

HERSTORY PROJECT

Mrs. Lamb interviewed by Helen Lovekin + KAREN DUBINSKY

Q. You lived on a farm in Saskatchewan?

A. Yes.

Q. Were your parents homesteading?

A. Yes, my father took the property for homesteading back in 1880.

Q. Do you have a large family?

A. Yes I and 8 children and Mother and Dad.

Q. When did you move to this area?

A. 1924.

Q. After you were married?

A. After I was married, yes.

Q. *knowing* What made you come here?

A. The dry weather out there, so we decided to come here. And because of the timber - out there we had no wood, we had to buy coal for fuel.

Q. So did you farm here as well?

A. Well, I guess you could call it farming - hay and we had cattle and horses and pigs and chickens.

Q. What did you think of this area?

A. We fell in love with it right away. After being on the Prairie, we were about 30 miles from the lake and here we got probably right on the edge of the lake.

Q. How do you feel about having this papermill here?

A. I don't know what we would do without it.

Q. You married in Saskatchewan?

A. Yes.

Q. And your husband was also a farmer?

A. Yes.

Q. Where was your farm here?

A. At Rscham, north of here - we don't pronounce it correctly so they tell us it should be pronounced Rikam.

Q. When you came here did you have children at that time?

A. Yes, I had four of them, two boys and two girls.

Q. So your whole family moved here.

A. Yes.

Q. How did you come down, by train?

A. Yes, we came by train. My husband came in the car with the stock and implements and I came with the children in the train.

Q. Were your children very young when you had to be moved up here?

A. I was 32 and my husband was 36.

Q. So that would be a rather long journey with children on a train.

A. Oh it was, they got very tired and the youngest one, he was $2\frac{1}{2}$, he would say everytime the train stopped, "Now come on Mommie, get off this rickety old train." He didn't like it at all, he had never been on a train before.

Q. What was the home like that you came to here?

A. We just stayed with a neighbour we had known before we came down here. He generously gave us his kitchen to live in until we got a log house up on the homestead.

Q. How long did that take?

A. Five months.

Q. So what you had to start off with in building your home here was pretty rough.

A. It was built with rough logs, yes. And there was a small sawmill here and we could get lumber for the floor and the roof.

Q. How did you keep it warm?

A. By woodstove.

Q. Was that very good for heat?

A. Oh, yes, wonderful. We had wood stoves out in the Prairies too but we didn't have timber so we had to use coal. But here, after being in the country where there was no wood, every chip and stick was used carefully.

Q. Were you pretty isolated on the farm or did you have neighbors close by?

A. Here we had neighbors very close and at the time we came there were a lot of people coming in here. They wanted to get away from the dry regions.

Q. So here you had neighbors and in Saskatchewan your neighbors would be further away. You would be more isolated?

A. No, about $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile was the nearest neighbor there. That was about the same here.

Q. How did the climate here affect you?

A. We didn't find a great deal of difference. We had cold winters in the Prairies but we had a lot more rain here in the summertime.

Q. Could I ask you how old you are?

A. 88 going on 89.

- Q. You grew up in Saskatchewan. Your mother also came from England?
- A. No, my mother was raised in the east. Her parents had come from Scotland just before she was born.
- Q. How did she cope with the homestead?
- A. They found it rather rugged after the east, with all their fruits and nice gardens and all that and come out to the Prairies where they had to break up the land and gradually work into fruits and vegetables. Of course they started out with oxen for power.
- Q. You would have had a lot to endure, a lot of hard work and very different from what your father and mother were used to. Did she teach you anything about how to cope with life?
- A. Yes it teaches you patience for one thing. You just have to be patient and take things in their stride and as they come.
- Q. Can you think of any particular incident which demonstrated to you what you would need to have in your later life as a girl?
- A. We had to make everything. We had to knit the socks and mitts and caps and things and make the other clothing from materials. One difference I noticed a great deal now - I remember one time my mother called me in, Eaton's in those days used to send out samples of materials for dry goods and my mother got samples and she called me in to pick out a piece that I would like to have for a dress. I chose a nice pink one with little dots in it and it was 5¢ a yard. One year I made the dress - that is something that I have often thought of since the price we had to pay for material now. I wish I had kept a piece of that material.
- Q. Can you think of any stories she taught you by her example as a mother?
- A. She taught the girls all through that we had to take a hand at cooking or dish-washing or getting vegetables prepared.
- Q. What about education? Was she anxious that you got your schooling?
- A. By this time, the time I was old enough to go to school, they had got a sort of grant to pay someone to teach in a private home. By the time I was at the school age they had a school building and homemade desks and seats - so they weren't very comfortable to sit on.
- Q. You had brothers as well?
- A. Yes, five brothers and two sisters. There was eight of us all together.
- Q. Were you all encouraged equally to go on with your education?
- A. Oh yes - I wanted to go on. But if they would rather choose some other life - two of my brothers chose railroading engineers.

