her dad and cousins to Garden Hill and they always stopped in Peterborough. She met Norma, who was a trained singer and sang at June and Bob's wedding. Norma married late in life and lived in Peterborough; she took June in and she had a wonderful time. She had friends and got June to entertain June cooked dinner for them. Norma worked for the judge. Norma would invite friends over but did not like to cook so June would.

Bob, how did you transition into your many careers? You were a farmer, civil servant, and entertaining as a square dance caller. Bob and June almost separated over that because Bob would go out and June would be with the baby, and Bob said he was going to Temperanceville. June didn't believe there was such a place and she thought it was just a hoax. Many years later they were driving and he stopped the car and told her where Temperanceville was and showed her the barn. Bob finished high school in 1939 and he farmed for quite a few years, he used to deliver bread with the horses. That's when bread was 8 cents a loaf. He remembers Mr. McDonald, whom he knew when he went to public school. He lived across the road and he jacked the bread to 9 cents. Bob always had a standing order with Mr. McDonald for 3 loaves for 24 cents and he always got a copper back. Bob told him the price went up and he needed 27 cents and Mr. McDonald told him he wouldn't eat. That went on for 2 or 3 trips until finally he said he'd have some bread. Bob's Aunt Emily had lots of money, but she'd never pay you. She said it was okay if you didn't slice the bread because she had a knife. She could slice bread easily and used to do big loaves. Bob finally got the money from her, which was \$5 or \$6. She never kept track, whatever you told her she owed you, she would give to you.

Bob would do maybe 2 or 3 lines twice a week during the winter time, because of the horse and cutter. They started to plow the roads periodically. The longest period of time that the





roads were not plowed would be 3 or 4 days during a bad storm. One Sunday night, the roads had been blocked. There was only one snow blower and it broke down and they'd never get it going back. There was no place to put the snow so they brought in a bulldozer and they unloaded it just before Metcalfe's gate. They started to blow sideways, not up and down, and the next morning it hadn't got up to Darla's, it was just halfway. So Bob invited them in to breakfast. If the road isn't open all the time then people are uptight; even back in the 50's. When Joe was blocked going out of Bradford, Bob got into town with the team and he took them down to the station to take the train down to Detroit. We don't have the snow today that we used to have. You also had five times as many people to look after. When you got into delivering bread, you were always involved with horses. Was your dad a horseman? He doesn't know if you would call them a horseman because you had to own a horse in those days. They never had a tractor until 1944. He was by himself when Bob was small. There was a mare that Bob's dad had, Nelly was her name, and Bob's dad would always tell him to stay away from Nelly, because she would kick him. Although she had never kicked, he sold her. People came in to see Nelly and she didn't kick.

Bob did a lot of judging horses in school fairs, and then he worked with Elton Armstrong who taught him a lot of tricks. [*name is inaudible*] used to send him and June way up north to do fairs. But when you go up there you can be asked to judge anything, from fish and boats to babies. Bob enjoyed doing it for a while; it was fun. It was interesting to know who was showing the horses. Bob and June did that for a number of years during their summer holidays, but they don't do it anymore. Bob remembers a particular trick Elton taught him at the Collingwood Fair. Bob was confused as to how they were going to sort 60 horses. Elton said they'd sort themselves out. You keep driving and you line them up. You would see the same horses and people week after week. Elton was from Newmarket. Mrs. Armstrong was a big wheel in the institute. To judge at fairs, Bob would go up to Clute, Apsley, and Burk's Falls. Clute was one of those communities that was established after the First World War and it was a formal community. It needed a considerable amount of planning of what they needed to do. The town wasn't very established and the people were far out into the wilderness and it was difficult to create services





for the residents of the town. June doesn't remember if there were many French settlers in Clute.
[*Tape cuts out*]

[*Tape resumes*] June is talking about sewing and baking because her hands were small. She recalls that [*name is inaudible*] who had a baby contest asked her to judge in a huge tent when she was 16. However, they didn't have machines to weigh them so June came up with a way. She gave the prize to a baby from Bradford. The officials knew that June was from Bradford, so they probably thought she was cheating. Another time, for a sewing contest, a woman had a pillow case and an apron and she was mad that she didn't get first place. Another time, she was judging a cake and she couldn't cut it and found out that there was cardboard in the center to make the cake look nice. Fruitcake was very expensive to make during those days and another woman just added a little fruitcake to the top of a normal cake to try and deceive the judges. June has also judged turnip kraut*. People say Bill Fuller could make a good turnip pie. June remembers making squash pie, but never turnip.

George asks how Bob got into square dance calling. Bob says that goes back to high school and he could call a little bit at a time. The first time he ever got paid it was in the war and it was in the old town hall. They asked him to come and call, and he got a dollar and he was home happy because he made a dollar. It went on from there and he enjoyed it and he did some more but it was never one of his big occupations. He just started in high school and in Gilbert* when the regular caller wasn't there he would fill in. Then he went to Bond Head. Today it's a profession, and he is out of touch with it. Now there are professionals and they are well paid. When Bob was asked now to call, they offered him \$50, but he isn't up to beat enough on it.

George asks Bob if he remembers when Professor Day did the Canal. Bob says yes but he wasn't very old. When it comes to machinery they used, Bob only remembers the ordinary machinery, the machinery that was digging the canal. He doesn't think he took any pictures. George wants to find someone with enough recollection to sketch a picture of a machine. Bob remembers the machine started to run into quick sand and came back up. He thinks Margaret may have pictures, but pictures were not a big thing back then.





