

PETROLEUM HISTORY SOCIETY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Mary Sawka

INTERVIEWER: Aubrey Kerr

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AK: It's Thursday, November 11, 1992. I'm Aubrey Kerr, and I'm in the home of Mrs. Mary Sawka, and you're on 49 Street and the street number is 4922, and your house, the door of your house, faces away from 49 Street. And it's on the corner of a very busy intersection, and you were saying you had lived here since when?

MS: 48 years ago, since I've been here in this house.

AK: Since you moved here.

MS: Yes.

AK: The house is very well kept, it's lovely... everything is freshly painted, and it has those old china doorknobs on some of the doors. You were saying that there was a shoemaker lived in this house before?

MS: Yes, had a shoe shop out the back.

AK: Do you remember his name?

MS: No, I can't remember the name.

AK: Did you buy the house from him?

MS: Yes.

AK: But you had young children then, too, didn't you.

MS: Yes.

AK: They were all young, yes. How many children did you have?

MS: Four. Two boys and two girls.

AK: Right, we'll get to them in a minute. But I'd like to go right back to where you were born and your maiden name, and the name of your parents.

MS: I was born in Redwater, and my name was Mary Drokodiw. And my mother was Sophie Drokodiw.

AK: And JN...?

MS: John. And Sophie.

AK: That's quite a popular name, isn't it? Sophie. And was this right in the town or on the farm, where you were born.

MS: On the farm, in Redwater. About 3 miles from here I think it was.

AK: West?

MS: West, yes. And a little south, right.

AK: Down where maybe Pasemko was...

MS: Yes, across the state.

AK: Oh, across from Pasemko's. Is that right? That old...

MS: Yes.

AK: Is that right. Oh that's where Victor lived. I interviewed Victor.

MA: Yes, we were across the state...

AK: Is that right. And that's where your parents had the farm.

MS: YEs, right.

And what year was it you were born?

MS: 1911.

AK: 1911. So you're 83, no 81. That's your birthday in January

MS: Yes. ???

AK: And were you born at home? There was no hospital or anything...

MS: No, I don't think so. I don't ???

AK: No, you had some lady come in, midwife...

MS: Yes. exactly.

AK: And your parents had come from Galicia?

MS: ??? I think it was called ???

AK: You don't recall the name? But it was in Galicia.

MS: I think so, yes.

AK: Did they ever tell you why they came to Canada?

MS: No, I don't...

AK: Did they ever tell you how they came over by what, boat or...

MS: No.

AK: You never got any history from them. That's too bad. And you had how many brothers and sisters?

MS: Three brothers and one sister.

AK: Three brothers and one sister. And are any of them still alive?

MS: Yes, my one brother ??? passed away?

AK: Right. Where are you in the family? Are you one of the younger or...?

MS: No, I'm second.

AK: Second oldest, eh?

MS: Yeah, sister and ???

AK: Do they live in the neighborhood here, or...

MS: No, Edmonton.

AK: They live in Edmonton.

MS: But the oldest brother lived at ???

AK: Right. And did they pursue farming?

MS: Yes, they were farmers.

AK: And how about the homestead there - you had lived there till... what year did you live on the on the homestead with your parents? How many years did you...

MS: ???

AK: But you went to school from there.

MS: Yes. Yes.

AK: And where did you go, into the ??? School?

MS: Yes.

AK: What grade did you go to?

MS: Grade 9.

AK: You didn't go on from there?

MS: No.

AK: What was the reason for that?

MS: Well I didn't pass grade 9 so I... didn't go anymore.

AK: Did your did your parents feel like you they'd want to give you more education or...

MS: Not at that time, I don't think so.

AK: That was it, eh. And then what did you do then? Did you work at home?

MS: Yes.

AK: Did you take work anywhere else?

MS: Yes. I used to work ??? I used to work with the bitumen.

AK: Is that right?

MS: And then I worked ??? later on.

AK: You had you had your children then.

MS: Oh yes.

AK: No, but I'm talking about before you got married. Who did you marry?

MS: Anton Sawka. And his parents lived where, close to where you were?

MS: Amelia.

AK: And his parents had come from...the old country.

MS: Yes.

AK: And have they any stories, did Anton tell you any stories about how they came...

MS: No.

AK: Alright, then how did you and Anton meet?

MS: At a dance I think it was, the dance.

AK: And you got married... what age did you get married?

MS: I was just married 10 years, we were just married 10 years...

