INTERVIEWER: Dianne Zieman

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TIME: 2 hours.

INTERVIEW:

Mrs. Eva Maude Kearns, nee Fowler. Mrs. Kearns lives at 121A Farah Street, New Liskeard, phone 647-6352. She is a widow, will be 85 years old in August. Originally from Cheltenham, England, she lived in Montreal when she first came to Canada, in 1908.

New Liskeard - Mr. Kearns was the manager of the Union Bank when he was transferred here in November 1923 - the next year, it became the Royal Bank. Mr. Kearns was born near Ottawa and worked in Metcalfe.

They travelled up to New Liskeard by train, as there was no road at that time. Her first impression of Cobalt, from the train, was "the Black Hole of Calcutta!"

The train got in direct from Montreal at those times - presume this meant that they did not have then to change trains in North Bay. Their arrival at the local station wasn't too encouraging - a man hollered at them "Who the hell are you?" She said that she cried all the night long and never stopped. She absolutely hated the place at first and really missed her family and friends in Montreal. The first night, not only did they have the rude greeting at the station, but at the hotel, they were refused a room when the clerk found they intended to keep their big English terrier with them - they'd brought him up from Montreal in the baggage car. They said they'd go elsewhere, and the clerk re-considered and offered a room at the top of the hotel so they could keep the dog with them. They stayed at the Grand Union Hotel for a few nights - the owners then were the John Buchers - then moved to the apartment over the bank.

Apparently at that time, the Union Bank had a house for its manager on Whitewood Avenue. However, since the house was very big and the Kearns had no children, they preferred to move to the apartment over the bank. They had a small garden behind the building, and what is now the biggest tree in New Liskeard (perhaps downtown New Liskeard?) was planted as a slip by her husband - it's a Manitoba Maple. They also had a small sidewalk garden in front of the building, although the town would not allow such a thing now.

Mrs. Kearns' dominant first impression seems to be really hating the place, although now, having been here for forty-nine years, she loves it equally as strongly as once she hated it.

Shopping: The previous manager's wife had told Mrs.Kearns all the worst parts about living here - she had said that there were many things that one couldn't buy in town. However, as Mrs. Kearns returned to Montreal so often to visit her family, it didn't really bother her. She did buy certain articles in New Liskeard. Remembers Robinson's Store, Greenwood's restaurant and grocery store, two or three meat stores, Eplett's. As there were a good many wealthy people in town as a result of Noranda Mines, there were some lovely homes and some good shops. No nice commercial buildings as there are today, and the clay was up to your knees. She had been learning to drive in Montreal, but it was impossible when they came up here - couldn't go out within a radius of five miles after a heavy rain. Mr. Kearns went around with a petition to have the streets paved, but she cannot remember how long it took to get action.

She had a friend coming out from London to visit - she had to get her long rubber boots up to the knees so her friend could get out and around the streets.

Industries: Wabi; Hill-Clark-Francis were here - they had a big staff and had built up much of New Liskeard. When they moved the business to North Bay, it failed. All the men are dead now - their widows still live

in town, although Mrs. Clark is very ill. Jack Clark has the Building Enterprises now.

Very little poverty in the area then - they only had seven Christmas baskets to fill one year.

Entertainment: The social life was just wonderful here - dinner bridge, to which they would wear long flowing dresses even in forty below zero weather. There was a theatre right opposite the Royal Bank. Mrs. Ruby Dunn Watham, a music teacher, used to put on plays such as "The Mikado", "The Pink Lady" and "H.M.S. Pinafore". She was a great teacher - and discovered many wonderful voices in the area. One of the girls that Ruby trained was Joanne Hanmer, who is now a professional teacher in Toronto.

During the Music Festival, put on then through money they raised doing the plays and shows, now by the Kiwanas, Mrs. Kearns would go and stay with Ruby for a few days to help her with the pre-schoolers rhythm band. No one has taken over from what Mrs. Watham did. This was a very musical town - Ruby would take her choirs to Toronto and always did very well.

Recreation: They would curl and skate in the winter - always had the lake for swimming in summer - basically, all the things that they do now. The younger people would probably ski, skate and snowshoe.

There was Park Royal, on Dawson Point Road, run by Mrs. Gibson, a wonderful person who used to care for sick people. There was a racetrack and a tennis pavillion out there. There used to be a speedway about half-way along the Point Road, probably around Mason's; and another racetrack on the beach in town.

Hotels: There were the Grand Union and the old Windsor down on Armstrong Street, which was nothing to boast about. The King George Hotel on Wellington Street - was nice for them when Highway 11 went through town.

