

CONSUL MUSEUM INCORPORATED
Oral History Collection – Section 2
Collected by Oral History Researcher Meagan Gough
Grace Darling Interview 2008 March 13

Catalogue No. 2.22 (E,R)

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Conducted in Grace Darling's home in Consul, SK

GD = Grace Darling

MG = Meagan Gough

Recording made with RCA DigitalVoice Recorder. Transferred to CD-R

MG: What is the history of your family here in Consul?

GD: My family actually lived up in the Divide area. That's where I was raised. We lived on a farm, a dryland farm, and Claydon was nine miles that way and Divide was nine miles that way. So we got our mail in Claydon. Took eggs in and did our grocery shopping in Divide, got our cream and whatever. There were five brothers and two sisters, eight of us. My mom was only seventeen when I was born, pretty young.

MG: Are you the oldest?

GD: I am the oldest, sad to say. Yeah, there are only four of us left out of the eight.

MG: Are they here in town?

GD: I have a sister that lives in Success. I don't know if you know where that is – just out of Swift Current. And a brother that lives out on the farm south of Divide. That's the only one that's very close. And my other brother is out in Kelowna.

MG: So your family, did they farm?

GD: It was a dryland farm, yeah, and they had a few cattle, but our herd never really got bigger than a dozen. So then the prices were horrible, you couldn't get anything for them. We used to walk to school, three miles to the little country school. Then we had to move. We had no high school, so when we wanted to go to high school we had to move to Claydon. I went to high school for two years there and then moved to Robsart. We all moved to Robsart and that's how I ended up in Robsart. I took grade eleven and twelve there.

MG: What year did you move there?

GD: Let's see, about '42, I guess. Moved everything we owned in a lumber wagon; we were real pioneers!

MG: It was sort of booming then, Robsart?

GD: Yeah, it was much more so than now, anyway. They had a pretty good high school, and I think that there were twelve of us that graduated from Grade 12 there.

MG: And what was your maiden name?

GD: Rush. R-u-s-h.

MG: Rush. Okay. I ask because I was talking with Archie Smiley yesterday about his experiences in Robsart and I am trying to picture who some of your neighbours were in Robsart.

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GD: Oh, yeah, I knew Archie and Lavone, have known them for years. Most of the people who were living there when we were there have either moved away or have passed on. Bert Olmsted's folks, well, they just moved to Swift Current a couple years ago. They were about the only ones that are left. It's sad; I hate to see the little towns die. Like when we lived in Divide, I didn't even know anything about Consul growing up; we didn't get that far from home! You didn't just start out that many miles in a lumber wagon—

MG: Without a purpose?

GD: Exactly! We didn't do any trading here or anything like that then.

MG: So did your husband's family live where?

GD: South of Divide.

MG: He grew up farming or ranching?

GD: They had a farm. His parents had a few cattle there and then they moved to Shaunavon when they needed medical help and his brother took over the farm, but he was a diabetic and not well, so eventually he had to move, too. My brother actually bought the farm.

MG: Your brother?

GD: Yes, and he still lives there. And now he has a place in Medicine Hat, so he's going to be moving, too. He has cattle, so he has to stay there to take care of them.

GD: Actually my story in Consul starts when I got married and moved here. My husband was working for the BA Oil Company. He had just got out of the Air Force and we were married in 1946. I came here and I didn't teach for about 16 years. I was a housewife and helped him with the business, and then they were so short of teachers they came and asked me if I would come back. So then I took university classes every summer. I would teach until the end of June and then the first part of July I would head to Saskatoon to take classes, get home, and go back to school! Until I got my teacher's certificate. Then I taught 25 years. So, it's been an interesting life.

MG: What grades did you teach?

GD: Grades 5 and 6, sometimes combined, sometimes I just had Grade 6. A wonderful bunch of kids.

MG: Aw, I am sure they thought the same of you.

GD: I sure hope that they did! I am sure though that there were some who weren't happy with what you did, but that's life. Now they are older kids with families. I'm going to be sad to leave here. It will be hard to cope with that.

MG: Are you planning on moving eventually?

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GD: Yeah, I am. I bought into a place in Swift Current. My sister and her husband are moving there and they talked me into moving. They say it's time to get out of Consul where you have to go everywhere for a doctor and stuff like that. So they talked me into it. They are building a place in the same building.

