INTERVIEWER: Dianne Zieman

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INTERVIEW:

Mr. Mort Mason of Dawson Point Road, New Liskeard - 647-4992

Mr. Mason was born in Scarborough, Onatrio in November of 1885 - family had an old homestead there. Really came from Markham when he came up here in the fall of 1901. His father had come up here in 1897, but Mort was in school in Markham, and as his father didn't know how they were fixed for schools here, he stayed in Markham. He was in his 16th year when he came here. The other three kids in his family were "just gone" of school age, and soon got going to school once established here.

Early employment:

He never wanted to go back south again. His father had a camp for lumbering; he worked for him the first winter he was here - 1901-02. Then, he worked at the sawmill at the mouth of the Wabi for McCamus and McKelvie. He drove a dumpcart the first year - his father had an extra horse and he used it. The next year, he went into the mill and did tail-sawing, and taking the lumber away from the carriage. Then, he ran the edge or two.

Not so many men working at the mill then - probably about 12 to 14. About 1903, McCamus and McKelvie erected a sash-and-door factory and had to put in a dry kiln to dry the lumber.

His father's lumber camp was about eight miles up the Highway (65?) and a mile in to the east - on the fourth Harley Township. They drew day and night for a time, because they had two teams of horses and only one sleigh. Finally, they got another set of sleighs. When it got soft and slushy in February, they decided to try to keep the timber going out, so again, they were drawing day and night to get caught up. Since his father was sure they would get more frost, they stayed in the camp and let the rest of the men go. Cut a couple of hundred nice spruce logs for the

house; but the ice and snow never tightened up - just stayed soft from then on.

They would build skidways to skid the logs along; then build another one, until they got to the river. Would dump the logs down the riverbank; the buyers would count them piece by piece.

In 1904, he went to a camp for McCamus and McKelvie that was up in Henwood Twnshp. Cut red pine that winter - lovely, lovely timber - which they dumped on the Wabi River to be floated down.

Wages then were $9.00 a week for a man, although the engineers were quite a bit higher paid. He didn't pay for his board and washing directly but it had to come out of their salaries. A suit of clothing would do for years then; pretty hard to soil the old materials. A good pair of working boots would only cost about a dollar. Lots of stores in New Liskeard, eg. John Wilson's General Store, Grill's Store - they came from Markham. These stores were up and going when Mort arrived; probably when his father came here too.

They would go to work as soon as they could see nicely in camp, between 7 and 8 a.m. in the winter and then in the spring, it would be a little earlier. Remembers up on the camp with his father, when they said that they were drawing day and night, they used to have coal oil flares to see to load; after they loaded, they wouldn't need the flares anymore. A fellow by the name of Joe Hamilton was hailed by someone "Good morning Joe!" His snappy reply "Where was you in the forenoon?"

Note about the location of his father's camp: (on the North Road) if that road was opened through, it would come out up near the spring at the green trees, just this side of the Sunnydale Cottages on the Dawson Point Road.

He teamed for Mr. McDougall in 1912, when McDougall was building the dairy farm, on the site where Mr. Mason and his son, Bill, now live. He came to work steadily for McDougall in 1913.

The first fellow who had worked for McDougall was a George Kormanz; then someone called Gregg (sp?) took his place, but he was such a drunken rascal and so abusive to his family that he was let go. Mr. Mason was asked to move down here and clean up the place, look after things. At that time, Mr. Mason was married, and shared with his father-in-law, Mr. W.V.Craigg. They lived about a mile down the road from McDougall's farm - the same carpenters built Mason's house and the farm at McDougall's. Remembers that McDougall did advertise for someone to run the place.

There were forty cows on the dairy farm and a lovely barn, built according to government rules and regulations - one of the very best barns north of Toronto. It has been torn now, because it was rotten. They had modern equipment, for that time, such as milking machines and cream separators and so on. Have to keep that stuff very clean; it has to be washed every time it's used. Not all sunshine! If you have plenty of help, you might just as well milk the cows yourself. Largest herd at one time would have been about 48.

They took the milk to Haileybury and Cobalt; would have to take it in to the streetcar in the morning for the 6:15 a.m. car - had to be there early enough so it could be loaded on. In the summertime, it would be taken over to Haileybury by boat. The boat they used was gasoline powered, and quite a nice size - could hardly swamp that thing.

McDougall was a lawyer and lived in Haileybury where he practised law. There was also a hennery at the dairy farm; Mr. McDougall was quite progressive. According to Mr. Mason "he (McDougall) had everything figured out on paper - where he could buy things and make it pay."

The lake:

The Meteor was the big passenger boat. Would land down the bay at Sharpe's because the Wabi wasn't dredged then and the boats could only get in at high water in the spring. There was no dock, and so they would unload passengers into the painter and then shove off to row to shore. They used to dump the cattle at the point (Dawson's Point) and then drive them along the road into town.

He remembers an incident when in a boat with two or three other people, and the boat stuck on the sand bar in the bay near the mouth of the Wabi. Someone in the boat got out of the boat, stood on the sand bar and pushed the boat off; but as he pushed, he slipped and fell into the deep channel. Rather amusing to the boat passengers.