AK: Well that would mean that he was 25 when you got married.

MS: Must have been.

AK: You said he died at the age of 35. Right. And when you got married to Anton, did you want to your own land to live on your own farm?

MS: No we stayed with his parents ???

AK: So you lived with Mrs. Sawka...

MS: For one year...

AK: Yeah, but I mean we while Anton was still alive, you were there.

MS Yes. For a year. Let's see...

AK: No, but he lived for 10 years, so you were married for 10 years. And where did you live during those ten years.

MS: With his mother.

AK: I see. Did you have your own house, or did you live in the same house?

MS: Same house, there was a little house but I stayed in the big one. There was a ???

AK: That probably was...was there any indication that you should go and get your own farm?

MS: No, my husband had a farm, he had a farm ??? on the farm.

AK: Oh, I see. But you lived...oh I see. His farm was somewhere...

MA: Around Amelia too.

AK: Oh, I see. What did he have a quarter section?

MS: Yes.

AK: How had he gotten it, did he homestead on it, or?

MS: No, he got it through his parents...

AK: But he owned it.

MS: Yes he owned it.

AK: So, one year you stayed with Mrs. Sawka, had the two Mrs. Sawkas there... I guess that wasn't really working out too good.

MS: It was okay, we got along, no problem.

AK: That's good, and then you decided that you ??? And your husband, did he die of asthma or something?

MS: Yes.

AK: Was this something that had been part of the family...

MS: Well, my son ??? had ??? for ten years ???

AK: So, you moved in here into this house in 1944?

MS: I think so, yeah,

AK: And that was a few years before the boom started, right? And at that time your children were quite young then, you had a brood of children to look after.

MS: That's right.

AK: Well when you moved in here, did you get a job then? Did you take a job?

MS: Yes, soon after I moved in here I went to ???

AK: But you'd have to look after them. And did they start to go to school here?

MS: Yes. Well the oldest son started at Amelia before we moved away, seven...

MS: Was that Ray? Well Bob was the older of the two. Do you remember ever having Anne Walter as a teacher? Anne Walter?

MS: No.

AK: Anne Walker.

MS: No, I didn't have her as a teacher.

AK: They didn't teach... And there was, later on, just as an aside, Mike, who lives in Sawhill...he was the principal.

MS: Mike Sanich?

AK: Sanich, yeah. I'm going to see him at four o'clock.

MS: He's a nice guy.

AK: Yes, he's very nice and I'm looking forward to meeting him. But, he taught Ray. Mike said he taught Ray. I guess that was here in the school here. So you were busy with this family of yours, very busy, and what was the first... maybe you were so busy you didn't realize what was going to happen. When was your first indication that something had happened here when they moved the rig in, did you have any ideas of what was going to happen.

MS: No.

AK: Looking back, you have any kind of ideas of this, of what was going to happen out at the Cook Farm there?

MS: No, I didn't.

AK: All right, when it did happen, when wild did get hit, what was your reaction then, how did you feel about it? You didn't have any particular...

MS: No...

AK: Did you feel that there was going to be a lot of activity, a lot of ??? or did you have any...

MS: No, I didn't have any...

AK: And you were still here, and across the street was Yvonne Royer, and she was running her...I think she just started running her egg grading station.

MS: Yes, I think so.

AK: So, when all this crowd of men come in, did you say you went to work at the greasy spoon.

MS: Yeah, I went to work at the greasy spoon.

AK: Yeah, it was down... well where the hotel burnt down.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

AK: Was it right next to where the hotel was?

MS: No, I don't think so.

AK: All right. So, who looked after your children while you were working?

MS: I looked myself but I had no babysitter. ???

AK: No. ??? the chef...do you remember how much they paid you?

MS: No, I don't remember, very low...

AK: Not very much, no. Did they give you a free meal?

MS: Oh, yes.

AK: Was that the place where all you can order with bacon and eggs? All you could have was bacon and eggs, or did they have a menu?

MS: I think they had a menu.

AK: Yeah. Okay. What was the other job you had during the boom?

MS: That was all I had.

AK: Just the greasy spoon.

MS: Just the greasy spoon then I worked in the hotel.

AK: That would be the new hotel.

AK: And what was your job there?

MS: Kitchen.

AK: Cooking there. And who ran that new hotel?

MS: Melenko ???

AK: Melenko? And how long did you work there at the hotel?

MS: Well, until I was 65.

AK: You did, all that time? You must have worked over 20 years.

