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Oral History Collection – Section 2
Collected by Oral History Researcher Meagan Gough
Jim Pridmore Interview 2007 Aug 23

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Conducted at the home of Jim Pridmore at 713 2nd Ave, Maple Creek, SK

JP = Jim Pridmore: Interviewee

MG = Meagan Gough: Interviewer

NJT = Nancy-Jean Taylor: Videographer

JP: Yes, my wife and I and the two boys. I got a job at a Collegiate in Prince Albert as the janitor.

MG: In Prince Albert?

JP: Yes. See, I left here '49 - was very dry. I had about 50 bushels of wheat that fall. In spring, we decided to come home and work on the farm again. We came back, and my neighbour and I, we planted this 50 bushels of wheat. It was a start. And, in '42 there was a good yield, but the price was no good to sell. Had to sell some of it as pig feed at 25 cents a bushel. And this was in '49 that I went to Prince Albert, and worked there that winter, then came home.

MG: So, you're family was here in Consul?

JP: My mother and dad were there.

MG: What are their names?

JP: Herbert and Annie Pridmore

MG: Herbert and Annie? I am just sometimes writing down little notes so I don't interrupt you—so, Herbert and Annie, they had a farm?

JP: They homesteaded north of Consul – 10 miles north and 3 miles west. Since 1912 – that homestead is still in the Pridmore name. My son, Brian, has the land now.

MG: So, I was introduced to you, and I had only heard you be called "Grandpa Jim".

JP: Yes, James Pridmore.

MG: I've only heard Grandpa Pridmore from Susan and other people.

JP: Yeah. And I don't know, things began to change a little. Moisture conditions got better. Things gradually got better all the time. I don't know...

MG: Were you part of any of the irrigation projects?

JP: I didn't work on them, but I learned about the Cypress Lake Dam. During the early 30's the Government was trying to get some relief for dried-out farmers and they started this Cypress Lake Dam with a dam at both ends. It would take the flood water out of Battle Creek and Spangler to form this Lake, and it's still going. There is a lot of irrigatable land between Vidora and Consul. The PFRA owned it all and they broke this land up, and it had to be leveled, and irrigation ditches put in, and it's still in progress yet

—
MG: So, the land that your family has now, in that area, before you went to Prince Albert, you were farming that land?

JP: Yeah, I had 5 quarters of land and tried to sell it because I was going to buy another farm at Prince Albert, but I couldn't sell it. So, I was kinda lucky I couldn't sell it, I guess. *(Laughs)*

MG: I guess so, huh? The way it worked out! So, how long did you farm that land then?

JP: Well, I was out there until 1980, until I was 65. I sold out to my sons, Bob and Brian Pridmore—and they gradually bought more land and it's turned out to be quite a set up now.

MG: It's still in the family?

JP: Yep. I have five great-grandsons and two great-granddaughters.

MG: That's a good crew.

JP: Yeah. Oh, I don't know what else.

MG: Well, some of the other people I talked with spoke of the really good years that stood out in their life and the others where they had to fight upstream. Some of them talked about the flood in '52. Do you remember the flood?

JP: Yeah, I remember the flood. We'd built a new house, built it along the creek. We kinda expected the Government was going to put this water into Cypress Lake, but there was too much water, and they couldn't handle it. So, we had to move our house up to higher ground.

MG: You moved the whole house? Wow, really!?

JP: Yeah.

MG: How did you move it?

JP: Hired a contractor to move it, had to build a new basement, but—

MG: Did the water reach up there?

JP: No. We just watched it. Yeah.

MG: Have there been other floods like that, or was that the worst one?

JP: That was the worst one.

MG: That's so neat to hear, that you just picked up your house and put it on the high ground. That's one way to do it!

JP: It cost 350 dollars to move it, but it didn't really matter. Once you had it picked up and put on the truck it didn't matter how far you went!

MG: Yeah! So, when you were a kid, talking about water, did you haul your own water?

JP: We hauled the water from the creek in barrels.

MG: Could one person do it, or do you need more than one person?

JP: No, one person could do it. They would use what they called a “stone boat”- a sleigh with water barrels on it that you would drive down the creek to fill and bring them up.

MG: Who had that responsibility in your family of hauling the water?

JP: Dad, mostly, but I did some. Couldn't seem to get good well water there, so we used mostly creek water.

MG: How many siblings did you have?

JP: How many what?

MG: Brothers and sisters?

JP: My mother and dad were married twice, she had three boys and my dad had one girl. My dad came from England and my mother came from Ireland, and they worked in the area of Stony Beach, which is northeast of Moose Jaw. They couldn't buy a homestead there, so they had to come out to Maple Creek to homestead. They built a house and moved to Maple Creek.

MG: What did they do in Stony Beach?

JP: Worked on farms.

MG: My grandfather's side is from England, too, just like the Reesor's. They farmed in Markham, Ontario on a farm called Devonsliegh; they came from Devonshire, England. We just found out that the Reesor's had a farm there, too. Did you ever make it to England to see?