- Q. Did you work before you married?
- A. Just at home, that's all. There was the children.
- Q. You are the oldest of the daughters?
- A. I was the oldest of the family.
- Q. You had some additional responsibilities?
- A. Yes, and I thought that wasn't fair. Too many things I think - she wanted me to supervise and it didn't turn out quite right and I got chastized for it.
- Q. What kinds of things were you able to do to brighten up your house and make it more into a home?
- A. Oh, embroidery work and we gathered these flowers and bullrushes in the fall and tied them up with - well we would crochet a straight tie and make a little bow on that. Sometimes we put them in a fruit sealer and put them on an organ or something like that.
- Q. Do you do those paintings?
- A. I did the center one, the other two are done by friends.
- Q. Did you find you had a talent for painting when you were young?
- A. No, this was after - my family were pretty near all away when I started to paint. The lady here was the President of our Women's Institute and she was just a natural painter - she had no schooling on it at all. We were all so keen on her work and she said, "Well if you ladies would like to learn, we could arrange for some painting lessons." So she did.
- Q. Did you do quilting?
- A. Yes, lots of quilts. Pieces now that we wouldn't bother with.
- Q. Did you have one of your children at home?
- A. Yes, they were all born at home. There was no hospital like now.
- Q. Who helped you when your time came?
- A. Just a neighbor lady and then I had the doctor here. There was a doctor and he had a large community and it was difficult to get him. I just remember my mother telling that when I was born my Dad had to go 20 miles with an ox hitched in a hay rider to get a doctor. He had a pony of course and could come much quicker.
- Q. When you were having your children did any of those old stories occur to you about your childhood.
- A. Oh, yes, sure. Especially the first one. It made me think of what my mother had gone through.
- Q. Did it give you more strength ?

- A. Well, I guess it did in a way. You think that if your mother can do it so can you.
- Q. You would have been bringing your children up in the depression?
- A. Yes, that was hard because we couldn't get the things that we really wanted. The things that they needed. We couldn't get the things for their lunch, in fact, that we would like to get.
- Q. What would you be able to get them for their lunch?
- A. Mostly just a sandwich made of homemade bread and homemade butter and the meat was home cured also. And jam, we picked a lot of fruit and made jam out of that.
- Q. Being on a farm, I guess you never have to go without food at all?
- A. No, we were never short of food - we grew our vegetables and I think back now and I see wagon loads of potatoes and carrots and beets and turnips and things that were cooling in our basement. We just wondered how we could get through them all in the winter. We were all ready for next spring and to start again.
- Q. Would you have to go without or economize on things like clothing or household utensils?
- A. Yes, you get one good dress made and that would be handed down from one to another. With my mother, I remember she had her wedding dress, a brown silk, and she had that one for 25 years, that was her good dress. Wherever she went she had to wear that.
- Q. You mentioned the Women's Institute. What year did you join?
- A. My mother and I had joined to a Homemakers Club in Saskatchewan which is practically the same thing.
- Q. Did you join the Women's Institute here shortly after you moved here?
- A. Yes, in '26 we organized our Institute here.
- Q. Did that help you meet new people in the area?
- A. Oh, yes. Many of the things we did helped the school and teachers and furniture. The Institute supplied the furniture for the first school.
- Q. What kind of fund raising things did you do?
- A. We put on concerts and we had a wonderful lot of people here for entertaining. So we put a great deal of that on. Then we made quilts and sold them and we knit caps and mitts and sold them.
- Q. Did you see the Institute as a club that helped people?
- A. Oh yes, it was wonderful.
- Q. But it was something for yourself too.
- A. Especially for the women. It really raised their lot a good deal.

