

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Homer Hayden

INTERVIEWER: Nadine Mackenzie

DATE: May 1983

HH: [in mid sentence]. . .Dodge was quite a town in those days because it was where all the gunfighters lived, at one time, for a short period, like I said,

NM: This is Nadine Mackenzie speaking. I am at the residence of Mr. & Mrs. Homer Hayden in Longview, about 50 miles south of Calgary. Mr. Hayden, thank you very much for having accepted to participate in our oral history project. How long have you been living in Longview?

HH: Since 1937.

NM: What did it look like when you came?

HH: There was only three buildings when I came to Longview in March, the spring of '37. The oil fields moved down to this end and there was a lot of activity in this area at that time.

NM: What made you come to Longview?

HH: Well, I was born on a farm and we farmed 12 miles west of Nanton. The crops weren't very good, the places were not very good, the last wheat I sold off, the '36 crop, I got 27 cents a bushel for it and it cost 14 cents to get it thrashed. It was kind of a disappointing outlook at the farm in those days and then Turner Valley started to boom again and that's what brought me to Longview. That little town was just starting to build up, there were only 3 buildings here when I come here first. A Chinaman by the name of Long Tom??? had the first building, a little restaurant in town and then the store next door to him and a boarding house and that was the three buildings that were here when I came here in '37.

NM: Your parents were farmers?

HH: My parents came from the States. My grandfather homesteaded in the state of Washington before it was even a state. He stayed there for some time and the Indians used to come around quite a bit, they didn't like him too good but they liked my grandmother, they'd come in and put war dances on for her with white man's scalps hanging on their belts. Eventually they moved out into Nebraska and then with his three boys, he decided to come to Canada. They came to Canada in 1907, grandfather and his three boys and decided to buy some land 12 miles west of Nanton. The land was split up into three parts for each boy. My dad had so much and my two uncles had the others. The first year that dad was in the Nanton area, before they bought the farm though, he lived in a little building east of Nanton about 6 miles, that's where I was born. He did a lot of breaking for the settlers that were coming into that area at that time. Mother and dad were married in Kansas and they went on their honeymoon in a covered wagon for quite a distance.

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Tape 1 Side 2

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Tape 2 Side 1

NM: This is the second interview with Homer Hayden. Turner Valley went booming because of a gas fault. Can you talk about it?

HH: Actually I think that's more in your geologists line to know about where this gas fault . . . there was supposed to be a fault that. . .there wasn't any oil in this part of Alberta at all, it was quite a surprise when the discovery well drilled by R. A. Brown, on the hill here, struck crude oil, which started the boom in '36, '37. That's when the farmers and everybody that thought they could make some easy money, drifted into here. The little towns just sprouted up, nearly overnight. If you wanted to build a house here all you had to do was go to the landowner and inquire about buying a lot or renting a lot and they'd come and stake you out a lot and take your name and things and you paid so much a month for your lot, you see and you could build your house on it. The rent wasn't too high, most of the people, as I say, could hook on to the gas, free gas, and they could live quite cheaply here. Most of them did quite well. Some of them that didn't do so good went back to the farms and things. But the little towns that grew up, like Little Chicago and Little New York, grew to a pretty good size. Some of our own Canadians thought it was terrible to call good Canadian soil after American cities. But actually the name of Little Chicago came first. There was a store keeper in Little Chicago, name was Rex Warman, he had a little store there and farmers and people coming in, and building houses, usually all the money that they had, they'd run up some pretty good bills at this store and he got quite put out about them running such bills up and not paying and he went after them and they nicknamed him Al Capone. He had a little scar on his face like Al Capone. And of course, too, besides that, there was a good sized lake right along, just on the edge of Little Chicago and one right in the centre of it. They're dry now, they've been dry quite a bit this last year, but they were good size lakes in those days. At one time the road from Turner Valley to Little Chicago had a foot of water on it where this lake was over the road. So they nicknamed the town Little Chicago. There was no road right down the hill in '37, from Little Chicago down to where Little New York was going up, but they eventually built one that year. But people would come down to Little New York and they would say, well, what's this town going to be and we'd always say, this is Little New York, this is going to be a bigger town than that up on the hill, just jokingly and that's actually how the names got started. Then there was Little Philadelphia, a little place up the river a ways here. I don't know just how it started its name, I suppose because the other towns were called Little Chicago, Little New York that they thought they'd call it Little Philadelphia. But there was another little settlement, down close to the Mercury plant that they called Little Tulsa, where all the drillers and tool pushers from Oklahoma