MG: What happened to a town like Robsart? Why did it become a virtual ghost town?

GD: People just started moving away; they had to get jobs and one by one they just started moving away and next thing you know, there is nothing left. And then once there's not many people the services leave, too, because they can't exist. Same with Govenlock and same with Senate, they have all gone that way; it's too bad. At one point Vidora was quite a thriving little village, too. And Govenlock at one time, what did they have, four banks or something? It was a real hub at that time; big hotel. We have to hang on to our school and things like that. Actually, when Robsart School closed most of the kids came here to Consul. That was a big blow. If we weren't in an outlying district like we are, we would be in danger of getting closed, too. Like they are closing these schools is ridiculous! You know, like Richmond and some of those little towns north of Maple Creek, they are fighting like the dickens to keep their schools open. The government is so short-sighted.

If I could bring my husband back I would. It seems lonely the last four years. It's been four years next month he has been gone.

MG: Do you want to talk a little about him?

GD: Sure.

MG: So he worked in the oil business?

GD: Yeah, for a few years and then he got his own gravel trucks and equipment and started his own gravel business. He did that for, oh, a lot of years, since the late 50's. He was ready to go... Four years ago, he had all his machinery ready to go for the next year and his heart just had a bad valve, and he went into the hospital. They were trying to build him up for an operation and he just didn't make it. So he was still doing the trucking. He was 82.

MG: And you have babies?

GD: No, we didn't have a family, one of our sadnesses of our lives. We wanted children, but didn't have any. Tried different things but nothing worked, so I guess it was meant to be.

MG: I guess all of your love got to go to all of your students?

GD: Yeah, I guess they were my family.

MG: Lucky students.

GD: Anyway, I have had lots of nieces and nephews, so it's been okay. Very disappointing for awhile, but you have to get over it. So anyway, Lloyd was a musician. He played for dances, loved to do public address for hockey games and ball games, anything that was going on.

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MG: Oh! A very social creature, by the sound of it.

GD: Oh yeah, very social. Yeah and he would be the, what do you call it, the presenter at weddings and anniversaries?

MG: Like an MC?

GD: Yeah, an MC. He would run the program for whatever they had. We were always busy. Ball games in the summer and, of course, he was busy with his work. But he always managed to take time to announce. You know he started announcing hockey games in Consul before there was even a rink in Consul. They had a sheet of ice poured on the ground and played hockey. And ball games, they used to be across the track, over in that area. Just had a backstop; no diamond, no booth, no nothing, but people would line up on Sundays and play ball. Govenlock, Senate, Robsart, Divide, Merryflat and Consul; all those teams would come together and have a wonderful time.

MG: I have talked to some of those MerryBattlers.

GD: Oh yes, they were quite the people! There is another area that, at one time, had so many people living there. It's filling up again, though. There are young people having children, so maybe eventually it will come back and we will have a ball team again. I don't know.

MG: What would be your hope with these towns? What would you like to see in 25 years? What would you like to see with Consul or Robsart?

GD: I would love to see them growing, but the way things are going it's not realistic, I don't think. I just hope that they can hang on. I don't think there will be any revival of the ones that are gone. Although the ones that were here before started from nothing, so you never know.

MG: Anything is possible, I guess.

GS: But the farming. Farms and ranches have been getting bigger; one family owns so much land. There isn't a place for people to get land if they want it in a lot of cases, so how are they going to move there if they don't have land? Big ranching and bigger farm machinery have led to bigger farms and bigger ranches, and so one family owns all of the acres where before they were just little plots. It's a different lifestyle.

MG: So it's been very hard for the small farmer?

GD: Oh yes, very, very hard. Yes it is.

MG: Has it changed a lot then in the last generation or two? How, like, the size is the main thing?

GD: Yes, I think that is the main thing. Someone once said, "You look here and in another 50 years there won't be anything but jackrabbits and sagebrush." I hope that's not true!

MG: Oh gosh, I hope that's not true!

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GD: But if people age and have to move away for care and things, what are you going to do?

MG: One of the things we have been asking people, in relation to you saying what a shame it would be to see this town die, what do you think makes a town like this a special place to live?

GD: The people, of course, I think. Anyplace, you know, it is the people who make it. A place is just houses and material things, but its heart is the people. Wonderful people in this area, this country, I think, anyway.

MG: I would have to agree with that!

GD: I am very partial to the southwest of ours.