INTERVIEWER: Dianne Zieman DATE: May 2nd, 1972

TIME: 2½ hours

INTERVIEW:

Mr. and Mrs. Donald Smylie, 25 Niven Street, New Liskeard, phone: 647-6629, have both lived in this area for some time. They were both married before, and have children from their respective first marriages living in the area. Mrs. Smylie's first husband, Mr. Walton, died several years ago, as did the first Mrs. Smylie.

Origin:

She was born Marjorie Gillett, and came to Canada from England. They travelled to the New Liskeard area, coming up the lake by boat, and settled in the Englehart district near Charlton. They reached that area by boat up the White River.

Mr. Smylie's family came up here in 1901, when he was three years of age. They took the Meteor up the lake and came in at Sharpe's Landing. His father wanted to get the family away from the south - had had a farm at Niagara Falls, but they were only getting about 12¢ a bushel for grain. They had lived in Toronto for awhile but decided to come north.

Actually, that must have been his grandfather who brought them up here because his father was dead, and his mother had him and four other sons to care for.

From 1901-1906, the Smylies lived on Rebecca Street. Then, they sold their farm to Mr. Craig, for the big price of $800 for the house. In '06, they moved to the farm. Mr. Richie, his father's brother-in-law, bought 160 acres - the Richies and the Tuckers came here in 1892.

Transportation:

Wagons, buggies and "democrats" - a democrat has four wheels, a family wagon that carries six or seven people.

Education:

There was a country school in the Charlton area where the Gilletts lived, but no high school in that area at the time. They would take their entrance exam at about 13 or 14 years of age. She remembers a Miss Benjamin who was one of her early teachers. The teachers boarded with the farmers close to the schools, and would stay a term with one family.

She had to walk 1½ miles to school; remembers the frozen lunches and wet boots that they would have all day. The kids would thaw out their lunches by holding them on a ruler over the stove. There were about 36 to 40 kids in the school, and they would have Christmas concerts, at which Mrs. Gillett would play. Mrs. Gillett was also the church organist.

Mr. Smylie attended Ball's School in 1906 when they moved out to the farm. He had a Buster Brown suit, which was of a black material with white stripes, a big white collar and a tam. He thought that it looked like a dress and refused to wear it when he started at Ball's School. His uncle grabbed him by the ear and hauled him off to school, which seemed more embarassing to him than having the country kids ridicule his suit, so he wore the suit quietly from then on.

There was a Miss Solomon who taught there around 1912. Another teacher wasn't too good at keeping discipline in the school. She had set him to burning the paper that was in the stove, but he was killing time by reading the compositions instead of lighting the stove. It was a large box stove and he was crouched in the front of it. The teacher shut the door on him in an effort to punish him, but when he was ordered out of the stove, he emerged with a face covered in stove black, which completely broke up the school and thoroughly enraged the teacher. There was no water in the school so she sent him to a neighbour's to get some, who had none either, so he had to wash his face in buttermilk.

Chores:

The kids would meet at Brantha Corners, where Marjorie Gillett's aunt had the post office, and they would play ball sometimes, but most of the time they were quite busy at home doing chores.

She and her sister had to bucksaw the wood; there was a well and a creek, from where they drew the water. They picked berries, and at one point, she picked potatoes. They would pick the bag of potatoes and get a cent a bag, or else the sack of potatoes. She took a bran sack, and it took two men to pick it up when it was filled. The farmer was angry but he had to let her have all the potatoes in the bag. The kids would help the neighbours to pick berries, for the fun of doing it.

Employment:

They did general farming, no particular crops. Her mother sold butter to different people. Mr. Gillett worked for A.J. Murphy in the lumber camps. He would go in to the bush in the fall and come home in the spring.

There was a lot of trading, as the people didn't have the money. They would exchange goods, or pay off a debt by so much work with their team of horses.

They would thresh from farm to farm, and all the neighbours would pitch in to do each farm in turn. The women would come to help at the threshing "bee" by bringing and cooking food for the men. The men were hearty and heavy eaters who worked from 7 a.m. to dark, with no coffee breaks. Their only break might be a glass of cold water with ice, which was a treat. No freezers then - people kept butter and things cool by putting then down the well.

Mr. Smylie made a couple of trips west with the Harvester Excursions; one summer, he made $500 working for Sam McWatter out in Saskatchewan. He was so impressed with his fortune, that when he came back to New Liskeard, he bought five lunches at a box social!

Logging:

He made one or two trips into bush to work in camps for Peter Grant and A. J. Murphy. It was a pretty good life, with plenty to eat and double bunks. The camp stoves were kept going day and night, so that it was very hot at night.

With a team, they would get $4.00 a day and found, which meant board, plus feed for the horses. They would get up at 4 a.m. and the lead team would be out at 5 a.m. Went three miles up the Montreal River. Used jack lanterns before daylight.

Would ice the roads with a big wooden water tank and do it at night, so it would be frozen by the next day's hauling. They would have two teams with the tank, and four or five sleighs for the night gang.

If they went off the iced roads with the big loads, it was almost impossible to get going again. The logs were very heavy and it would take a lot of jerking to get the load moving again. The sleigh haul was usually in early January, so they would be able to get out by March to do the skidding and so on.

The timber camps usually supplied the wagons, as the farmer's wouldn't be heavy enough.

There were women cooks in the camps once in a while, but mostly men. One cook that he remembered was a Mr. Menard from Gatineau.

If there was an accident, the victim was usually taken out with a team of horses. The boss of the camp usually had a team of drivers.

It was great for the farmers to go there (the bush camps), as it meant money for them and their families.

Church:

At Brantha Corners, the school building served as both school and church. A few years later, they built a church. The old bell is still there. It was a non-denominational church, basically a United Church. Always had a large congregation.