Q. How?

A. By getting them all together. Exchanging recipes and methods of housework. I don't know, perhaps you've heard this story of the lady that first started the Institute. She was just a young girl and I think she was raised near Toronto and she wanted to be a teacher and she became one and in those days they had to teach two or three years in a rural district before they were eligible for a town. So she did this and while she was putting in her three years out in the country she fell in love with a young fellow at the house where she was boarding and finally got married. She went out giving lectures on organizations of the women so after a time - Erlin Lee was then the Minister of Agriculture and he told Mrs. Hoodless that if she wanted to get an organization for women he would do all he could to help her. He was the President of the Farmers Department. He did help with that a lot because he went around demonstrating and lecturing what the things would be like for the women. That is how the organization started and it is still going.

Q. It seems to have caught on really quickly.

A. Our membership now is $8\frac{1}{2}$ million. All, of course, over the world.

Q. Did your institute do the Tweedsmere history?

A. Yes, we're doing that.

Q. You mentioned that the women organized and you said that was a very good thing, was there a definite lack of women getting together in this community, not sharing things?

A. There was until we started organizing the Women's Institute. Then they caught into that very readily.

Q. How did you arrange things so you could have your afternoons or evenings free? Did you leave your children with your husband or...?

A. We took the children with us. Nothing like a day care centre nowadays, we had to take our children with us. Carry them on our backs and go wherever we could.

Q. Very often, one hears the idea that women can't work together.

A. We haven't had anything like that - very little. Over 50 years nothing like that has happened that is worth mentioning.

Q. It made enough of a difference apparently to the lives of the women to make it worthwhile.

A. It certainly did. A wonderful difference to women's life.

Q. What did you, what kind of a woman's life did you lead?

- A. We had so much work doing, we couldn't get into mischief.
- Q. What kind of work did you do in the farm in Northern Ontario?
- A. Almost anything - on the Prairies I used to drive the horses and harrow or whatever it was, depending on what you had to do. I milked cows, I milked as many as 20 cows at one time.
- Q. So, in your circumstances, people just did what they could and it wasn't a matter of a man doing this or a woman doing that.
- A. Oh, no. If a man was busy at something else, you took over what he hadn't been doing. If you didn't know how you had to learn how.
- Q. And the kids would all help too?
- A. Oh, yes, they were right there to help out. The young people in those days were more willing to do these sort of things. Today there are very few of them that want to do any work.
- Q. Did you have any time just to sit down and think by yourself?
- A. Very seldom, sometimes in the evening, especially in the winter time. But then you would be knitting or sewing or something.
- Q. Did you find that frustrating?
- A. No we just enjoyed it. Took each day as it came along. We had games, we would get together and sometimes in the winter in the afternoon. We all had home-made sleighs for sliding down the hills and we would gather, about 10 or 12 of us, and sleigh ride for the afternoon and then we would go in and make doughnuts and coffee. That was our amusements in the afternoons. In the summer-time we played outside games all the time. We would play with the children, "Ring around the Rosy" etc.
- Q. Were there dances and things?
- A. Yes, we had dances once a month, the difficulty was to get music for it.
- Q. Would it be just local people?
- A. Just local people.
- Q. Would the dances be held in the homes?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What kind of music - would you get accordion, violin?
- A. Yes, accordion, violin, guitar. There was no piano.
- Q. Did you use the organ?
- A. Yes, that was used at many a dance.
- Q. Did you bring it from Saskatchewan?
- A. No, we bought it here - it was the first organ that was sent up to Dryden...

