INTERVIEWER: Dianne Zieman

DATE: March 21, 1972
TIME: 1 hr. 20 min.

INTERVIEW:

1. Mr. and Mrs. David Alexander (Alec) Blair
2. Gertrude Bessie Smith
3. 253 Birch Drive, New Liskeard
4. 647-5383
5. Retired.
6. Mrs. Blair: born in the Township of Whitchurch, York County, near Toronto. Mr. Blair: born in N. Orillia, Co. of Simcoe.
7. Mr. Blair - his grandfather was from Scotland; his grandmother came over to Canada at age 3. Mrs. Blair: parents born in Canada; ancestors probably from England.
8. Married.
9. Mrs. Blair: age 72; Mr. Blair: age 72.
10. TODAY:

Education - Have nothing to do with it now, so cannot say too much. Feels that they are trying to force French too much onto the English. In Quebec, it is O.K., but not in an English-speaking province when English is the language of the whole world. It is a shame that they are trying to make them bi-lingual in the rest of Canada. He never heard French to know it was French before he came up here, other than for one incident when they were picking thimbleberries near Penitangue (thimbleberries: black berry, very seedy, thorny bush, thimble shaped berry.) Re bussing the students into larger schools - it seems more expensive and not particularly good for the children.

Economic Situation - Not out and around for any jobs, although they do know of one girl who has been out of school for a year and still cannot get a job. They don't really know too much about it - they don't go out to any of the gatherings and so, haven't really heard very much.

City facilities - a lot handier here than lots of the cities; although the cities do have streetcars, etc. In all northern areas, the expenses are higher. Should be something done - did bring the price of beer down up here and raised it in southern Ontario - but gas, etc. are much costlier here.

This winter, the town had a little rink just back of the school - how many places in the city would they put little spots where the children could go outdoor skating?

Re traffic - the stoplights they have were certainly needed, but whether they need more - perhaps one on Elm Street or a sign to indicate that Armstrong is the Highway - on Hgwy. 65, they do have a sign. Town has done very well in snow-clearing - deserve a star for what they have done. Studded tires should not have been banned in the north - if you go anywhere around here, it is for long distances.

Wishes that they left the name of Dawson Point Road after the old settlers, rather than changing it to Lakeview Drive (which few people use!)

Recreation - the kids get all the exercise they could want - badminton, tennis, hockey, football - there are a lot of little kids playing hockey.

11. Changes: equalizing expenses; changing back to studded tires up north. Trying to buy a clear pine board - it is sawn up here and shipped out of the country - #1 pine board. Present system of getting the raw materials here, shipping south to process, then shipping back here for sale - for high prices.

E.G. When they were in at the Mat at the Hydro plant, they were putting up a curling rink - wanted a covered spot in which to curl. Gillies had a mill in Temagami and one day when the bush foreman was there (they drove logs through - took them down a log slide below the hydro plant);

Fred Parnam asked Mr. Gillies when they were watching the logs coming out of Rabbit Lake that since they were short of material and he had heard that they were going to tear down the old mill near Temagami, could they have the wood for their curling rink. Pine boards were 16 to 18" wide and not a knot in them - cannot see lumber like that now.

13. Changes should be made to encourage tourists. When Rob and Beth (their daughter and son-in-law) get their park going, people will be able to strike out with a trailer from down south - Moore's park will be a place for them to park their trailer in this area.

There are too many different people involved before you can do anything with your own land - it makes it difficult to develop a private enterprise. One even requires permission to sell one's own land now.

Too many of the rights that we used to have have been taken away by the different boards that are set up - doesn't think in a lot of cases that the board members know what is is all about - a good guy is just included on a board, not because of his qualifications.

THE PAST:

Mr. Blair came up here in the autumn of 1938; his wife and children joined him in 1939. Times were hard then - they had lived on a farm, but he was bothered by a stomach ulcer and had to get something else. Had a brother in Fraserdale (Abitibi Canyon) at the Hydro plant, and his brother said there were lots of opportunities for work in Northern Ontario.

Had a Raleigh route for three years - didn't want it permanently, just until he could find something else, then he went out with the Northern Ontario Power and they moved to the Mat. On the Raleigh route, he was based in New Liskeard; his territory extended as far as Thornloe, Kenabeck and the Quebec border the other way. Travelled by car - had to supply his own. No gas rationing when he was first on the route - the more gas you used, the better they liked it. Had to buy the stuff from the company first, then sell it to make a profit - no salary.

In '42, went to Northern Ontario Power to work down at the Mat. There was a community - more men then that at any other time. The Hydro took over in 1945. Were eight or nine families. Had a school, just a one-room school house then.

Housing - lived in one of the terrace houses - five family and one apartment unit in a long terrace; also the cookery for the single fellows. Just as good as some of the houses here in town - better built, although not as fancy nor insulated. Quite comfy - electric stoves and homemade heaters. Wood stove at first - heaters had been made at the Hydro. Running water - taps and indoor bathroom. Very poor wiring until the Hydro took over.

