

CONSUL MUSEUM INCORPORATED

Oral History Collection – Section 2

Collected by Oral History Researcher Meagan Gough

Ron and Delores Tittle Interview 2007 August 24

Catalogue No. 2.6 (E, R, WV)

Conducted on Tittle Home Site NE30-02-26-W3, SE of Consul, SK

RT= Ron Tittle: Interviewee

DT = Delores Tittle: Interviewee

MG = Meagan Gough: Interviewer

NJT = Nancy-Jean Taylor: Cameraman

24 August 2007

MG: So were you basically stuck here (due to flooding)?

RT: We were stuck here. I guess '97 was the last time we weren't able to get out, for three days.

MG: So, I guess you always have to be prepared for a flood in this house.

DT: Well, I think they flooded real bad in '52.

RT: Well, the garden hit four feet; the bunkhouse was sitting with two feet of water around it. The old house up there, Dad had built a five-foot dike around it to keep the water out. It was in the spring of the year. Dad had an old tumble bug and he plowed wherever he could find dirt that was uncovered enough to be able to use.

DT: April 13th.

MG: April 13th, 1952 - that's when it started, or that was the worst day?

RT: No, we weren't here for the worst day. My uncle rode down here. He had heard Lonesome Lake - and I can't remember the people - Nelson's, their dam had gone out up by Robsart.

DT: That's where Lacelles are now. You know that big flat of Warbergs'. There's a dam back behind that.

RT: Lonesome Lake at that time held a big pile of water (they don't hold water in it anymore), and it had washed out. That water come down past Billy Behrman's, just south of Vidora there, (you know where Billy Behrman lives? You went right by Billy's) and hits the creek between Vidora and Consul. That water was on top of what flood water was coming down from the hills. Then, over west here - you know where Gabruchs live? - they have a great big dam and that washed out and it all happened in conjunction with each other!

DT: That was Rotnems at that time, wasn't it.

RT: Yes. We really got it down in this area.

DT: No phones at that time.

RT: No phones. The only way we knew about it was my uncle had been in town—

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MG: What I was interested in the other day when you were talking about the flood, you were saying there was a fire, too!

RT: Well, '52. It started out in this family that my sister was born February 6th, my youngest sister. Mom was in the hospital for a gallbladder operation where she just about died just after that. April 13th was the flood, or when we left. It actually lasted quite a bit longer than that. August 23rd it froze. They had a super crop and it froze right out and made nothing. It was about the end of September when the fire started east of Claydon, went back down into the States and then come back up here. It burned probably 25 miles to 30 miles before they finally got it under control. They had fire trucks from Havre. They figured there was a thousand people fighting that fire. I know my dad and Schmidts were down there with ploughs trying to stop it. They hauled the coffee out of here in boilers.

DT: Cream cans, too.

RT: Cream cans, whatever they could put coffee in.

DT: The women came from all over. They would grab what they could grab to make sandwiches or whatever to feed all these people. The lightning that year was just unreal.

MG: So is that what caused it?

DT: The lightning, yes.

RT: But other than that, I have lived here since 1949.

MG: What are some of the things that you try to carry on and what are some of the things that you've seen change?

RT: The change has been drastic as far as the farming. I can remember my dad having that old D John Deere up there with no cab, sitting out in the environment. Today we sit there and watch all the environment hit the glass and turn the knob to where we are comfortable.

DT: I think people are more conscious to conserve the soil compared to what they used to be. Years ago they used to farm, turn everything over and make it black. And make it blow so like in the dirty thirties there was nothing but dust. Hopefully, we never see that again!

RT: Take a look west; we planted 35,000 trees out there.

DT: This dark green is all trees.

RT: There's 35,000 trees out there.

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DT: His mom would talk about how it was so bad, the dirt, and the windows weren't sealed that good those years. They put wet towels and rags on the bottom of the window sills to try to keep some of the dust out of the house, not dust, but dirt. She said it was nothing to wipe an inch of dirt off your table before every meal.

