



## Gord Church

### *Interview Two*

October 25, 1996

Length: 1 hour, 29 minutes and 35 seconds

[*The interviewer is not introduced, but it can be assumed that George Jackson is speaking*]. George is speaking with Gord Church about the Bradford marsh. Gord says that he has seen the bridge working [*they are looking at a picture of a large bridge.*] Someone left a picture on Ken Wood's door one day with no notes on where it came from. [*George shows Gord the mystery picture.*] The bridge is in the picture; there is scrub in the marsh, and it was all like that. They went in and cut the trees down before hand, but they didn't clean anything out.

George says they had a gang that worked; folks went in and cleared when they cut the canal during the winter. In the estimates there was 1000 or 1200 dollars that they allowed for clearing the pathway. There were about 20 guys working on it, and they told them that as they cleared the path, they could take the wood home for free. Gord saw the small bridge. It looked the same as the big one, but it was a little bit smaller. They tore it apart. It went around the "big canal" and back down to the river again. The small one came behind the where the Legion Hall is now, down to the edge of the highway. George notes that they are looking at picture A1010662; it features the big canal. The picture is from 1926. [*They are looking at the picture and pointing out the canal's path.*] There is Collings' hay barn, it ran north and south and it would be about 30 feet wide. It opened on both ends, you could drive right through. There's a fairly substantial building here, that's the Quonset hut. As you come down Simcoe Street, when you turn into where the parking lot of the skating rink is today, that was where the big building was. There used to be a bridge at the racing track. The track went to the east of the building and went around. The horses would run over the bridge and go around and come back; that all used to be the fairgrounds.





They dismantled the bridge around where the Legion is today. George says they had a dance on the bridge when they built it and Herb Taylor was at the dance. When you're reading about it, they talk about the fact that they were building a scow. Maybe they brought it on the railway bridge. There was a [*inaudible*] there, between the Riverview Inn and the river on that side, and it is still there today; between the tin building and the highway. They went up from there and started the canal. It would have been tricky trying to get something that big to float. You can see it on the pictures, the domes turned into quicksand. Herbie Taylor never lived in Bradford, he lived in Amsterdam. [*Using a picture Amsterdam is pointed out; where the 5<sup>th</sup> Line comes in.*] Originally they were going to cut right through, but there was quicksand so they had to back out.

George asks Gord about the Sutherland's bridge [*they look at a picture of it*]. There were two Sutherland brothers there; one was Dave. They hauled vegetables off from the marsh, loaded it, and then brought it across the bridge. Most of the gravel came up from the Sutherlands. George hauled gravel out of there when he moved there; it was after the highway, and it was hard as rock. Gord says they used to stand at the back of the truck and reverse the truck right up by the bank. They would then poke a hole in it, put dynamite in, set it off, and run away. One day they were out there, and it buried the truck. Gord thinks they cleared three truckloads out of there before they could even free the truck. George was talking to Bill McArthur about this and he was saying that he and someone else were hauling gravel out and dumping it on the canal bank; and they got about a dollar and a half a day. [*George shows Gord a picture from 1926 when nothing had been developed yet.*] There were no roads; you just had to cross the bridge from the Sutherland's marsh out to the bush. You had to go through the bush to get to the roads.

George asks how far the canal bank would be open like that; he asks if you could travel with the truck. Gord says there was just enough room for you to turn in and turn around. They brought it up using teams of horses. There were a lot of horses that were in teams. All the wagons had wide wheels. The wheels and wagons were not made locally in Bradford. The time





period for this would be from the 1934 to 1940. After about 1940, they started to open up the canal. [*Tape cuts out*]

[*Tape resumes*] There was a bridge down at the 5<sup>th</sup>. Emerson Faris was just west of Simcoe Street. The Faris' were next to the Turners. They finished digging the canal in about 1927. However, people only really started growing crops on it in about 1934 and then it was very busy. [*They look at a picture or map.*] Gord says it is not the same bridge. This is a new bridge that was built maybe after Hurricane Hazel. The bridge used to be farther west. There was another one at the Wilson's farm too. Wilson's bridge came down through Wilson's farm, not very far from Highway 400. When 400 went through, the canal bank was established by that time and you could get around on it. The highway didn't come around until 1947 or 1948. People started coming to the marsh in about 1934, 1935, and 1936. George thinks the Dutch settlement started around 1932 or 1933; Gord thinks it was in around 1935 or 1936. The marsh sat around for about five years and nothing happened with it. By 1934 or 1935 you could drive pretty well on the canal bank, but towards Amsterdam there was no access at that time. They extended the Graham Sideroad through. In the spring, they had a truck they would use; they put 10 bags of fertilizer in the back and went into the marsh with that. They went in using the Graham Sideroad; that would be around 1935 to 37. They were hauling through the Wilson's and the Sutherland's in 1936 to 1937. You couldn't drive on the canal bank very well until about 1940.