MS: Oh yeah, about that. I was 65.

AK: And you were bringing your children up at the same time?

MS: Yes.

AK: And what, you were just you were cooking in the kitchen, on a shift basis?

MS: Yes, I used to work at night.

AK: Well, you didn't have far to walk. Then what was it like when the boom started to die down? What was... there was still work for you?

MS: Yes there was.

AK: Was the hotel fairly busy remember?

MS: Yes, quite busy.

AK: Right. Do you remember how many rooms? Was the one that's still standing?

MS: Yeah.

AK: How many rooms did it have?

MS: I don't know.

AK: You never worked as a chamber maid there...

MS: I had a friend, she worked there... don't know her name...

AK: During this boom, you would probably see a lot of strangers and a lot of commotion - can you describe any of that to me.

MS: No.

AK: Well, then what about this street here, was it... were these buildings on this street here or where they built after the boom?

MS: No, they were built after.

AK: So the street was vacant.

MS: Yeah. This bank wasn't here, it was built after...

AK: That's the Imperial, but it wasn't there.

MS: No, no.

AK: You see what I ... I think there was a garage, Maloney's Garage, wasn't he down there? Because that's where the Royal Bank had its offices, id you know that they opened offices in the Maloney's?

MS: Yes.

AK: Well, what about like where the IGA was ???

MS: ???

AK: Oh, right. And then there was another outfit that I've been trying to get some information on is Deshishon??, Frank Deshishon, he ran a cab I believe, is that right. He ran a taxi cab?

MS: I don't remember.

AK: His son is running that after Petro-Can. So by this time, all through these years, your sons and your daughters had gone on to higher education, and your older son, did he did he go to university?

MS: Yes he did.

AK: What did he take?

MS: Commerce??, but he didn't make it through... he didn't finish.

AK: Right.

MS: But he had a good job.

AK: In Calgary, yeah. Has he got a family?

MS: 3 sons.

AK: He has 3 sons, right. And what attracted Ray to getting into the oil business, do you know? Did he ever tell you?

MS: No.

AK: But he went to the University of Alberta>

MS: Oh yes.

AK: Yeah, and he got his degree there. Then he went on to... did he take postgraduate work? I mean after he got his first degree, did he go on to a second degree?

MS: No.

AK: No. Did he ever talk to you about his ambitions for... in the oil business? How did get started in his first job.

MS: No. ???

AK: What about your daughters, did they go on to get higher education?

MS: Yes, my daughter is a lab technician.

AK: A lab technician. And where is that, in Edmonton?

MS: Yes.

AK: With one of the hospitals?

MS: The University Hospital.

AK: Right. Is she married? Got a family?

MS: Yes. She has 3 kids, daughter and a son??? one is an engineer, and ???

AK: You mean their children.

MS: Yes.

AK: They are grown-up children.

MS: Yes, and the youngest son he just finished university, has to get a job yet...

AK: I see. So he's... and is your daughter still working at the lab?

MS: Yes.

AK: A lab technician. And then your other daughter is?

MS: She's a secretary.

AK: Who does she work for?

MS: She works for the university too, what's the name, I can't remember.

AK: One of the faculties, eh? She works right in the University?

MS: ??? I forget ???

AK: Well, that's all right. So is she married?

MS: Yeah.

AK: She has some children?

MS: She has two. The daughter is a dentist.

AK: One of her daughters.

MS: Yeah, the son is just going into university, ???

AK: Well you must you must have some great-grandchildren, have you?

MS: No, not yet.

AK: Not yet, eh? Just grown-up grandchildren.

MS: No great-grandchildren.

AK: Well, we'll keep an eye open for that.

MS: ???

AK: And so did you ever... well you were in town the other weekend when I was up here, visiting your daughters?

MS: Yes.

AK: Yeah, right.

MS: ??? appointment with an eye specialist, ??? picked me up.

AK: From here?

MS: ??? picked me up, ???

AK: To have your eyes checked?

MS: Yeah, I go once a year to have them checked.

AK: We are not looking at page 182, 183 of the book "Memories", and at the top of page 183 there's a photograph and we don't see we don't see... yes, we do. There's Anton and there's Walter, Anton, the hired man and there the family looks very well. Very healthy looking and so this is Mrs. R. Sawka, now

she would be your grandmother-in-law and then your mother-in-law was over there, Mrs. Anna Sawka, is that, she's on the left there. She was your mother-in-law, right?