JP: In 1970 we went on a tour and we had rail tickets bought ahead of time. We went through Chicago, and we went to Ireland and saw where my dad had come from.

MG: Oh, wow!

JP: Have you interviewed Brian Pridmore? He's my son.

MG: (to Nancy-Jean) Do you know Brian?

NJT: Yeah. We were starting with the fathers of the families.

MG: Our interviews, our first discussions, have been with the fathers and mothers of the families, and then we will talk to your children's generations.

JP: How are you doing that?

MG: We talked to you, Sigurd, Laura, Norm Tenborg today—so, we are starting with your generation - we are “starting at the top” of families.

JP: So, does that mean – me?

MG: Yep, that means you! We are going to talk with as many people as we can, but many people told us to come and talk to you. What do you think some of the biggest changes have been in farming in your lifetime?

JP: Well, machinery - it has advanced so much. Like, my dad had four horses and he farmed with them and then in 1936 he bought himself an Allis-Chalmers tractor and farmed with that, and then eventually got better stuff again, got rubber tired tractors—What else would you like to hear?

MG: This is wonderful. One of the questions we asked people as well is: what are some of the things your parents taught you about farming that you have tried to carry on?

JP: The biggest thing was to conserve moisture. To farm properly, you had to do it at the right time. We had quite a lot of trouble with horses. You couldn't always get over the land when you should, but since they got modern machinery it's got a lot easier.

MG: So, machinery could be used to conserve moisture? What are some examples of that?

JP: Well, to get the land in better shape, to get the seed to moisture—all those things.

MG: Did your family have to level your land at all?

JP: Well, we did that for irrigation, but we ended up with sprinkler irrigation, so we used to pump water out of this creek and water the land with it. In fact, they still do that some places. Our farm, some of it is pumped out of the creek and through these sprinkler pipes.

MG: What kind of pump system did they use? What were the pumps actually like?

JP: They were driven by a tractor—and eventually they got away from the tractor and began to use a centrifugal pump. My son, he waters with pumps half a section, I guess.

MG: What was your favourite thing about farming?

JP: I guess it was a gamble!

MG: Laughing! You don't need poker chips, eh?

JP: I like gambling, lots of gambling in this life.

MG: Don't need to go to Las Vegas?!

JP: No. Well, I don't know if there is anything else—

MG: What is the hardest part about farming? The gambling?!

JP: (Laughs) No, the hardest part about farming is the old style way of doing it. We didn't have any hydraulics.

MG: It was all by hand?

JP: Ya, stooking, thrashing and hauling the bundles to the thrashing machine. Nowadays, it's combines and that's all they have to do.

MG: What time would a typical day for you, growing up, start on the farm?

JP: I would get up at five in the morning. We used to have to gather in the horses we needed to work in the field, then you had to feed them, then you had breakfast, and then harness them up to get to work the land—

MG: What time would you get home?

JP: Well, you quit at twelve for dinner, go in the house for an hour and had dinner. Then you went back out again and worked until six, then went back in. You turned your horses out and then had supper.

MG: Did you have cattle?

JP: Yes, we used to raise a few cattle at my place. We really had to have some cattle in order get some money – in order to borrow some money from the bank. Farming- there was no credit there, but if you had a few cattle you could always pay the bank.

MG: Ah, so they were insurance, kind of? You had beef cattle?

JP: Yeah, beef cattle—probably about forty head. I have the two sons. The younger one, he's a straight cattle rancher. The other son, he is part grazing and part grain crops.

MG: Oh, ok—what types of crops did you have over the years?

JP: Spring wheat, sometimes durum—it's a softer wheat, a macaroni wheat. Yeah, they make macaroni out of durum wheat—

MG: Oh! That's not the shape it comes in?

JP: No.

MG: (Laughing).Ok, just checking. Did you have a type of crop you liked to put in? A favourite?

JP: Oh, you just grew what you thought would do the best—

MG: When we were, earlier today, we heard a story about a cougar being loose in the area—did you ever have any trouble like that with your livestock?

JP: No, we raised a few sheep one time, but the coyotes ate them more than we did!

MG: A coyote's dinner?!

JP: Yeah.

MG: How do you get rid of coyotes if they start chasing your animals?

JP: It's pretty hard—coyotes have been hard to irradiate—some of these trappers can snare them and catch them.

MG: So, you and your wife farmed for a number of years, then—

JP: Well, we were married in 1938 and moved to Maple Creek in 1980, so we farmed those years in between—

MG: 42 years, wow—

JP: She taught school different places—

MG: Oh, really? She was a teacher. What grades did she teach?

JP: Well, they used to have just one grade. No, several grades in a country school, maybe seven or eight.

MG: So, she would teach all of them? Wow, that's a lot different than a teacher now to know how to teach all of those grades. So, if you were to pass on words of wisdom to someone who was just buying a farm now, what would you tell them?