Gord started his transport business in 1932, and they used to haul coal and cement. Bill Melbourne was competition up until about 1943. His business was class A and Gord's was class C. They would bring the cement back for the Coombs\*; they had coal sheds. They would have it all packed in bags. When you loaded cement onto the truck in the summertime you needed to wear mitts because it was so hot that you would burn your hands. You only carried in about 6-7 tonnes. George asks what kind of trucks they used. Gord says they had Chevrolets; 6 cylinders. No booster breaks or vacuum\* breaks or anything in those days. It was a long trip to St. Mary's back then; they left in the morning and didn't get back until late in the afternoon if they were lucky. Once, when Fred Cook and Leona Miller\* were married, Gord was coming back from Goderich with a load of salt and they were coming home from their honeymoon. They didn't





know, but they stopped at a restaurant and Gord stopped at the same restaurant. Gord got home and told everybody that the Cooks were coming into town that night; the Cooks always wondered how everyone knew. Gord told them that they didn't see him, but he saw them.

[*An early picture of the 400 is show.*] When they first put the 400 through, Gord thinks that it was only a two lane road. There was Davis' down there and they had some cleared. That section there [*indicating to a spot on the picture*] was all Holland River Gardens which covered about 220 acres. The road did not come out to where the research station is; it was just a marsh road through there. To build those roads on the marsh, they hauled in and put down clay and then finally they put gravel on it; for a long time it was just clay roads. They didn't try to get a base underneath it; it was a very bumpy road.

[*George shows Gord pictures*] George indicates that Matt [*last name is inaudible*] gave the photographs to him. George shows him a picture from 1948 and Gord remembers it well; he went to Toronto. In another photo are two Holland River Gardens trucks. One had a window on it; it looks like an old army truck. Gord says their truck was in there somewhere. They took vegetables down to city hall. It was probably organized by Holland River Gardens. Gord says that their trucks are in the picture, although he is unsure which ones specifically they are. [*They are looking at pictures and identifying different owners or companies.*] There was the Jobi Morris\* restaurant (he was Chinese), Kapasak's\*, Mike Maglow's\*, Foodland, and Lukes' Mill. Gord's dad was a miller. When they ran the mill with flour, his dad was the miller but then they did away with the flour and had a grist mill. Gord worked there when he was 15 years old during the summers. They had a steam boiler but they never used that. The steam boiler was for the old flour mill that burned down.

[*George shows a picture.*] The picture is of the old baby carriage factory. It later became a shoemaker shop, a hockey stick factory, a casket factory, and then a cooling building where they kept lettuce. George shows another picture of the Bonita railroad station. [*Tape cuts out and then resumes*] [*They are still looking through pictures.*] You can see the beginnings of Holland River Gardens. George shows Gord a picture with a view across the marsh taken in 1948; he isn't





sure if it was taken from the south or north side. Gord wonders if the tower he is seeing is the Bradford Tower or Newmarket Tower. [*Tape cuts out*]

[*Tape resumes*] [*They look at another photo.*] George says that this is supposedly John Davis and asks Gord if he knows him; he replies that he does. George notes that there is a wheelbarrow in the photo. Gord says the person in the photo is picking roots off the marsh. They used to have the wheel hoes. You would turn them upside down and put cases of lettuce on them. Gord didn't have anything to do with building the research station. Many of the ditches that were dug at the marsh were done by hand. [*They switch to look at another set of pictures.*] These were taken down by the packing plants, in the early days of the Holland River Gardens, and when they were breaking land at the Davis' on the south side. They used a bulldozer; the bulldozer place didn't come in until just after the war. They see a picture of the old barge that was used to clean out the canal. Gord says it is the barge that he towed out of the canal. He doesn't think they cleaned it out that often. They cleared the ... marsh first before they cleaned the bush lots. The bush lots were cleared later on. They started up where the marsh hay was, on the south side. They look at another photo and George thinks that, when they were cutting, it would be marsh hay there. They hay would be cut back 20-30 feet from the water's edge. Collings and Armstrong used to have to go up to Orillia to get to the water a few weeks before cutting the marsh hay. The water level from Lake Simcoe was all controlled from up in Orillia back then.