went together. They had their own well and built their houses all in one little cluster there. That was called Little Tulsa. Little Chicago reverted back to the name of Royalties, they had a post office they called Royalties there. It eventually closed down, as the royalties just started to go down, people moving out, moving out, now there's only a few people living there. Longview, or Little New York as it was called in those days, seemed to stay a little more stable and a few people moved in. Then we got formed into a village and they moved the post office up from the country post office, 3 or 4 miles east, up to Longview and with it came the name of Longview. And now Longview has our post office, we have quite a few nice houses in the town now, our streets are all numbered, houses are supposed to have numbers on them, the streets all have names rather and we have an up-to-date sewage plant and a water pumping station. We even have a mayor of the town, which I should say is my son now, he's the mayor of the town.

#062 NM: Turner Valley was full of pipelines and you mention that there was even some ice on them, in summer.

HH: Oh yes. The pipelines in early days here, they didn't have time to bury them all, they laid them right on top of the ground for the time being. Eventually most of them are buried, some of them were taken up and it's only the essential pipelines that are being used. There's lots of pipelines that are in the ground that have disintegrated so that they're not able to use them. Some of them are really in good condition but they're not being used anymore, no use for them. In the early days here, when the gas pressure was so high, it was quite often to see a pipe covered with frost right in the middle of summertime, a real hot day, there's be an inch of ice on the outside of the pipe. Some people thought because it was so cold in the ground but actually it wasn't the cold in the ground that caused the frost, it was the high pressure of the gas expanding so fast, that as it came out through the pipe it took all the heat out of the pipe and the pipe got so cold that they condensation that formed on it would form into ice. Sometimes there's be an inch of white frost on the pipe right in the middle of the summer, which was quite common here when the gas pressures were high enough to create this.

NM: It's amazing really. You saw the decline of Turner Valley, can you talk about it?

HH: Turner Valley started to decline when they struck a few wells up in the Redwater field and in the northern part of Alberta. At the south end they drilled one or two holes that were dry. They had a few outstanding wells around that had been drilled, even though the last couple of years there has been a well drilled just east of us here, which was a dry hole too. So they have actually drilled out I guess, all of the potential of this end of the field. Someday they might come back in and there might be another discovery well, who knows.

NM: But what happened, there were people leaving Turner Valley?

HH: No. I don't think people. . there were a few people, the people that worked on the oil rigs, drillers and roughnecks and things, they'd move along to wherever there was drilling. They'll move to those areas, you see. But now, in Turner Valley and Black Diamond, there's quite a few people that have returned in these towns and they make up quite a few . . . I don't know just how many there'd be retired, there'd be quite a number in Turner Valley and Black Diamond, not so many in Longview have retired. Besides the other people that work in Calgary, there's quite a few that commute to Calgary now and work

in offices and different jobs, machine shops and things like that. There's enough here, it seems like in Longview now. . . I don't know how many people that commute to Calgary, there's quite a number that go to Calgary and work. And then there's the plants, like Western Decalta??? employ quite a few men that live in town and Turner Valley and Black Diamond too. They have quite a number and we have a few employees too that help to make up the number of people that live in the area. And there's a few farmers that have houses for their men too, that work for them. So every thing helps out to make it a better village. We have a few nice houses now, in Longview, actually have quite a few nice houses in Longview.

#108 NM: There was a coal mine in Turner Valley, what happened to it?

HH: Coal mines. There's coal all over this area. Black Diamond was named because there was coal there at one time. Then we have a little place here down the river from Longview about a mile, it's called Coal Creek, coal out croppings on the bank there and there was quite a few mines at one time were running here, when they supplied coal for the power plant in High River. In fact even the coal trail, it's called the coal trail, going from Longview into High River because so much coal was hauled out of here to High River, back in the 20's.

NM: Were there many people working in these coal mines?

HH: A few miners you see. Not too many. They seemed to make a living out of it. We had two old English fellows that had a coal mine down here when I came here in '37 and they were still working it. It went on an angle down underneath the river bed and they were getting good coal out of there and there wasn't a drop of water in the mine from the rivers.

NM: Mrs. Hayden, you were a teacher in Longview in 1929, can you talk a bit about it?

MH: I was very pleased to be asked to be a teacher at Uphill, because there were so many of us that graduated that year from the normal school, that schools were very scarce. So I was very pleased to be asked by the . . .