RT: You know, I think this RM is 36 miles by 36; 36 miles square. There's 490 people in it today, where probably back in the early '50s even, there were 2,000 people living here.

MG: Oh my gosh.

RT: There was Vidora. At one time, they had up to 400 people in it.

DT: It was the largest place between the three - Consul, Robsart, Vidora.

RT: You go west to Senate and Govenlock, there is absolutely nothing. All there is, is a sign for Senate. Govenlock, they still have the community hall.

MG: So what happened to the population?

RT: A lot of people couldn't stand the environment.

DT: Couldn't make a living.

RT: Couldn't make a living.

DT: If you have nothing to feed your family, you can't stay. I think that was the sad part. A lot of the families were big those days. It was nothing for there to be eight to twelve kids. Eight, I think, was a small family. Now most of them are only two. Quite a difference! I would never want to go back to those days. I can remember some, but not as much as you [Ron] remember.

RT: I remember in '49 when we come here, Dad going out with a one-way, at that time, and one-waying the Russian thistles out and then taking a horse-dump rake and raking them into piles and stacking them for feed. That's all there was for feed.

DT: The old house always sat right where this house is - that's where his folks always lived - and his mother had no way of keeping anything cold. They had an ice house out where the feed stacks are. That's where she went to take her milk, her butter, her cream. How many trips a day did she make? She has no idea. Hundreds of them!?

RT: We cut ice down at the CPR pump house; there was a pump house just a mile down the creek where they pumped the water up to the railroad track for the steamers, one of those big high water towers. I don't know if you've seen any pictures of those or not.

DT: That used to be Supreme.

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RT: That was a mile east of here, a station called Supreme. There was a dam on the creek that backed up the water (it was probably about 5 feet high) and Dad and Schmidts used to go down there and cut ice.

DT: The creek up to Supreme would have been a mile and a half? Or a mile?

RT: A mile. The water was pumped through a wooden pipe and the trench was 6 feet deep and it was all dug by hand. In 1913 there was no such thing as a steel culvert or backhoes or draglines or anything. It was all dug by hand.

MG: Do you think the community has changed? The population has changed, but when you were describing how people helped out with the fire. The community sense of value is still there?

DT: If you're in any trouble, they are still there to help you in any way. I think anybody in this community would give their shirt to you if you needed it. I think so.

MG: So even if there's less people, there's still that value there.

RT: It's still there. We maybe depend on each other more than we used to in a lot of ways.

DT: Sharing work. Well, maybe not so much work, but even a little bit of equipment here and there, or helping out with this or that, because the man power isn't there anymore. People don't have five boys at home to help out or something like that!

MG: It makes a big difference.

RT: We own a place up north, the Close Place. You come south of Vidora? There's three granaries and a set of corrals four miles south on the west side. That was owned by Closes. If you look up on top of the hill you see an old house. That was built in 1909. There was a family named Closes that moved up from South Dakota. They drove their steamer all the way from South Dakota up here and they built that house and it was a very unique house in a way. They built an oval window in it.

DT: Facing north.

RT: Looking north, and when you came over the hills, you'd see that light. They always kept a lantern or something in that window at night. It burnt all night.

MG: Oh, it would lead you home.

RT: It was very dry back in the '30s, and they just didn't have the water to grow. Even back until the lake [Cypress] was built up north, Battle Creek would go dry in the summertime.

DT: We've seen it dry.

RT: We've seen it dry.

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RT: Five years ago was the last time it was totally dry. It never started running 'til November that year.

MG: How's the drinking water around here?

RT: We haul it.

DT: We have to haul it from Consul.

RT: There is an artesian well at Consul that we haul from. Like Kevin's place, Reamers' place - all of those have deep wells.

DT: Except in the coulee by Bevin and Carrie's. That isn't a deep well.

RT: Well, that's a freak of nature. You can put a pump on that - an inch and a half pump - and you can pump 24 hours a day, seven days a week and it will never lower and never go dry!