George says Gord was telling him that there was a camp up there by the willow tree [*referencing a photo*]. Gord says that it was a homemade outfit; like a trailer with wheels underneath it. It was just a building with a stove, cookhouse, and bed in it. They didn't really cook for the men. For the man who stayed there, it was like his house; he would stay for four to five weeks in a row and then he'd go home. George asks if they had a camp site when they were up at the marsh hay. Gord says no, you came north of the willow tree in a scow, and there was a little place to pull the barge in. They tied the scow to a place in the ground. There was a shelter for the horses just to the north where the cookhouse was. It was made out of loose hay; they would put boards down, make it high, and place hay on top. In between each horse they put a





pole. Sometimes they'd have six or eight, or sometimes only four horses. The old man who stayed there (Gord can't remember his name) would have his shack pretty close to where they were working. From the baler to the shed, it would be about 1500 feet. When Gord was there they used the tractor to drive the baler. Sometimes they would put extension wheels on the sides of it. The one Gord used had a plunger on the back of it. On one side you would tie the wires and you would need to put the wires through the boards. The farmers would fork the hay right off the baler. It had a platform that was about six feet by six feet so the baler didn't get too much in at one time. There was nothing else in the camp; just the barn, horses, baler, and shack. As soon as they were done with the baler they would bring it back into town in the fall. Gord had a dump rake; they had to fork the hay onto the wagon by hand. Collings had a side rake later on. Armstrong didn't get that modernized. The picture they were looking at of the tractors would have been taken in about 1932 or 1933. [*George shows Gord one of the books his friend lent him about building roads in the early days of the highways in Ontario.*]

Going back to Hurricane Hazel, George says Gord had quite a bit of involvement both during and after the hurricane. He asks how Gord got into the tow truck business. Gord says when Hurricane Hazel came along, it was during a time when they were out of business because they were working on the marsh. Gord worked there pretty steadily. When the hurricane went through, both upper and lower were flooded, so the 400 was used as a dam. They thought they would build it with four hydro poles, put planks in between them, and lift it up but the water was going through so fast it tipped over and they couldn't get it down to the bottom. They got it down part way but couldn't hold it, so they got Gord to go in with a tow truck [*inaudible*] They got the water shut off after about two days. There was no more water coming from the high land to the lower marsh. The pump pumped all the water out and two dams were set up at the north end. They got a crane and dug out the dam and let the water flow through. They didn't let the water flow through fast enough to flood the lower marsh, they just let it come through as fast as the pumps were taking out. That's why they built another pump house up at Verkaik's. George says that's the famous pump house; no one knew why it was built.





After Gord was through with the bridge, then they went out and did the tractors; all the equipment was there. They would bring them into the township and they would have mechanics from Newmarket there. As soon as you brought them in they would drain the oil, drain the antifreeze, change the batteries, etc., fill everything up and then it was ready to go back on the marsh. This was done at no cost to the farmers; it was part of the Hurricane Hazel relief. Ken Tupling and the council of Bradford organized this; King township was probably in on it too. Gord worked for the Winter\* boys, towing machinery out up onto the bank and then towing them away. They did the entire lower end. To get some of them out, they needed to use up to 800 feet of cable. They had a boat that was 4 feet wide and about 10 feet long and it was square. What they would do was estimate how much cable they would need to tow a certain machine out in the distance, load the cable onto the boat, row the boat out to the machine, and drop the cable in the water. One person would be standing on land to start the towing. They would do the tractors and everything else that was in the ditches.

George would like to again discuss the culvert under the 400 highway. He asks when they plugged it and when they started to let the water out again. Gord says they had it plugged on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of October. Then they established the big bank of pumps. They didn't open it up at all until after they had the two dams built. As soon as the dams were built, they opened the 400 Highway and the water flowed down through. It would have been maybe a month after the hurricane before they opened the 400 Highway. George says he was working up at the farm building barns when it happened and they had to use the 27 Highway instead of the 400 for a while. George says the towing work that Gord did benefitted many of the people. Gord says there were other tow trucks too but many of them came with about 100 feet of cable which was not enough. Gord's tow truck's radiator fan was separate from the motor. The fan was low and the motor was high, so they would disconnect the fan and drive out into the marsh through the water; they never got stuck. They also pulled many tractors that got stuck in the marsh (not because of the hurricane, but just on an average day). It doesn't happen very often now. Back then the tires were narrower and now they are wider and have so much horsepower. Also, the marsh in the early days was very spongy and now it is very dense. Now you can drive anywhere





you want on the marsh, any time of year. Back then it was only during very hot weather that you could even think about taking a truck or anything out on the marsh.

George would like to discuss the wagons again [*he shows Gord a photo of something similar*]. Gord says they would have steel wheels that were about 14 inches wide. Armstrong never got into those tractors, but the Collings did. When the horses died out, so did Armstrong. Collings bought a car and cut it down the same way as in the picture [*referencing a photo of a modified car they are looking at*]; they took the rear end and moved the rear end head about 18 inches and then they put the wheels in [*inaudible*] [*Tape cuts out*]

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

