



Gord Church

Interview One

January 28, 1995

Length: 1 hour, 34 minutes and 17 seconds

George Jackson introduces himself and says he will be speaking with Gord Church in Bradford. They will be talking about the harvesting and use of the marsh hay that was farmed on the Bradford and the Keswick marshes. [*Conversation starts mid-sentence*] Gord says that would be back in the 1930s and 1940s. He says that stow would be maybe about 10 feet wide and 30 to 40 feet in length [*It is assumed they are looking at a photo*]. You would see eight horses on there, and the height would be about 30 inches. They were towed with a [*inaudible*] moving inward. They started cutting marsh hay before Gord's time; quite a while ago. They would take the horses out of the barn in the morning. They would load hay up on boards and it would be brought back to where the horses were in the barn. It was like a homemade trailer, and that would be the living quarters. The person would wake up at seven in the morning, feed the horses, and bring them out again. They would put hay on the platform. You would have to make sure you didn't put your fork in when the [*inaudible*] was coming down and make sure you tied the bales right. They would take out the motors and the rigs. They would haul it in and bale it, and it would have to come off the baler. You would bale it right there. They had a horse-powered baler, but that was before Gord's time. They would put stacks of hay there in the winter time and bale that hay in the winter time.

The Armstrongs had nearly all of the west side of the river, by the 13th Concession. The Collings were on the east side. It was wider on the east side than it was on the west side. It would be on the other side of River Drive Park; Tom Foster used to go to the top of the street and do some baling. Tom Crocker also did some baling, although his lot was pretty small. The Collings and the Armstrongs had the two big ones. The houses were backed right onto John Street with





the hay barns were to the west of the house. To the east there was another big hay barn, and the horses were stabled up where John Street was. Between the stables and the house was a blacksmith shop.

The baling would start at about the end of June or July. They would harvest until the wintertime, when the bales would be stacked. He never heard the farmers talking about the “good old days”; that was going back too far for him. The horses were big, heavy draft horses. Most of the horses they got would come out from the West and they had to train them not to kick. There were no special harnesses used. The [*inaudible*] was about an inch thick; mostly they were made out of Elm because Elm was a lot stronger. [*This part of the conversation is mostly inaudible but Gord is talking about something that was put on the horses’ feet and got hung up afterward; possibly horseshoes.*] They almost always wore them only on the back feet. Very seldom was it put on the front feet because the horse did all the pulling on their back feet. Gord saw a horseman fall down more than once. George reads a passage about a horse being bogged down with mud. The farmers would hold the horse’s head and place hay around the horse in an attempt to get the animal to step on the hay. Once out, the exhausted horse would get put back in the stable for the rest of the day.

After they brought the hay down to the river, they would turn around and bring the trucks to the barns. They would also make string. Armstrong would sell his hay to the Steelers* and the Cassidys* who were the two big customers that he had. Steelers* would use the hay for pots and pans, and they would ship those using big crates on trains. Collings sold his hay to the Eatons. There were other people that he sold to besides them, but those were the big ones. The Eatons would use the hay to pack all the stuff that they would sell. The Eatons had a big barn at the north parking lot of the community. That whole north parking lot was owned by the Eatons and was part of their big barn. It was about 16 feet high and they would fill up both sides of it; they would drive in one end and out the other. When they were finished they had to pack it all in. They did this from 1934 until the 1950s. They tore the one building down, but the other building in Collings’ lot was sold to the Eatons. They took in that whole farm.





George would like to discuss more about the Armstrongs and references a map. The paint store was on the Armstrong lot and it was owned by them. Gord's grandfather's name was James Church. There's a little shed by the corner by John Street, which was Gord's garage that he built himself. At the Armstrong's, the buildings would be about as big as the hay barns and they would have big doors. The well was by the driveway and blacksmith shop, halfway down. The garage was 50 feet by 100 feet. [*They point out a house on a map or picture.*] Gord says that is the house that his family lived in before he moved to his present home. Gord was married and lived in the little lighthouse just south.

George asks if there was a hay shed over at Spencer's property. [*inaudible*] had a hay barn where the lot used to be before the Spencers moved in. it would come off of John Street. It was a big operation. There were at least 2 people in the boat, and about 10 to 12 people in total. Jim Howell* worked for the Armstrongs for years. Ernie Peter* and McKinstry worked for the Armstrongs as well. The Collings clan consisted of Fred Woodcock, Jack Rogers, and other Rogers. It was a pretty big operation. It was competitive between Armstrong and Collings. When they went down to the river, it was a competition to see who could get there first. The second person wouldn't be able to get in because the first person's truck would be in the way. They fought a lot over that.

George asks if the type of [*inaudible*] that's there now is the type of [*inaudible*] that was there back then. Gord says it is now because Bradford took it over. Before, it belonged to the Government of Ontario. The funny thing was that Artie and Len Saint (Artie Saint was a carpenter) wanted to get the contract to build the post office (the one that's by the Becker store; what is now the old post office). Artie Saint got the contract to build the post office and Len Saint got the contract to build the [*inaudible*] down at the river. It was all lumber, and the post office was nearly all [*inaudible; another material other than wood*]. That was one thing that everybody laughed about.