Farming:

At one point, he made $80 a month working on a farm at the Lakeshore.

He was in the poultry business for 12 to 15 years; had customers in both Haileybury and New Liskeard. Mostly, he sold to the stores, such as Desjardins, Jones, and Morris. At that stage, a quarter of beef sold for eight cents a pount.

Also sold dairy products - had to milk twenty-four cows by hand until the advent of milking machines. They shipped milk to both Timmins and Kirkland Lake, and would come into town seven days a week with the milk to be sent up on the train - did that for ten years.

Cobalt market - sold products there for a few years. When he was 14, he took his day's receipts and bought himself a suit on Lang Street in Cobalt,a brown suit for $11. His mother was pleased that they had done so well at market and that he had made such a good buy.

Entertainment:

As kids, they played ball when they could. The first time Mrs. Smylie saw the town of New Liskeard that she remembers was one occasion when she was blueberry picking with a neighbour and she could see the town on the edge of the lake from the ridge where they were picking. When she and her sister were older, they would come into the Fall fairs, but never as children. When she married, she moved into New Liskeard - married at an early age.

Mr. Smylie remembered dances after the fair, Easter and St. Patrick's Day. Also, taffy pulls, picnics and so - especially the Sunday School picnic.

Medical facilities:

As a child, Marjorie Gillett never had any of the communicable diseases, such as measles, whooping cough, and so on - doesn't remember any of her contemporaries contracting these either. She didn't get these things until her children did.

Cobalt had an epidemic of typhoid fever. They used to starve the patients then, and keep them in bed for months.

The midwives would go to the different houses when a child was due - Mrs. Gillett was a midwife. They received no payment for their work.

Mr. Smylie remembered an occasion when his brother Cliff, who kept bees, was stung ten or twelve times. He was violently allergic to the bee sting, and they had to run two miles to phone for Dr. MacNaughton.

Road building:

Mr. Kerr was appointed by the Government as the Road Commissioner - his daughters, Mrs. Reg Stevens and Mrs. S. B. Moore, still live in New Liskeard.

In the early days, if you started up to Charlton from New Liskeard, you would have to stay overnight, as the road travel was so tedious and long. In forty years, there have been great changes in Northern Ontario.

Mining: Mrs Smylie worked in Cobalt at one stage - the mines provided work for the men of the area - great for the farmers to get ready cash. He broke rock in 1916 at the Nipissing Mine. He had to load the aerial buckets at about one a minute - everything had to move really quickly once they rang the bell, had to put the bucket on. Worked a winter at the Nipissing.

Depression:

They stopped sending cream to Eplett's - they only made $3.50 a week for milking the cows twice a day and sending it in to the creamery. Wasn't worth it.

Re ice cream: Mrs. Smylie remembered that as a child, she would hunt in the crevices in the bush to get ice for her mother's ice cream machine.

Game Wardens:

William Armstrong, who was Mr. Walton's brother-in-law, and Elgin Binkley were two of the early game wardens.

Sherriffs:

Mr. Walton had stolen some chickens and turkeys as a boy - when he went overseas in the war, he discovered that his sergeant-major was Sherriff Stallwood who had caught him as a child. They used to steal the farmer's chickens and so for pure "hellery" when the boys were young.

Sherriff Callbeck had something to do with the hangings.

New Liskeard Social Events:

They would go to bridge parties - or bridge dinners, and wear long dresses. They used visiting cards - they would put their card in the little bowls in the entrance hall of whomever they were visiting.

There were both Nurses' and Farmers' Balls then - formal events. Fairly the same events as now.

There was a man who would come in, bring the costumes, and train local people to perform in various plays. Frisby's had the "Grand Opera House", and that's where the plays were produced. She remembers wearing big, frilly dresses and so on. Had choruses and acts - a little bit of everything.

Had fashion shows - actually they've had these shows for the last 25 years - Clark's, and Robinson's - Mrs. Smylie was in one recently, as the stores use local models.

The farmers would be invited to machinery displays, dinner and the theatre usually one day in March. He remembers seeing "Daniel Boone", and they would be given a voucher to go to the Chinese Restaurant. A meal then cost 25¢.

The Chattawqua also came - they would stay for about a week. Had a big tent on the beach. They were really outstanding - charged between $3 and $5 for a ticket, but it was well worth it. The ticket was good for the week, and they would see a play, trapeze act, and so on.

There used to be circuses, with a trashy midway - held on the beach or at North Cobalt.

Streetcars:

The route went along Lakeshore Road, followed lake to Haileybury and over to Cobalt. Only cost about 10¢ each way - the last time she took it, thinks it was up to 80¢.

The streetcars started when he was very young, as he took it to market. There is a story that Bob Armstrong took his wife for a ride on the streetcar to celebrate his wedding.

Some of the employees were Bolger, Jim Noble (conductor-motorman), MacIsaac was on the cars, and Lloyd Macmillan who was a motorman.

Note: to be added to the section on road building:

They lived at home, and had so much road work to do. Worked 7 - 12 and 1 to 6. If they so much as looked out of the ditch when they were supposed to be digging, the boss would be after then. Worked on the 5th Concession of Harris Township. Used scrapers and a team to dig the ditch.

His stepfather sold gravel in town from McDonald's pit. Took awhile to gravel the streets in town.

Remembers in 1915-16 that the road along the point, where Moore's land is now, used to be Lover's Lane, where it followed along the shore.

HIGHLIGHT:

Four of Mr. Smylie's brothers are doctors - his mother was very keen on education for her sons. One of his brothers, Cliff, wrote his memoirs and the Smylie's have a copy of the manuscript.