George asks when the Simcoe Road went down to the Marsh. Bob remembers when the bridge was built. Previous to that, when the Turners had the marsh and there was a boat ferry* with a rope on it and there would just be the Dome bridge*. It was in his time that Simcoe Road used to just go down to Jim Marsh's lane. Then they made it into the road. George asks if it's true that Turner sold it to the town. Bob doesn't suppose he'd give it. Anderson got across by the Dome bridge*. They built the bridge when they built the canal. To level up the top of the dike they just went along with the horses. That was a lot of years later. Bob didn't have any interest in the marsh until he started to weed. After they got it going that was his first job. Everybody started in the marsh. He worked for Ernie Muzzin and Albert Gaspero. He would weed by hand on the marsh for 15 cents an hour, from 7am until 6pm. He was maybe 16, 17, or 18. He weeded onions, carrots, and celery. He may have had 5 acres to weed. The big farm had 10. Then they started to grow potatoes and Bob went down with the horse and buggy to scuffle potatoes. That would be back in the 40s, and he received a dollar an hour. Bob didn't get involved in too much harvesting. He used to cut a bit of celery.

Bill McArthur would be a good man to talk to about thrashing. Bob worked for Farm Kren*. Bob isn't sure how he got into that; he ran into Mr. Glastley* (he thinks) and he suggested that to Bob, and he met someone on a part time basis. That was a nice experience. They always wanted you to do the work when you were the busiest. You would go out and appraise the farm and send in the report. That was before June's time. It was late 1940's. That led Bob into highways. He was there for 22 years. He started in 1962 and he was appraising and negotiating. Sometimes he brought Jimmy. George remembers working on the Peterborough Bypass. Bob went up one time with a guy on that one but he didn't settle it. Niagara Falls and the 401 was tough. The 406 was rough. Anything around the 401 was rough. He had an experience one time when they were building Highway 10 and they made a mess of a garden. The woman called them in a fuss and the boss was easy going but he was ruffled and cursing and swearing. The woman kept hollering and Bob wouldn't answer to her. She said she knew the highway would do this to her, that they would send out someone who didn't care about her garden. Bob got the problem settled. It's sad to see people so wrapped up in things like that.





Bob's still appraising. He enjoys it, he's close to home, and he picks his own assistants, hours, and days.

The conversation goes back to politics. Back in the beginning of the township in 1952 there were municipal politics, a sense of old guard and new guard. They used to have nomination meetings every year. People were a lot more tuned in and directly involved back then. They were going to follow up their complaints. Now they complain and no one cares enough to follow up. They weren't as busy in those days. Now you can make a mistake but it doesn't matter because there wouldn't be an election for another couple years. Back then there was an election every year. In those days, local council would meet once a month and today it's a full time job. People had a lot more personal interest in politics back then. Bob doesn't think people stick to their party lines as much as they used to. People's votes depended a lot on their personalities. June tells a story about how her Grandpa Wilcox was invested in politics. It was a real part of their life, and now most people don't even know the difference. People don't even know the buildup of governments.

June was the first woman to be elected to the School Board in West Gwillimbury. She was chairman when they built the first additions to the school. Her father went through the marsh with signs and June bets she got every marsh vote. She ran against Neil Weir*; her father was a great campaigner. He said he'd never read books and June went to get a book from the library on Mitchell Hepburn and he was enthralled and got right into the book. Periodically he would read books after that.

Tales can be told about Hepburn and Earl Rowe too. Bob can remember one time someone was driving around the parliament buildings looking for Hepburn (when the election was going on) and he couldn't be found. They found him on the porch of a prominent man in Newton Robinson. They were both going out to speak that night. To a certain extent, politics was a game. Now it is vindictive, you have to go and persecute someone. When Canada goes into the next election it will be the same thing. Politicians go out to destroy another person. They will say anything, whether it is true or not; it's all about the timing. It's a shame, really. Another anecdote is that Earl Rowe had many breakfasts with St. Laurent. When they were having





problems down there and they didn't know what to do, they wanted to have breakfast with him to figure problems out. They had a lot of respect for one another.

George asks if Bob was involved with sport activities. Bob was never good at sports but he enjoyed it. They had an old Scotch Settlement team back when he was in public school, about 60 years ago. On the team were Mel Sutherland, Dan Sutherland, Mookie Faris*, Earl Grey, the Coutts boys (they were in a league with Bradford, Mount Pleasant, Fennel's, Pinkerton, Bond Head). That died out and then they had another league going in the 40's which had Bradford. Then it died out and got going again in the 50's when they had that good league with Harry Coutts, Ken Tupling*, and Carson. Bob played a little curling as well. Then their son started to get into sports. They used to drive him to the golf course and leave him there for the day.

George asks if Bob remembers the Bradford fair. Bob showed the last team in the Bradford fair in 1939-40. It was a casualty of 2 bad years; there was bad weather, and it was going financially backwards. Everything seemed to be going wrong for them, and the war was just starting. There were two or three reasons why it stopped. The fairgrounds were where the community center is now. There was a grandstand there, and a racetrack for horses.

June knew a Mrs. Steele and used to have her over to judge the costumes during Halloween and she's come over to the Valentine party and she used to bring a baby. June used to visit her too. She would also visit the Gardeners* every year for tea and everything was made of honey. Steele's corners was named after the Steele family. The school was turned into a house by an Irishman. When June was in the school board there were 8 children. It started with \$1700 or \$1800 in 1950. She went to see Brock Evans when she came to Bradford about a job and was hired. George thanks Bob and June, and tells them he will bring them a copy of the tape.

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