There was a teacher here, Mrs. Ryto who came up from the east to teach and in the summer time instead of her going back home, she had her brothers and sisters come out. Also some friends came too. When they went to church here, the Presbyterian Church, and they thought it was awful because there was no music. You had to have a person who would lead the singing. When they went back home they got their auxiliary busy and bought this organ and sent it up here. When they got better off and decided to get a better organ, we bought it from them. It cost \$35. I've been offering \$500 now but no one would take it.

Q. \$500 is not enough. Can you recall when women got the vote?

A. Yes, that was a very interesting time. We were very excited and tried to get every woman to vote. We had a number of Ukrainian families here and it was hard to get them interested in voting, they joined the Institute and were great workers but when it came to voting, they had a different idea.

Q. What was your idea about voting?

A. I thought the women should have the same opportunities as men. Get the right to vote and exercise your wishes.

Q. Do you remember any of the demonstrations or speeches on the part of the suffragettes?

A. I don't think we had few of them.

Q. How about in Saskatchewan?

A. Yes, I think there were more than down here. They were more excited about the vote up there.

Q. Do you remember the attitude of some of the men around here? When women were first allowed to vote.

A. Oh, yes, the men thought we should stay home and mind the babies - that's what they told us.

Q. But you didn't listen to them.

A. No. There was one man who before he got married had given his lady love a ring with ten little diamonds in it and a pearl in the center. Well, she was looking at it and admiring it and he says, "That is ten boys and one girl" and she said, "You'd better get an incubator."

Q. What did it feel like when you cast your first ballot - did it feel like you had gotten somewhere?

A. Yes, I had the feeling that we were rising a little bit anyway.

- Q. Were you involved in any suffragette activities or the Women's Christian Temperance Party?
- A. Yes, we used to help with that too. That was more on the Prairies.
- Q. How do you feel about the women's movement today? Do you feel that we are still working for the same thing?
- A. Yes, it seems that it is the same as me, maybe I'm old fashioned - it seems that we are going up another step.
- Q. Things took a long time.
- A. Yes, that is right.
- Q. Was your family affected by either of the wars?
- A. Well it goes back to my great grandfather, he fought in the Boer War and my grandfather was in the African War and then my father was in the , I can't remember what year that was because he didn't go overseas, he was just training on the Prairie and then my two sons were in the last war.
- Q. What was it like after seeing the First World War and they say that this is the war to end all wars - to have to send your boys off to a Second World War?
- A. We didn't agree with it at all. We thought there should be some other way of setting things. Rather than taking a King or a country all the time.
- Q. What kind of work did the women do here after the War?
- A. Beside homesteading?
- Q. What about the women that stayed home?
- A. They were working for them and knitting things to send overseas and canning vegetables and fruits and meats to send over.
- Q. Did that accomplishment make the women feel that they were doing something for the country?
- A. Yes, I think that they felt they were really helping with the war.
- Q. The more I hear about women knitting clothes etc., the more I think that the government didn't issue them. We also heard that there seemed to be more of a commitment on the civilian women's part, to the First World War. They seemed to work harder for it than the Second.
- A. I've heard that too, but I couldn't say that it was so. Either in the Prairie or down here. Women worked equally as hard in one war as the other.
- Q. I suppose if your children are involved, it becomes much more personal. What do you think was one of the hardest parts of being a farm woman?
- A. It is much easier nowadays. The farmwomen have as many household conveniences as do city people.
- Q. Would there be a chore that you particularly hated to do?