Hauling the hay down in the winter time took a few weeks. Gord isn't sure how much the hay would have been worth, but he can't imagine it being that much money. You would only get \$10 a load for taking the hay all the way to Toronto. If you handled the marsh hay with your





fingers, it would cut you. You would have to haul the hay up to feed the horses. When the hay was full grown, it was pretty thick. Every fall after a new harvest they'd go up to stack the hay and they would burn where the hay had been. Depending on where the wind was blowing, sometimes the smoke would blow down the river. That way they would have good hay for the new harvest.

George asks who built the barges. Gord says they were all made out of plank and nailed in about two inches. In between every joint and every spring you had to poke them in, hammer them down, and tar that over. That's the way they sealed the joints. Armstrong only had one barge. Caesar lived on John Street, right across from Armstrong. He had a small operation, but a good one. They would make maybe about one tenth of what Collings and Armstrong would make. They would put boots on the horses; they were made to fit each horse. When you were finished you had to hang them on the hangers.

They had a machine that was about three feet (he cannot draw it). It looked like a spinning wheel and would go clock-wise. They would take a handful of hay and put it in and it rolled the hay. It rolled the hay out in three rolls. At the back end of the machine it would take those three and [*inaudible*] [*Tape cuts out and then resumes*] It turned out to look the same as that, only the hay would stick out every now and then. The company (he can't think of the name) made the water pipes for the town. They would have a steel core which was four inches around and the hay would be rolled tight on the steel core. They would put the steel core in the mould with sand. Then they would pour the hot metal down the mould. By the time the metal was cooling, the hay would burn off. They were about 20 foot water main pipes. On the inside it would be 6 inches or 12 inches; there were two different sizes. Collings supplied the hay for this. That would be in the 1930 to 1950s. How long, when they made this, the rope would be about enough for the different pipes. Rope was also made with the marsh hay which would be used for mattresses. The mattresses were a completely different type of rope it was only handmade. They had a machine that turned the rope as they would feed the hay in it. In the mattresses, they would pack hay in and also add loose hay. Collings made mattresses as well. Dodger's father was





an undertaker; he was no too tall. He was undertaker before he did the marsh hay. They did not pay him too much. George says that he is going to take the map home and send it back to Gord.

George and Gord discuss fishing and say that it would have been back in the 1930s. They [*it is unclear who is being referenced*] ran a pretty tight operation. It was all done with carts and they shipped it to Toronto for mostly the Jewish people. In the winter time they would fish through the ice. They would cut a hole in the ice and attach a weight to a wire [*Gord draws a picture of this*]. 100 feet up the lake they would cut another hole. The hole would be about four feet. They would tie a rope on the fishing line. Then they would go a mile up the lake and put a post in. They would go another quarter mile across the lake and attach another post. Then they would go 15 feet and put another post in. They repeated this process on the other side. The rope would go through a pulley [*inaudible*] The ropes were always underneath the water. It took them a full day's work. The machines had a gas engine, and there were two of them. It could pull 10 miles of rope. The fish would come out of the pocket and you would scoop them out by hand. Once you had enough fish you would then ship them to Toronto (these were live fish). One day they would only get 25 fish, and another day they would get 3 tonnes of fish. They had square tanks that were about two feet deep with water inside. Gord remembers the last big haul he ever had. It required three hauls, two trucks, and two full days just to get them out of the net. You would take one load in to one fish market and another load into another fish market. He made three trips with each truck to Toronto and Hamilton. There would usually be about two to three gallons of water in each tank. Until you would get used to it, it was a bit scary; it didn't bother you later on. They fished in the same area in the summer and they would put the fishhooks right in the water. They used metal-like boats [*much of this account is inaudible*]. Nearly all the marsh hay and the fishing were done from the [*inaudible*] up to the lake.

George and Gord discuss bridges on the marsh. There was a bridge on the 5th Line on the marsh [*they reference a map*] that went in to Turner's. Turner used to go in beside Brown (Tom Brown, Bob Brown's father). There was a bridge here for the Sutherlands. There was a bridge up on Simcoe Street and one somewhere near the 400 Highway. There was John Wilson, and the Foxes came in later. Wolsten* had that property; he traded the farm because he wanted





to get out of the trucking business. He traded to someone who wanted to get into the trucking business. He had the transport service in Toronto. The next bridge went through ... and up to the 400 again. There used to be another bridge up by Western Road, and that was the only bridge Gord remembers being up on that side.

Gord got into the transport business in 1934. In 1933, on Western Road, the Wells* were coming in and had to break land on their property on the marsh. Everything had to be done by hand and there was too much land for them to do it by themselves so they let people take shares for certain acreage of their land. Gord's brother had one of these shares. During that winter they bought a used 1932 Chevy truck. That winter people would want them to help them move things. From 1933 to 1934 it had grown, and that is how they got into the truck business. The marsh work started in the spring. They had three straight [*inaudible*] and seven tractor trailers.

[*Gord looks at a photo of the Argos* hockey team which he was a part of.*] He identifies Don Dobson*, Roy Fuller, Gus Carter, Roy Collings, Nesbitt, Bill Coldridge*, and James as players in the photo. They played on St. Patrick's Day in Toronto on a rink of artificial ice and won the championship there in 1941. They also played in London. They always played outdoors. George and Gord speak about a truck that Gord had. The radio station in Richmond Hill bought it from him wanted to restore it. They got three quarters of it restored and they turned around and sold it to someone in Ottawa. [*Tape cuts out*]

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