N.B. reach the "Notch" from Cobalt and the "Mat" from Silver Centre - a dam on the Montreal River - Lower Notch.

The power plant was put in in 1910 and after that, the men just kicked out power. Mechanic and operators - then called oilers, now called operators in training. Two men to each shift and a team of horses to go out for supplies. Used to make out their order for the last time the cars could go out and get enough food to last until mid-April. In the winter, if they ran short, would go across the ice to Fabre on the Quebec side.

Had to make all their own entertainment - would have a dance or card parties - at the dances, someone would play a guitar or fiddle; the card parties were once a week.

Shopping - sent our orders to Cobalt; the trucks would pick it up and when they had not a truck, before 1950, they would come in to New Liskeard to shop because they had lived there. Missed some of the things they could buy when they had lived on the farm outside of Orillia. She wasn't too fond on phoning out the order - preferred to see what they were getting. Not too much to complain about. The price of groceries used to be 8¢ a loaf for bread; milk wasn't over 10¢ then - however, wages were much lower. Later, they noticed that the food prices were higher up north.

At the Mat, they had sports in the winter - had a pickup hockey team on an outdoor rink. Would do a lot of hunting and fishing in the wintertime. Did a lot of walking in the bush then - along a lot of the trails.

No purebred Indians then - Mrs. McLaren was part Indian - perhaps all. Mrs. Bonin was part Indian (Pete Bonin is usually around the bowling alley in Haileybury.) Since they left the Mat, there have been people exploring in there and they found a fireplace and petrified wood in that area. Pogan Rapids was the Indian word for the pipe - could cut a reed any place in the bush for a stem - they have a bowl for a pipe carved out of the stone at Pogan Rapids - has a little whole in it so it can be carried on a string around the smoker's neck. Also, Mr. Blair has a skinning stone from around Orillia. Collection of nature finds: rattles from a snake, humming bird's nest, and petrified material that looks like horses' manes, in motion.

During Hurricane Hazel, they were isolated. The road came down the big Notch hill where it crossed the river and up another steep hill. Wes (?) came back and said something humourous about being throughly drenched. Darned near flooded out - the road was washed out. Took the cars out the other side of the river because the bridge was thought to be unsafe and so they went the alternate way.

One spring breakup in Latchford, the water was rising over the bridge before they built the new bridge. The water came down the Montreal river and had to go through the Notch - was forcing down, with more water coming off the down the sides from the melting snow - were afraid that the water would take the timber out. Boulders there about the size of a small room - after the flood was over, couldn't see the boulder any longer - the force of the water, ice, and rocks under the ice had pushed it away. People could stand on the bridge and hear the boulders rumbling along the river bed.

One time the 'flu hit the community, just after Dr. Fraser Farlinger started to practice here. They telephoned out to the substation in Cobalt and the message would be taken from there. Mr. Blair said that the doctor would have had to go in to the Mat - no one was well enough to drive out! Men had to be sent in to run the plant - he was the only regular on shift at the time - managed to go to work although he too had the flu.

Community at the Mat - one big family - heck of a good bunch to get along with. They had visitors come in - they thought it was pretty but an awful road, and couldn't get over the mosquitoes and the black flies - just had to stand up to it. Sometimes, they would put on some kind of liquid, but their daughter Beth would rather be bitten than put on that oil.

They mentioned an invasion of "army worms" - apparently an army of caterpillars which moved through Martineau Bay, stripping the vegetation and came wn the Mat road. Trains were held up and highway conditions were rather dangerous with all the squished caterpillars on the road. They just moved up and over anything in their path - got to water, they went in and started to swim. Good year for pickerel - very fat and happy from their feed of worms.

The Blairs had bought a boat in town, remember hearing the pop - pop as the wheels of the car would run over the worms on the way back home. Since then, the "army worms" have gone through Earlton. They came from the West - must have crossed the Mat River and went north-northwest.

W.W.11 - lot of community drives. Most of the men and boys they knew joined up. Haileybury had the armories so they would probably enlist there. Got a lot of French from Quebec then - the lads went from here to the army and their jobs at Wabi, and Hill, Clark & Francis were taken up by the French.

At Fabre, they used to be able to go across to there and shop - one could be understood in English. The French would come over here and be understood as well (in English I believe the Blairs said). However, since they have started this thing of speaking French in Ontario - when the French come here or when you go over there, they no longer understand English - they can speak broken English but won't do it.

Housing - never been a particular problem as far as they are concerned. At first, they had rooms with Benoits on Dawson Point Road; then a house in New Liskeard before they went to the Mat, moved in with a bachelor just across from the Catholic Church. New sub-divisions are being built in this area now.