- A. Oh, yes, dishwashing for one thing.
- Q. Hating dishwashing sure hasn't gone out of style.
- A. No it hasn't, even if I do have a dishwasher.
- Q. Unlike a lot of women your age, you are not telling us that we should be home having babies and looking after them and you are quite interested about the affairs of women. Why do you think you picked that up?
- A. From my mother I think. She was very much that way. She was very much in favor of better conditions for women.
- Q. Was there any particular reason?
- A. All the women around her, especially on the Prairie, they just did as much work as the men really.
- Q. You are probably familiar with the Irene Murdock case out in the Prairies? What were your views on that?
- A. I don't know what to think of that. So far we haven't got too much information on it.
- Q. You told us that most farm women worked hard if not harder than the men, so if something happens to their family, do you think it should be divided equally between them?
- A. I think that would be a proper thing if they worked equally hard.
- Q. The women have to work outside on the farm as well as inside, and often they are a man's work persay, did the men in your family ever share any of the chores inside the house?
- A. Oh, yes, some of them did, but some of them wouldn't take to the housework at all. My grandfather and my father were quite willing to take a turn at washing the dishes or peeling potatoes.
- Q. Even now if you can get your brother or your boyfriend or your husband to wash your dishes it is a real accomplishment. Did your husband help you out with your children?
- A. Yes, he was always willing to do whatever he could. I was raised in such a large family that I got used to doing everything in connection with children. If I asked him to do things he was willing to do it. Sometimes he would say, "I'll do it if you show me how" .
- Q. How did you feel about other women who would do twice as much work as their husbands - working outside and then working inside?
- A. We had one case like that that used to rile me because he was a schoolteacher and he would go out and set out so many yards of land for his wife to clear

while he was teaching.

Q. Chopping up wood?

A. Yes, cutting the wood and clearing the stumps and everything. That used to annoy me.

Q. Did you ever speak with her about it?

A. No, I never, it wasn't my business. I didn't want to make trouble between them. If she was willing to do it for him, I guess it was best just to leave it as it was.

Q. What was it like in a rural community if there was a family and somebody was being mistreated but there were no government agencies?

A. I don't know just how far the neighbors could have gone, but in this case, they didn't do anything. If they - sometimes, some of the ladies would go over and help her, clear the brush etc.

Q. What about in a case where someone drank too much and would get violent?

A. In that case, some of the men would interfere.

Q. So if somebody was beating their wife, a neighbor would come and beat them?

A. I don't know whether they would beat him or not but they would do something.

Q. So you had your own policing force. How far north was the community you lived in?

A. Fifteen miles north.

Q. So did you get into town much?

A. No, it was a year and a half before I ever saw it. We were too busy getting our home up and the barn for the stock and chickens.

Q. Would it be a treat if you had to come into town?

A. No because you had to ride in a wagon and there was no road. I dread to think of it now.

Q. So it wasn't something you looked forward to doing?

A. No.

Q. When your children were grown up did you begin feeling lonely? You'd worked so hard to establish this home.

A. No because I had some knitting or sewing or something to do. There was no time for loneliness. Evelyn, the eldest one, she was only 13 and I had to send her to Winnipeg to go to college because she wanted to be a teacher. Two years later, Frances wanted to be a bookkeeper so I had to send her to Winnipeg too. I had to pick berries to pay for their board. Then I got working for some lady who wanted me to be there with her children when she was going out.

I worked for the board and that helped out a lot.

Q. So in the early days you would pick berries and what?, sell jam.

A. No, just sell the berries. I used to pick about a \$100 worth and that was a lot of money in those days. It was a lot of berries too.

Q. How long would it take you to pick a \$100 worth?

A. All the berry season, as soon as the berries got frozen we couldn't sell them anymore. We would start about the 20th of July but there wouldn't be very many for picking and later on into August we could pick maybe three baskets a day, my husband and I. The children would pick maybe two baskets each.

Q. So you believe as long as you can keep active and do something useful there is no reason to be lonely.

A. That is the way I feel. I've always been that way.

Q. Aside from your mother, can you think of any other woman who affected your life or the way you thought?

A. No, unless for my grandmother or mother's mother. She was a very proud Scot and I used to have to go stay with her during the winter because my uncle was up at the barn most of the day and she was getting on in years and they were all afraid she might take ill or something so I had to go and spend my winter months there. I remember one day, their cattle weren't used to children, just grown ups so one day she asked me to take the potatoe peelings out to where the cows were milking. And I didn't like to go. I was afraid of those great big long horned cattle. She asked what was the matter with me and I said I was afraid of their long horns and she said, "Ah, lassie you do not trust your Lord or you would not be afraid to go out there." I thought, the Lord was a long way from me, when those cattle got after me.