The Kearns lived on Dawson Point Road at one stage. They bought the house from a Mr. Simmel, who had been badly beaten up in an attempted robbery at his house. Mrs. Kearns had a chance to satisfy her gardening urges - had two asparagus beds, in which she planted 1200 infintesimal little plants - could have supplied the whole town with her harvest!

When the MacNamara Highway Company came up here to put down Highway 11, Sid Byrd was head of the job. Mrs. Kearns is still friends with Mrs. Byrd, who now lives in Toronto. The Kearns' land on Dawson Point Road was bush right up to the house and down to the lake, where they had a lovely sandy beach, 1550 ft. long. Mr. Byrd came out with one of the big road machines and took out every tree, so that she had 17½ acres of lawn. Of course, then they had to do something about cutting the grass...so the Kearns got a team of Belgian grey horses; then later a tractor.

There was no charge for Mr. Byrd's work - apparently it cost something like $15 to run the machine for an hour, and they paid nothing!

Medical Facilities: Always good. Dr. Andy Farlinger and two Dr. McCulloughs. Good family doctors. Two dentists in town. The hospital was way up on the hill, it now is an apartment building. That was a terrible climb for anyone going to have a baby - a friend of Mrs. Kearns had to walk halfway up the hill when she was about to deliver her child - their car couldn't get up the hill. Doesn't remember the doctor's services costing too much, although they were rarely sick. There were two drugstores in town at that time. There was really nothing to grumble about for such a small town so far north.

Transportation: Buses and streetcars at first from New Liskeard to Cobalt. Had a much better train service then - now it is really poor and very difficult to get to Montreal.

Depression: A lot of people lost their money on the market; most people had invested in the mining industry. Regarding poverty in the area, she wasn't aware of any, but doesn't say that there was none. Perhaps in the country people had to get relief. The churches are still involved in helping the poor.

Salaries? Doesn't remember how much her husband earned, but they were able to go away to Florida in the winters for a holiday. Prices were much lower then. Remembers being able to buy eggs at 25¢ a dozen in 1918. Some things were more expensive here than in Montreal; doesn't think there was much difference in buying clothes. However, they didn't have much money then so she didn't buy many clothes at first.

W.W.11 Quite a few of the men went from here. The women did war work for the Red Cross and things like that. Good organization - a lot of the women here had been nurses and they had excellent results for that kind of work. Dressings, knitting things and sewing for the soldiers - many did that sort of think, although she wasn't very good with her fingers. At one time, she used to help out with the Blood Donor Clinic. One thing about New Liskeard, people were willing to help.

Fire: They arrived the year after the fire. She was told that when the flames got to the station, it stopped so New Liskeard wasn't damaged. A lot of people in Haileybury were in the lake all night.

Today:

Education...Pretty good facilities. The St. Francis School has moved into a new building. The principal told her that there was everything that they could possibly have - four classes in one roon - will take a bit of getting used to. Don't know enough about the bussing situation to tell whether it is good or bad for the kids. Almost 80 teachers at New Liskeard High School.

Economic Situation .... mostly unemployment in the summer when the students are looking for jobs. They have Rexwood and Northern Ontario Dynamics, started by the German fellow. Unemployment is prevalent all over. Her niece graduated from university with a B.A. and couldn't find a job - she spent the winter skiing in Europe, but what will she do for work when she returns. How can everyone blame the government - it's the machine age that has done away with so many jobs.

There are probably a few people around here living on welfare. She doesn't really know about it. Doesn't really discuss that unless there are men present or else with a husband - not the usual discussions with her friends (! - obviously Women's Liberation hasn't had an influence here!)

Job training.....Perhaps at New Liskeard Secondary School - doesn't really know. Usually seem to go away to take courses. As far as she has heard, the wages here are fairly good. Not too many strikes here.

City facilities ..... The Ontario Northland Railway isn't doing much to improve transportation facilities! Have two different flights - Nordair and Air Canada. Nearly everyone has a car now so there's no need for a local bus service.

Entertainment now is lacking - not a large enough population. In Kirkland Lake, they get musicians, whereas here, have to stick to the Bingoes. The Lions are willing to donate $40,000 to New Liskeard for a swimming pool - heated, and there has been a donation to make Fleming Road (have never heard of this area) into a real place.

Certainly seems to be a busy town - all the cars. Nice shopping area.

HIGHLIGHTS:

When they thought they might be transferred, Mr. Ernest Sawford-Dye painted a picture of what New Liskeard looked like from the hill for them.