The boat the "Aileen", after which Mrs. Reg. Walker is named, went down off Windy Point, which is where Bateson's house was - very high from the water. Apparently there was no coal oil in North Temiskaming (Notre Dame de Nord) and the captain thought he would put on quite a few containers, while he was going. The water was quite rough. If the captain had tied the containers down to the sides to keep them still, he would have been all right, but he didn't, and the containers slipped to one side in the rough water, and the boat capsized. The captain drowned - only he and the engineer were on board. Mr. Mason knew the captain, but not his name. Doesn't think that they ever raised that boat. (Note - when I interviewed Mr. & Mrs. Reg Walker they mentioned that they thought Rob Moore had brought up the wreck of the Aileen a few years ago. Have not yet interviewed Mr. Moore - will check with him when I do.)

Has been quite a few years now since they stopped running the boats on the lake - the sweeping boats have been on the go. Sweeping boats pick up the logs along the lake. The booms would stop right down here because it was in the bay. They would have a cookery and a sleeping boat; had their own tugboat. Would come whenever they had a load to pick up. Must have the lake pretty clean by now, as they are not driving the logs down any more. They were always losing some and the towns along the lake would kick about the logs.

Maude Groom never mentioned Gall or Redman in her book - they were both captains on the lake. Redman was on the lake in 1895, when Mr. Mason Sr. came up at first. Cap. Gall was the one that he remembers, but they took his boat off when the railroad came through.

In the early days, farms would be taken near water if they could get it. All up along the White River was pretty well settled then on both sides. That was a lovely trip up on the boat. Cap Hendry had a boat - all the others belonged to Lumsen. Cap Hendry made daily trips up the White River in a cow, would take up freight and stuff. When Cap Hendry was bringing up this boat for the run on the White River to get started, old Lumsen would not let anyone bring up a boat if he could stop it - would buy the boat first. Wanted no competition. Wasn't going to let Hendry put his boat in the river from the Lumsen dock - so Fred took it further up the river and put it in.

In 1907, Mr. Mason married Stella Craigg, who was the first telephone operator in town; (then a Mrs. Chapman, and a Miss Burpee from Pembroke - telephone operators) not his wives! His wife came from Greenbank where her father ran a harness shop; actually, Stella was born in the States. Her family moved up to this area in 1902.

Fires:

There was lovely timber along this road but the timber was nearly all taken off by the time he came.

There was a bad fire in 1916, bad ones before that but not so big. The fire of '22 and the one in '16 were the ones he remembers most.

In '16, it burned up the North Road, the highway area. Nasty things - when its dry, you never know where they are going to break out, they run so fast. In lots of cases, the people do what they can to stop, but a lot of times, they just have to wait and let it burn, while they try to protect the buildings. It does clear the land. Many people have been burned out and had to build over again. Remembers that the Hesslop family all suffocated during a fire. They got into the root cellar or the well - the worst place they could possibly go. Only one person in that family survived - she was visiting in North Bay when it happened; only 11 years old. She married Fred Whitfield, who worked for the government as a homestead inspector - Mr. Mason's father-in-law, Mr. Craigg, had been a homestead inspector for 20 years.

The fire of '22 was burning north of New Liskeard, but the wind changed and drove it down to Haileybury. Bad one for Haileybury. He was living in New Liskeard at that time. His brother-in-law, Frank Pettit, was living up at the stone house down the road. One woman next door to them in town got so darned frightened of the fire, she was out in the street praying and bellering around. His wife and Frank Pettit's wife were sisters - she wanted to come out here to be with her sister, although she wasn't particularly afraid. They brought some grub out with them - remembers one of them sat down in a pound of butter and flattened it right out. When they got out here, the hollow between the house and the lake was just going on fire. Didn't think the fire would jump the lake! His brother-in-law was an awful liar - would get excited and tell you anything if he thought he could get you to believe it - seemed to get just as much kick out of that as if it were true.

Tom Craigg had a big farm this side of Thornloe. The '16 fire burned his barn and the implements. The next time, in '22, it burned his house, barn, and his sawmill. There was quite a lot of timber around there too., so he had a small portable sawmill. Built the barn up to 110 ft. long. Had timber in Kane Township, about 21 miles away, where he had another sawmill. Tom commented "The day I was raising my barn, God was burning my sawmill over in Kane." One fall, it snowed and the grain was still out in the fields. Tom made the remark that "God's bookkeeper will be busy this morning." Someone asked, "Do you think he will keep track of it for you?" "Well, sir, I don't know." Apparently, Tom used to leave the "h" off the words where it was to appear, and add it to wrds where it wasn't needed.

Dawson Point Road:

Dawson was the first man to live down at the point. Mr. Mason just saw him once - remembers that he talked through his nose and that it was comical to listen to him. Then the Batesons came to the lot next to Dawson. They were all well-timbered lots. His father had worked for them one winter - the time before Mort came up here. Must have been around 1898. He never knew about it until Ally Bateson told him recently - they are good friends and keep in touch.