The PF [PFRA which stands for Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Association] down here has spent thousands of dollars. They went right around the place and punched holes. They were bound and determined. They finally gave up and dug a deep well. We never could afford it. When Watsons dug their well it cost \$40,000, in 1981. The government came in and wanted to punch a hole to see what the Judith River water was like. We had a community meeting - there was us and Schmidts and Funks, Reamers, Chapmans and Watsons, I guess, in this area. We had a meeting and decided that Watsons needed it worse than anybody.

DT: Here we had the creek, and the cattle at least could drink out of the creek, but they had nothing; they were hauling water for cattle and everything, but that was mainly why they had chosen them.

RT: I worked for a seismograph outfit.... To get water is 1,000 feet. This hole, the last hole we drilled originally cost us \$11,000, but they got the casing out which saved us \$4,000, but that is a \$7,000 post hole.

RT: When I worked with the seismograph, we came in here on a Sunday afternoon and we punched four or five holes, 150 feet deep and there was nothing – it was all dry.

DT: In 1967 it flooded bad enough that we were totally surrounded by water here. It took the bridge out.

No, not in '67. It took both ends out. First it took the north end out and the water was high enough, finally it took the south end out. The bridge was sitting in the middle and you couldn't get to it from either end. When the water finally went down, you guys laid planks across it; we walked the planks.

RT: Yeah, it was high for so long.

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DT: I think it was three months we didn't cross the creek there. We had to either go by trolley car or walk the plank, like you say.

RT: Dad had taken a team across the creek and they were literally swimming. I can remember him taking the team and pulling the John Deere tractor across so he could seed. Everything to the east here used to be farmed. He pulled the John Deere tractor and seeder across with the horses because the water was so high he couldn't drive it across.

MG: What were your parent's names? I should ask that for the record.

RT: Steve and Mary.

MG: Steve and Mary. Their full names?

RT: Steve Tittle and Mary Ann Tittle.

MG: What was her maiden name?

RT: Messmer. She was raised about 12 miles west of here.

DT: I can remember her talking about (in the winter) going down with the stone boat and filling barrels of water and by the time you got back to the house they had either froze or dumped over. She was from a big family of nine, too, so just imagine hauling water for your entire household! They drank it and everything, too.

RT: We were different here because by fall Battle Creek would be running, so we always had lots of water. When we moved to this place, the man who had owned it had put a cistern in and a pump in the house, so we could pump the water up with a little old hand pump - one that's like the old one in front there [indicates the old cast pump outside of the house now]. That was in the house; that was 1949 when we moved here. In the fall, once the creek froze over, Dad would always fill the cistern and just before spring runoff he'd fill the cistern so we'd have drinking water for the summer and winter. We would go and chop ice, bring it up and put it in a boiler on the stove overnight so Mom could wash clothes the next morning.

DT: Things did get better; most people put in their own 32-volt power plants so everybody had their own power. Finally the power came in.

MG: How many children do you have?

RT: Our own? Kevin and Marla. [Referring to photos] There is Marla and her husband and grandkids.

DT: This is Kevin and Stacey.

RT: There is Kevin and Stacey. They live just over there and they got no kids.

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RT: No, the winters are not what they used to be. I can remember when we moved here, there wasn't the road there, but even if there would have been it would have been covered up with snow because the snow was so deep.

RT: The ice would jam up. Now we never get any runoff; the creek never gets high. When we first moved here, every spring, it was a ritual for the creek to be high. '52 was an extreme, but 1967 and 1986, that was the normal in the spring of the year.

RT: Yeah. I've got irrigated land a couple miles west of here. If you come straight south of Consul, instead of turning east or west you keep going south, you go right through the middle of my irrigation.

NJT: What plot is that?

RT: Nashlyn.

NJT: It's the Nashlyn?

RT: Yes. You can see the Nashlyn Reservoir when you come south of Consul when it's full. You can see the trees and dam now, but you can't see any water in the reservoir right now. It's pretty empty.

NJT: You've had a lot to do with irrigation, politically.