MS: ??? was Rosalia, that was her name.

AK: Rosalia, that was her name. And well, they had a hired man, so they must have... did they all live on the one farm then in those days?

MS: Yeah.

AK: And did they have more than they have more than one hired hand or no?

MS: No, I don't remember.

AK: And did they crop, what was it, mixed crop - wheat, barley?

MS: Yes.

AK: Right. Anton was the one you married.

MS: Yes.

AK: Right. And the homestead continued to be farmed by Anna and her youngest son Daniel, where Anna and Daniel, you weren't on that Homestead.

MS: No.

AK: Now, Victor Sawka, was he a brother in law?

MS: He was a brother to Anton's cousin.

AK: Oh, I see. So they would be cousins, like to your husband then.

MS: Yeah.

AK: Right. And they were born very early - 1893 - and they were living here, so they must have come out to Canada very early. And Victor and Pearl, I guess they've been dead quite a while.

MS: Yes.

AK: Victor says, died at the age of 47, 1940. Now we're looking at page 167 and there's a short article here about Mrs. Annie Prokopiw. And her maiden name was Kutney.

MS: Yes.

AK: In 1910 Annie married, John Prokopiw and the couple raised five children - Mary, that's you, John, Mike, Bill and Kate. And of them, you have some of them still living?

MS: They are all living so far.

AK: Oh, I see, so the two brothers are still living in Edmonton. And are they retired?

MS: Yes.

AK: What did they used to do?

MS: My brother Mike was working for Imperial Oil.

AK: Oh, in the production here? In the field?

MS: Yes.

AK: Did he have any stories to tell you about his work?

MS: No.

AK: And Bill? What did he do?

MS: Well, he worked in the casino.

AK: Oh, the casino eh? That's a money maker eh?

MS: Yeah.

AK: And your sister Kay, is she still alive?

MS: Yes.

AK: And she lives?

MS: In Edmonton also.

AK: Boy, there are an awful lot of people in Edmonton, aren't there. Did any of these people think that they'd like to go out to British Columbia and live in Vancouver Island?

MS: No, they never said anything about that...

AK: What about you?

MS: No.

AK: You wouldn't want to go there, your roots are here.

MS: Yeah...

AK: And then it says here, Mr. Prokopiw passed away in 1959, and Mrs. Prokopiw you now lives in Redwater with her daughter. Marry Sawka. So she lived here for a while.

MS: Yes, she was 99...

AK: 99!

MS: She was in a nursing home, she got...

AK: You had to put her in, yeah. So how many years was she living with you?

MS: ???

AK: She moved, yeah, so then you arranged to have her in one of the local ones here?

MS: Yeah.

AK: So what year was that if she was 99? What year would that be? Well, wait a minute, it's right here. Annie Kutney, it's Annie Kutney isn't it?

MS: Kutney, yes...

AK: Well, there's an error in the book here. John Prokopiw was your father and he married Sophie, Kutney, yeah. So she would have had to have been a sister to Annie, then? Is that right?

MS: Yeah, I think she ???

AK: Right. So it's another, yeah... did you ever hear of a Peter Kutney, in Calgary?

MS: No.

AK: There was a Peter and... okay, so we got that straight. Now just to repeat, if your mother's name was Sophie and her maiden name was Kutney and she married John Prokopiw.

MS: Right.

AK: Okay. So Mrs. Prokopiw was your mother and you said she lived until 99, so she would have had to have been born away back, maybe was she born in Austria before they...

MS: Yes, she came when she was 16 years old.

AK: Oh, she was 16, she was a child when they...yeah, because it said here, in 1902 her parents, two brothers and two sisters came to Canada. So that would be when they came if she was 16. So by simple arithmetic your mother was born in 1886 and she died in Canada in 1985, and she'd come over as a child of 16 with her family. And she was in a nursing home for her last few years. Yes, right. Well, that's very interesting, it just shows you how mistakes are made in books., and that's one of the things I'm very anxious to avoid.

Well, we're just about finished our interview. It's been a great interview and you've reviewed your children. I'm just talking to the machine. I'm telling the machine something and there's a note here that has to do with the Vashoes?? Jim and Jimmy Vashoes, Jimmy's Vashoes' post office was just outside the door here, you could see it, where the Treasury Branch is now, and that was the original post office that they had. So there's an awful lot of history down here on this street. So I'll say thank you very much, over and out, it's now quarter to three and I appreciate very much your giving me the time.

End of interview