NM: The Board of Education?

MH: No, the local board, the School Board. I had 5 pupils from one family who were ranchers in the area and then the other children came from the development of the Mercury Plant.

NM: So did you have a lot of contact with the mothers of these children?

MH: No, not too much because of the distances. There was not a road then between the Longview road and the Mercury road. So you had to go back east and over the hill by the BA Plant, if you wanted to go in a vehicle, so horses were the mode of travel then. Eventually I had up to 15 pupils but at the end of March, the school was closed because the children from Mercury were accommodated in an addition to the school near Hartel, known as Glen Mead School. So with the closing of the school, I started substituting in different areas, put in 6 weeks altogether in the Turner Valley school and became acquainted with many good friends there then. So that was the end of my teaching for that year. The next year I went to Brave Head School, west of Nanton about 15 miles. There again, our mode of traveling was mostly by horseback and I enjoyed my year teaching there very much with the young people. But then I had to leave there and I taught my own brother and three sisters in our home up in the foothills. By that time I had met Homer Hayden and we were married in 1934.

#155 NM: What was your involvement with the oil industry?

MH: As far as the oil industry, the family I lived with, their two sons drilled on the old cable tool outfits and they'd come home just covered with mud and they found it very strenuous work compared to later on.

NM: Were there any women working in the oil field in this time?

MH: I don't remember hearing of any, no.

NM: And what was your involvement with the war workers?

MH: That was . . . after we were married in 1934, we were on the farm for the two years, 2 ½ years, but because of 1936 being such a dry year and prices of everything being so low that Homer decided that he'd come up here to work in the oil field. So for the first part of that year of 1937 I lived in High River with my mother and our daughter, Ann was there. We went to the hills in the summer and helped there and still Homer had not decided whether he was going to go farming again. But when he was offered this job at the BA plant, as more permanent living we moved here, at Christmas of 1937. Into a farm house, just a mile or so east, where there was a bachelor whom we knew and he was delighted to have a housekeeper and we were delighted to have a nice home to live in. We were there until 1941 or 42 and we then moved on up into Longview, into a little 3 room shack, which we've now expanded into a nice home. You asked about the war workers. Before we'd moved into the village, I had started doing knitting for the group that were sending parcels to those that were going overseas and doing different things. So once I was up here and could go easily to their meetings and helping them, we all tried to see how many socks we could knit or sweaters and so on. And we'd put on a bake sale or something to buy the wool and so on. And there was a very industrious group that set me a good example to try and follow.

NM: And then later on there was more of a community life in Longview?

MH: That community life began with the moving of the hall, which was originally a bunkhouse north of Hartel. They acquired it quite reasonably and the men moved it down in the area where the school is now. So we began to have these Saturday night dances, which were very well patronized by the boys coming home on leave or the local people. The hall was also used for the Sunday School, at one point in the peak time of the drilling here, we had over 90 children in that Sunday School. Then we had the Guides, Brownies, Cubs and Scouts. I was involved with the Brownies and Guides, Guides we began in 1942 and then a few months later the Brownies, which I helped with until they got established. They continued on and there's still Guides in Longview.

#212 NM: You two saw the decline of Turner Valley, how did you feel about it at the time?

MH: Well, I would surmise that our feelings weren't affected that much. I was sad to see a lot of good friends leave, we missed them. But with the departure of the large machine shops, because there was one in Royalties as well as down here, then Homer starting a business and I was involved with the book work and ordering and different things like that for many years.

NM: So you were lucky to be kept busy with something else here?

MH: Yes. Because I still had the young people, I was still involved. I was 28 years with the Sunday School and about the same length of time with the Guides.

NM: Quite an achievement. Thank you very much Mrs. Hayden. Mr. Hayden, looking back at

your life, what was the highlight of your career?

HH: I think actually there was maybe two highlights. One at home on the farm, when we had to pump water by hand, and they got busy and made up a pump that pumped running water from the spring to the top of the house, in the attic, where we had a big tank and to go up in the attic and watch this fresh water come in from this pump that we made up was quite something.

NM: That's quite something.

HH: It was, yes.

NM: What was your most important achievement?

HH: I think starting my own shop, Hayden's Machine Shop, after Barber's left here. We started up here quite small and we had enough machinery to do most of the work and now seeing that my son has come back and more or less taken over I'm quite proud of that.

NM: Thank you very much Mr. Hayden for these two very interesting interviews.