JP: I would tell them that they might as well retire first!

MG: You'd tell them to buy a ticket to Vegas and get it out of their system? Go gamble?

JP: That's the way it is, you know. You couldn't sell it for 10 dollars an acre. Now it would probably be a couple hundred dollars an acre, so you might as well just retire first!

MG: So, is there a key to having a successful farm do you think?

JP: Well, you got to study whatever grows the best in your district. A good thing is to try to conserve as much moisture as you can. Sometimes the level of moisture helps finish the crop. Well, is there anything else?

MG: Are there any stories you would like to share? A little story or anecdote about life around here? Anything you would like. We will be coming back though, once we get our discussion typed up and bring it to you. Then, if you think of any more things to share, there will be that opportunity. Nancy-Jean was just saying that one thing we were curious about that I forgot to ask was about your school days. Did you go to school around here?

JP: Well, I went to a country school. I used to ride 4 miles to school on the horse. Laura Parsonage, you met her, we started school together—

MG: She was talking about you this afternoon! She said to say hello! And she has a twin—

JP: Her sister—she lost three sisters and a brother-in-law, so there is just her and I left now to hold down the fort.

MG: Yeah! You were 8 and she was 9 when you started school, she was saying. Did you go all the way through together? Or just a few years?

JP: Well, just a few years because they built a new school in her area, before that they took them in the wagon. Didn't have any modern day busses.

MG: Who got picked up first? In the wagon? You or her?

JP: Nope, see I was in this district where we belonged to the school, and she belonged to the district that didn't, so they got picked up first. I still had to ride 4 miles—

MG: Did you play baseball too?

JP: Yes, I played—

MG: Did you play other sports in school? Or too busy working on the farm?

JP: Well, I don't know what else—

MG: Well, if you think of anything else, we will be back. This is just our first chat together. We would like to learn more about you and you can learn about what we have been talking with people about. Your stories really add to that – to the history of how everything around here has been over the years. We really thank you for that, thank you for having us.

JP: You are sure welcome.

MG: It's amazing how much information is in a conversation like this. You can really see it when you type it up.

JP: That's another thing—at Cypress Lake, we rented a farm when we first got married, lived on the east shore of the lake. There was no water in it. It was all dry. These whirlwinds - small cyclones is what they are – they'd be going across this lake bottom.

And the alkali dust would rise in the air from these cyclones—

MG: Did they look like little tornadoes? Oh my gosh! And they would be white?!

JP: Yes, alkali dust is white and it would get drawn up in the air—you could see them for miles—

MG: Were you scared of them?

JP: Oh, no! They were a common thing, those whirlwinds.

MG: Laura was talking about how her water that they drank at her house, her mom had to filter the alkali out of the water, because there was a lot of it. How often would those twisters come? Those whirlwinds?

JP: Oh, two or three a summer. They wouldn't do any damage; they would just be there and then...well, I don't know what else—

MG: You have answered all of the questions we had, unless there is anything you would like to add? You have very kindly answered everything we asked.

JP: I don't think so—

MG: Not this time?

JP: That farming when we were first married, when we rented that farm, we were involved in these grasshopper hoards, and the first year, they took quite a bit of our crop, and laid eggs that year. The next year they hatched and took the crop as it came out of the ground.

NJ: What year was that?

JP: That was 1939—

NJ: You are the first person who mentioned grasshoppers. They ate everything?

JP: Yeah, they took all of the crops coming up, so we decided to go home, to my mother and dad's, rented their place, and they moved to Vidora.

NJ: And where was your parents' place? Where was their farm?

JP: Our farm was back, it was where Brian's place is—oh! Our farm was back where Brian Pridmore's is, that was our farm, dad's farm.

NJ: So, grasshoppers were at Cypress Lake, where you rented a place—

JP: Yeah—

MG: '39 seems to be a tough year, over and over, it sounds like a tough year, then it shifted—

JP: Well, it got better, the prices and storage facilities—

NJ: Do you know Wilson Swihart?

JP: Yeah.

NJ: He had to take out a loan for seed, did you have to do that?

JP: No, I don't think so—

NJ: He has some papers that his relatives have which show how much he had to pay to buy seed.

JP: No, I don't think so. '37 was another bad year. My dad had to sell his cows, and we didn't have any hay – got about 10 dollars a piece for his cows.

MG: The whole thirties sound like it was bad – the whole decade sounds like it was pretty bad – you read about it in the history books, how bad it was—

JP: Yeah; you hear that story about that guy who borrowed two seed drills before he had to buy a binder.

MG: Oh my! Would you like a donut? We brought a donut for you! We have a donut for you. We have a whole bunch if you would like them!

JP: One is fine! Talking about droughts to donuts—

MG: Talking about droughts to floods, it's wonderful! It's so nice to hear about you and your family and where you came from.

Wrapping up, End of Tape

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