Cadman's had quite a big house - a fellow by the name of Spence owned the place before they got it. The house is just where the old place now is; that is, the cottage which we rent is located on the site of the old Cadman house. Mr. Cadman thought he was quite an English gentlemen; he was sent out here by his family so they could get rid of him. Nice talk and everything - he used to get a bit tipsy now and then, and would give a man $10 to hold his overcoat for him. Didn't stay a gentlemen for very long. Had a farm that went across the road and way back up the hill. About six years ago, the Jelly boys bought that land.

Logging:

There was a pulp mill in Haileybury, right down on the lake, straight down from the big hotel (wonder if that was the Matabanick?) They just peeled the logs down by putting it in water in a big tank and slushing it around to peel off the bark. Had it for 3 or 4 years then. The other mill was rented for a week, by some men who wanted to blow the end out to peel long pulpwood- the 12 foot stuff. Just for an experiment - putting in a new drum and so on.

He worked on a drum, cutting pulp, and sometimes hooking. On the return, a log would come out with bark on it - would hook it out and send it back on the conveyor. One night, the logs weren't coming out; he took the pike pole and was hooking out the logs. One just flipped him down into the trough - didn't stay there for very long. Never tried that again!

In the camps, there was always a good violin player and that kind of thing for entertainment. They would have dances. In the first camp in Harley, once they were expecting a load of people out from town for a dance in the cook-camp. They didn't come, and didn't come. Joe Hamilton went out to the stable and found a string of bells that they used on the cutter. Joe came running down to the camp yelling "Whoa-Whoa-Whoa". Everyone went racing out to welcome the crowd - no crowd, just Joe and his practical jokes. They had to make their own entertainment mostly - had lots of fun.

Mr. Mason has lived in the town of New Liskeard about half of his life here - approximately 35 years. Had a couple of houses there. Built a house for Joe Hamilton's family to live in when they came up in the spring of '02 - he bought the lumber, built the house, and took the cost out in rent. Never used to be so many houses along the point road - just a few farms. In the last few years, they have done a lot of building. Also, they moved the road. Apparently, the land that the old road ran on was owned by a man who refused to sell the land, and so they had to reroute the road around the corner.

Medical facilities:

When he first came, there was no doctor at all, except for a Dr. Codd in Haileybury, who was an English Church minister, as well as a doctor. There was a fellow by the name of Gimby who would give first aid and stuff like that; it was a big help to have someone who knew how to do that. Dr. Shields was the first doctor in town. He came around 1903 - remembers that because his brother and sister had the measles and he was called. Dr. Shields built a hospital there - a big house and had 10 to 12 beds in it, across from the United Church. Had to have some place to take people.

Mr. Mason had typhoid fever. Used to have a racehorse, which he bought from the undertaker when he worked for him. That undertaker could no longer afford to keep the racehorse as he was trying to buy out his competitor.

Mr. Mason worked the horse out on the track where the government farm now is. One day, they sent the kids up to a house to get some water from the well - the kids quarrelled with the children at the house and the mother sent the kids away. They went to an old well and brought back water from there - they think that's where Mr. Mason got the typhoid. The doctors had a rough time trying to figure out where he got the germs. Was in bed for 5 weeks - never held it against his horse!

Really liked his horse, and was the only man who could drive him on a slack line - took a lot of patience. When he had the fever, his brother came in to see him and suggested that the horse be taken out for some exercise. Mort told him he'd better leave well enough,alone, because the horse was a bad actor. His brother refused to believe him - borrowed Mort's new raincoat and the jogging cart and proceded to take the horse out. Never did that again... ruined Mort's raincoat - couldn't get the mud stains out. When Mort was better and was going to drive himself and his brother out to his father's farm, his brother (understandably) wasn't too keen on being driven by that horse - wouldn't get in the cart until Mort was in and holding the reins. Was shocked to see the horse trot out gently on a slack rein.

Mentioned racing at the local track. Won one race with his horse, but they wouldn't give him the prize. Apparently, things were a bit rigged, and if you wanted to win one would have to do the judges a few favours. Dr. MacNaughton had racehorses as well.

Most noticeable changes to Mr. Mason was the effect that the mining in Cobalt had on the area, and the coming of automobiles. Mr. Sam Eplett had the first automobile in New Liskeard - his youngest son Gordon may still be in town.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Mentioned a recent incident when his grandson Gord Fisher and Bob Holtz, who recently was killed in a car crash, sailed across to Burnt Island. The lake was quite rough and they couldn't make it back, so they stayed there overnight. Apparently, there is a shelter, with food in it for just such occasions - if one had to use it, one usually leaves money if you can. Someone must keep an eye on it and take the money to buy more provisions with which to stock it. I found this quite intriguing - reminds me of stories I've heard about trappers and prospectors doing the same with isolated cabins in the woods.

Also, Mr. Mason remembers the dog called "Cobalt" - often saw him in town getting up on the streetcar and going away. Very friendly dog, although he never made a fuss over you - if you wanted to pet him, he'd stand there and let you pet him. Cobalt was death on other dogs though.