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INFORMANT: MARY USHER

SUBJECT: St. Albert

PERIOD: 1952 - 1960's

INTERVIEWED BY:: A. Borgstede

LENGTH OF TAPE: 65 mins.

Feb. 8th, 1978

- 006 - 012 Mary Elva Usher (née Speakman), born 23rd August, 1911, 1/2 miles south of Red Deer on a homestead taken out by her grandfather in 1891.
- 013 - 031 Came to St. Albert 14th March, 1953, on her wedding day. Her husband, Roy bought the land as a small acreage, liked St. Albert (sleepy little town). First 1/2 acre was purchased from Rollie Bonneyville, later the road allowance in back was added giving them 3/4 acre. Property was originally on the extension of Perron St. It joined Highway #2 at the corner of their property. They were shielded from the highway by a cut bank which was taken out when the highway was widened in 1961.
- 032 - 037 United Church was founded in 1954, March 7th was their first service; Charter service was held 18th April, 1954. Services were held in the Club Macombo until the church was built.
- 038 - 047 Roy worked in Edmonton for AGT, built the house in 1952. He and his mother moved in in the fall. (Stayed at Frank Ball's, to the south for ten days until the house was ready). Ball Estate was bought from two Ryan brothers.
- 048 - 053 First impressions of St. Albert: like it, thought it was a very pretty valley. Town had a population of about 1100 (1129) by the census that year,
- 054 - 059 Mary worked in Edmonton for a year, later adopted a baby, then took in a foster child. (Jon)
- 060 - 079 Neighbours: Rollie Bonneyville who lived behind them was the carpenter who framed their house with lumber bought from Mike Miciak (had lumber yard where Imperial Lumber now is) and his wife Claire.
There were about seven new houses built in St. Albert that year.
Dr. and Ethel Cuts were to the north. They came 1945.
- 080 - 094 Community life: was very active in Women's Institute with her mother-in-law; had a booth at the summer picnics held behind the Catholic Church, catered for banquets, etc.
- 095 - 144 United Church: was a charter member, in the original choir. The meeting to form the congregation was held at Frank Ball's, about 65 people attended representing 11 denominations. Father Emile Tardiff, pastor of the Catholic church gave them much help and encouragement. Sod-turning ceremony held April 29 1956. Founding pastor was Rev. Dr. J.H. Villett, then the principal of Alberta College, with assistance of students.

First resident ordained minister was Dr. Edwin Schwartz. Manse was built in 1965. Moved into the unfinished church in July 1957. School District #6 had recently been formed but did not have the school finished in time for September 1958 classes. In order to use the church for classes the Sch. Dist. helped pay for plumbing, etc. which speeded the completion of the building. It was used by the Sch. Dist. until January 1959.

Church was built almost entirely by volunteer labour, about 70 families.

- bang* -
- 145 - 167 Adopted a baby boy at 16 days, had been born Christmas Day 1955. Legally they were over age, had lost one baby; Mr. Hill in charge of Child Welfare Dept. used his discretion to allow them to adopt. In 1958, a young boy in St. Albert lost his mother and his father was unable to care for him. Dr. Cutts was his god-father and asked Ushers to take the child. They raised him as their foster-child. (Brian O'Toole)
- 168 - 176 Medical services: Dr. Cutts was the only doctor, came for all emergencies.
- 177 - 192 Cultural activities: and all major shopping was done in Edmonton. Gene Perron, Hector LeMer both had general stores, Mr. Benoit had a meat market which he turned into a small I.G.A.
- 193 - 216 Bought water by the tank and stored in a cement tank beneath the garage. Had a drainage field for sewage. When water & sewer was put into the town area it was not put into the houses along the highway. At first the town got their water from the Sturgeon River, but it was so hard that it corroded the pipes. Later the agreement with Edmonton was entered into.
- 217 - 293 Mary worked part-time for the Morinville Journal, which was owned by Sun Publishers (Mr. Pugh). She did the local reporting. Later John Deacon, district editor of the Edmonton Journal asked her to do the local reporting for them. Later when Wim Netlenboss began publishing the St. Albert Gazette, she worked for him. In 1962, Edm. Journal put in their metropolitan bureau which cut off the major part of her reporting. She quit the Gazette to run her own mimeographing company... M.E. Usher Mimeographing. Morinville Journal had it's main offices in Edmonton (Sun Publishing). Rose Martel reported for Morinville. Mr. Netlenboss began the Gazette before 1961
- 294 - 334 Got to know many of the old-timers through her reporting, Anglicizing of the old French names and the bi-lingual nature of the town. Only a few of the business people
by the French themselves.
- 335 - 487 Relates an interview with Louise Belcourt at Christmas about 1960 - 61. In 1967, Mrs. Belcourt was named St. Albert's oldest citizen. Her son, Albert collected garbage. Louise lived with an unmarried son; told the story of the St. Albert Mounted Rifles who she watched leave for Lac La Biche when
- [Questionsble] -