Q. So a lot of determination was in your family.

A. Yes, on both sides - my mother and father both were determined and I guess that is what pulled them through.

Q. Were they very strict on you as a child?

A. Just about the same as all the children were. The parents were a great deal more stricter than they are today.

Q. Were you as strict with your own children as your mother was?

A. No, I don't think I was.

Q. What were the sort of things that you didn't want to do to them?

A. I always tried to straighten things out without trying to spank them. I didn't

like that idea. I think that was just taking the spanking out on them for nothing really. If you start when they are young and make them understand what they should do and what they shouldn't do, then you don't need to do the spanking that some people do. What they call child-beating now.

Q. How important was the Church in your life?

A. Very much so until we did come down here. Dryden was the nearest church and if you didn't own a team of horses and a wagon you couldn't go in time to get there. So we used to have Sunday school and every Sunday it would be in a different home. We would have an elderly man take the boys and men and an older lady for the older ones and I generally had the little ones.

Q. Was the Sunday school important because it brought people together?

A. Oh, yes, in that way. We used to get the missionairies that came in and they were stationed at Sioux Lookout and he would come up once a week and hold service in the evenings here., at the different houses.

Q. Did you ever get your own church?

A. Not up there, no. He came out to Dryden and I think we had 7 churches here. Do you live here?

A. No.

A. I was wondering if you lived here you would know better the number of churches.

Q. If you were our age is there anything you would like to do?

A. I won't say I'd like to do it over again because I could make a lot of corrections.

Q. What would you like to correct?

A. A number of things I had to put up with and I didn't like.

Q. Would it be too personal to ask what they are?

A. Different people coming in to settle here. Some of them would come in and they would be quite socialble and help out with everything. Then there would be others that would come in that would just seem to fight and go against what you were trying to do all the time. That was one thing that bothered me a lot.

Q. Were there many non-English speaking immigrants?

A. Yes, there was quite a lot of them.

Q. Was there much interaction between those people? And yourselves?

A. They tried to mix with them and get them to see their way and try to impress upon them that they were in this country now and that they weren't in their old country, and these were new rules that they had to abide by.

- A. For instance, when the women got the vote - especially the Russians, they could not see that the women should get any vote at all. She should just do what her husband wanted her to do.
- Q. Would this be the views of the Russian men or the Russian women or both?
- A. The Russian men mostly, but the women too. That is all they ever knew. As things went on and they got older, then they could see our views.
- Q. How involved was the Women's Institute in women's rights?
- A. They really took a leading part here.
- Q. What kinds of things, other than the vote?
- A. The lady that organized it - Mrs. Hoodless - she went around and practically spent the rest of her life going around and lecturing and getting women to join, the Institute. Sometimes I'd hear stories of women walking twenty miles through the snow down East to get to wherever she was lecturing.
- Q. Do you recall the views of some of the men in your community towards the Institute?
- A. They were just as eager to see it a success - they did all sorts of things to help.
- Q. Was that because you did so much social work as well?
- A. It might be, yes.
- Q. What do you think of the change in women's roles?
- A. It is much easier for them although there is a certain degree of "trying to keep up with the Joneses". We didn't do that, we were satisfied with our log cabin and woodstove.
- Q. Insofar as she has changed in society - how laws have changed - instead of saying we are asking for things we are fighting for them now and sometimes we get listened to. Are you glad to see this happen?
- A. I guess we will all be able to have somebody to carry on the work.
- Q. I hope so.
- A. there are women here who might be able to give you more information than I can.
- Q. You've been very interesting.
- A. There are 62 residents here.
- Q. Do you enjoy living here?
- A. Yes, but when you've been used to living in your own home it's different. I try to keep busy. I usually spend the summer out at the farm but this spring I had a gall stone attack and they wouldn't let me go out there alone.
- Q. You made dresses and things from tobacco pouches?
- A. No, from flour bags. They weren't itchy, they were smooth after you washed them.