RT: I think my dad started irrigating in '53. He rented the plot we've got, and in 1967 he bought it. So, we have been involved in irrigation for a couple of years. I got involved politically, I guess you'd say, when I got nominated to Consul-Nashlyn Irrigation Board. Then I became chairman. From there I got nominated to a steering committee, which would be about 15 years ago, to set up the Saskatchewan Irrigation Projects Association. I spent three years as the first chairman for the Saskatchewan Irrigation Projects Association.

DT: But you're still a member.

RT: I am still an active board member, until December of this year and then I have to go off. I have been off one year in that time, because you could only spend two consecutive terms and then you have to take one year off.

MG: Do you hope to continue with that?

RT: I hope not. I hope I can talk somebody into stepping into my position. I have had enough arguing with politicians.

MG: You've done your share of bidding.

RT: Yes. I have probably spent 25 years involved in the political side of it all, the boards and all.

DT: You can never get too much water in this country, water reservoirs or whatever.

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RT: I was the one that worked in the late '70s and early '80s to get the Battle Creek Reservoir built, which political will decided that we didn't need.

NJT: Where would it have gone?

RT: It would have been about a mile and a half off the US border.

NJT: Oh, so that far south.

RT: Yes. It was to store water to make up for the deficit when we created a deficit up at Cypress Lake. It was actually a balancing reservoir is what it would have been.

NJT: To make sure the Americans get enough?

RT: Yes, to make sure the Americans got their share.

DT: This is an international water stream, and they have to have a share.

NJT: Yes, fifty percent.

RT: On a year like this we probably would have had it full now, because I am sure we have excess water.

DT: But you don't get credit for excess.

RT: We never get a credit for excess. We can always go into debt, but we can never go into excess.

NJT: So the idea is when it is a dry year we can use more and then put it back in from the lower one?

RT: It was a very good idea. The government that was in power at the time, they were actually ready to let the contract out; everything was done. We had passed our environmental studies, which took a lot of work to get past that and they were ready to let the contract out when the election was and then a change of government and...

DT: Back to square one again.

RT: Back to square one. It has not died. We have had several water conferences over the past four years, in Regina and different places and the Battle Creek Reservoir is talked about at all those conferences. I guess because I don't let it die is one of the reasons! They did some studies, and the fellow that did the studies fully recommended that any place there could be water stored, there should be something done about it. We control one of the most precious commodities that there is, and the most fresh water in the world, here in Saskatchewan. It's unbelievable and yet, we are doing nothing about it.

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DT: Who would have thought even ten years ago about everybody buying water? When you used to see people running around with bottled water, you'd look at them funny. But nowadays, that's just a common thing.

MG: There's people that have water coolers, I noticed, in their homes around here.

DT: A lot of them do, yes.

RT: I still have faith in the old flowing well.

DT: We don't have a water cooler yet, but who knows?

NJT: So you get it in town for free?

RT: From the artesian well, yes.

NJT: That's a lucky thing to have there, isn't it?

RT: I would like to have one penny for every gallon of water that has gone out of that well since it was drilled.

DT: Well, there's actually two wells side by side.

RT: There are two wells, side by side, but it's still....

NJT: Is that why Consul is there, because of the artesian wells, or did they find that after?

RT: Actually, Consul does not have the artesian wells. They have wells in Consul that are 230 feet deep; they have lots of water, but it is not from the same stream as those wells.

NJT: But the artesian wells are on Consul land or are they on someone else's land?

RT: No, actually it's not. It's on Darryl McGregor's land, a mile east of Consul. Scott Sanderson has got wells, but they are not artesian. You don't hit the artesian again until you get back out to Elaine Earl's and then down through Gabruchs'. About a mile from Gabruchs' buildings it runs out again. We have tried to find it, but we can't find it.

DT: That same flow must go through where Scotty Brown is.

RT: It's a very peaceful place to live.

*Note that at times Dolores is speaking with Nancy-Jean as Ron speaks to Meagan. Audio recording and transcription reflect most audible conversation.