she was a child. There was a great social gap between the Metis and the Catholic settlers who came later. At Christmas, after midnight Mass, the Metis gathered at one home in family groups. A large kettle of meatballs had been put on to cook before leaving and there was a feast following Mass which included homemade doughnuts. They celebrated long into Christmas Day. *French settlers didn't really celebrate.* Recalled that, as a small girl, she and two friends had gone into the Bishop's yard, met Bishop Grandin who laid a hand on their heads and blessed them. She attended school in a loft in the convent where they used slates. Dress and cleanliness was strict; had great respect for the nuns. They would have a Christmas tree in the school and Bishop Grandin gave out gifts that the sisters had made; mitts for the boys and aprons for the girls and candies. *she did not board at the convent.*

488 - 554

Interview with Miss Mary Maloney who was in the Youville Home at the time. Their Christmas was strictly religious, (attended Midnight Mass) but celebrated on New Years Day when they had goose. She related a story when as a little girl. Her mother had received a lambskin in payment for her services as a mid-wife. Mary and her two sisters had been told to go upstairs while their parents had company; cut the curly hair off the lambskin and glued to a doll's head.

555 - 614

Skating on the river: (As related by Gene Perron). A farmer would plow out the river from the bridge to Big Lake with a sleigh and horses. Perron's house was used to change into skates, the river was lit with torches. *All the way up to Big Lake.*

615 - 651

As a reporter she attended the local banquets etc. *Didn't keep any of her old writing. Wrote about weddings, births, etc.*

652 - 696

Community Hall was greatly used including general meetings. Recalls when Louis St. Laurent visited St. Albert, spoke to the school children of Father Jan school, Mission School and the Brick School together outside; had great rapport with the children. *In the late '50s*

697 -

Door slam

Local politics: town was basically Liberal in the early days. Conservatives included Neil Ross, Marcel Lambert, Bill Veness. Campaigning could be vigorous. Local politics was 'cut & dry'. Elections were held at town meetings, candidates were elected by a show of hands.

End of side I

SIDE II

002 - 061

Up til the 1950's all children had attended the Catholic Public Schools; protestant children went to a room during religion classes. During one election, the protestants wanted to get at least one member on the Board, attended the meeting in force, and were in the majority. They elected a full slate. After some stalling (til pub closing) the majority changed and they did not get one person elected.

crackling

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The following year they (protestants) held a meeting to discuss getting a candidate elected. An 'emmissary' from the 'establishment' was sent to tell them they could have ONE. The meeting turned into a discussion on setting up another school system. First school sessions were held Sept. 1958. At the same time, the School Division (Sturgeon) did not want to provide new schools for the increasing population, and so St. Albert was taken out of the Division. This meant new schools had to built anyway so it seemed like a good time to start the new System. MacKenzie was the first school built; had about 85 student, grades 1 - 9. Vital Grandin was built about the same time. All high school students attended St. Albert High School.

- 062 - 115 Development east of the highway: When they first moved there, there was just fields across from them, and a small cabin owned by Louis Durocher. Buildings had been put in along the highway about 1953 through the Veterans Lands Act. Building in Sturgeon Heights started around Vital Grandin School, then in old Grandin Park. Land in the Sturgeon Heights area had once been owned by Laderoutes who had a dairy farm and their house is still on Sunnyside Cres. Dolhagary's had bought some of this land. Bocock's once owned the land on the west side of highway, possibly built Dr. Cutts house, moved on two small houses, for two sons (Geoff), one was were LaFranchises live, the other where the manse is. The land was then bought by Mr. Pelletier who had a dairy farm on Kingsway in Edmonton; had three daughters, Claire Bonneyville, Lena Lafranchise, and Annette Hauptman. Dr. Poirier bought the house, Rollie Bonneyville and Remi Lafranchise moved into the smaller houses (their father-in-law's) Dr. Poirier sold his house and practise to Dr. Cutts who also practised in both Edmonton and St. Albert.
- 116 - 121 Present Bocock farm is north of St. Albert on the correction line, originally had belonged to Mrs. Bocock's father, Mr. Kingston.
- 122 - 154 New Town Status: town was growing faster than the tax base could afford; N.T.S. allowed greater borrowing. Status was terminated arbitrarily by Mr. Hooke, Minister of Municipal Affairs; left the town in bad financial shape. Comments on the growth of the town. *You cannot stop it.*
- 155 - 174 Cost of Land: (would not comment) Land next to them sold 6 acres for about \$2500, Atkinson's sold land for the Holy Cross Cemetary for \$1000 per acre before moving to Lacombe.
- 175 - 222 Conditions of the streets, highway etc. before paving. *Difficult b/c the land was swampy*
Flooding of the river. *Flooding in the home.*
- 223 - 248 In 1952, town limit was at their property, before they started to build, limits were extended south. Spruce trees in yard were transplanted from across the highway when it was widened in 1960.

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