

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: JOSEPH A. SAYERS
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: BRESAYLOR, SASK.

INTERVIEW LOCATION: BRESAYLOR, SASK.

TRIBE/NATION: NON-INDIAN
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
DATE OF INTERVIEW: AUGUST 2, 1974
INTERVIEWER: MARY J. TAVEL
INTERPRETER:
TRANSCRIBER: JOANNE GREENWOOD
SOURCE: SASKATCHEWAN ARCHIVES BOARD
TAPE NUMBER: IH-081
DISK: TRANSCRIPT DISC 19
PAGES: 13
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Mr. Sayers was brought up in close association with Indian people as his father was a farm instructor on the Little Pine Reserve.
- Description of traditional Indian life.
- Stories of theft and murder by Indians.
- Early days of white settlers on the prairies.

Years ago when I first got here, there was only the kind of people that live around these creeks! Anyplace you went that was all you met was Indians. And they used to travel in big bands. And they used to move around from place to place in the summertime where they could get food for themselves such as birds, young birds, eggs, fishing, and hunt deer and larger animals. When they killed deer, they would cut the meat up, slice that into small thin slices and hang it along the fire and hang it where the sun could dry it. And when it got real dry, hard, then they would pulverize it with stone and make pemmican in which they put fruit, such as dried berries, saskatoons, and chokecherries. They also put the fat of the animals which they cook first, and then they take some of the grease out of it. And they mix that together and that was put in containers made of birch bark or the inside part of an animal, the intestines, something like the sausage we have

today. And that would keep for months, indefinitely as a matter of fact, if it was kept dry.

Mary: Would they only make one bag like, or would they keep a lot of it?

Joseph: Oh, no, no, they made a lot of bags, yeah. And the big, large part of the stomach of the animal, they used that for putting their provisions in; they cleaned them good. And they also used to use the hide of a small, young animal that is just newly born with the hair outside and they used to dress the inside good, clean, but they didn't smoke it. And they would sew it up at one end and one end was tied. That is where they used to carry their provisions when they were moving, like all their eatables, their bannock and so forth. It was tied on top with a string where worms couldn't get into it. And the fish, they used to fish. They caught the fish with spears then, and in shallow water they used a bow and arrow. And in running streams, small running streams, they dammed them with poles, stones and they left one place open with a basket made of willows and the fish would enter into there and get caught. And they would stay there all day and all night catching fish. And then they used to scale these fish, fillet them and hang them up to dry and smoke them (just the same as they done with the meat) and pulverize them. Then when they wanted to eat this pulverized fish, they cooked it. Similar to cooked beef.

Mary: Did they ever sell those fish or...?

Joseph: Oh, yes, yes. They used to sell those fish, come around and sell those fish, come around and sell some of their stuff, their meat and stuff like that. But there was no money.

All they wanted, they would come along and they wanted principally tea, tobacco, gunpowder, and shot. And lots of times they would sell you a whole bag of feathers, nice clean feathers for making pillows. Oh yes, they were always out selling, it wasn't selling, they just traded. And the saskatoons and the chokecherries and raspberries, they picked them and they dried them. They dried them just the same as they dried their meat and the same as we go to the stores here, we used to get dried fruit of all kinds, well they done the same thing.

Mary: Is it pails already they used for picking berries or...?

Joseph: Ah, well, they picked berries in these birch bark things, you know, they made their own pails. Pails out of birch bark containers.

Mary: I guess it was mostly women that were doing this.

Joseph: That's right, the women did all the work around the tents and around the home while the men went out hunting, trapping, and so forth. And the women used to cut their own wood and they were excellent axemen. (laughs) That is why in the summertime, they used to move around where there was good,

dry wood.

Mary: Well, we still are. We still chop pretty good. (laughs) Better than men, most of them anyway. Who looked after the horses then?

Joseph: Well, there was very few horses, very few, and they were just ponies. And when they used to move around, the first time they moved around, they didn't even have carts. All they had was what they called a travois. That was two poles that they fixed them on the back of a saddle and you could also use that saddle to ride. And that is where they carried all their stuff, in there. And I even seen a dog with a travois.

Mary: Maybe sick people too and old people. Did they carry people in them?

Joseph: Oh yes, they carried people, but most of the time, it was just their provisions and their tents and bedding. The rest of the people walked.

Mary: That is what I - you know that name of that thing you used to always try to...?

Joseph: That is about all I got. I have been late two days there. Well, you ask me some questions.

Mary: Where did you go to school?

Joseph: Me, I went to school in a little place at Bresaylor here. And I still have a picture of the school. And Atkinson was my first school teacher and after he taught a few years he went in to be a lawyer. And he was a very good lawyer, a criminal lawyer, in Battleford. Now my next teacher was a fellow named McKay, Dr. McKay. Used to be, Dr. McKay used to be in Paynton, he was my next teacher. Oh, I had several teachers. But the first year I went to school; I was nine years old before I started school. Dad moved close to the school so I could go to school. And Dad got a job, instructor, the Indian cattle on Little Pines here. And he went to where Wainright is. He kept the cattle there. We left early in the season, and early in the fall because we had to go over there and muck the barns, haul hay and not I, I was a kid, but he went with a bunch of Indians. And they had corrals to make and everything - the wood to get out before winter, before snow fell. And we took, oh, could be a hundred head of cattle, possibly more. And there was about six riders I imagine. Well, there was young Poundmaker was one of those that went along. George Timiyou and old Paunis(?) and old Kiskootakun(?) and old Smakunus(?) and there were some others that were riders, you know, but I can remember them. Well, we would only go a few miles a day, about ten, twelve miles I guess, driving those cattle. We would have to stop at nighttime and where there was grass and where they could... the ground was frozen and the lakes were frozen, it was kind of an open fall. The weather was fine, no snow. And old Paunis used to go ahead and

he used to have a camping place for dinner. He would have all the wood ready - all you had to do was start to cook. Then in the afternoon, as soon as we got everything on the move, he moved over about five miles towards the bush, lots of nice wood. Well, he had a gun, he gave him a gun and shells - ammunition - muzzle loaders. And he would kill enough rabbits there, make a fire, get everything, you know. Kill enough rabbits for the camp. He did that every day till we got to where we were going. And in the spring of the year, we came back. Well that year, I only went about a month and a half to school. By that time I am ten years old. Dad didn't have much money, had to get out and work. So when we come back in the spring, had to wait till the snow was pretty well all gone, just about all gone. Only some snow in spots. Now we are coming home with all them cattle and we made less time I think coming home because the cows were having calves all the way

around you know, and you couldn't drive them fast. When a cow had a calf, they loaded this calf into the wagon. Everybody had a bunch of kids in the wagon and some newborn calves. (laughs) It went that way every day till we got home. So when we got home, Dad put in a little crop at the time we got home.

I went to school another month and a half. Then that fall he got a job wintering cattle, Spence's cattle and Taylor's cattle, up here north of Maidstone. So, there was my school again. I got about a month and a half of school again. We stayed up there all winter and never came back until the spring. Just about the time school was closed for the summer. It was after that I went to school. I went to school till I was nineteen, a big man. Someone said to me one day, I went into a lawyer's place to get some papers drawn up and she said to me, "You must have been a not very bright scholar, eh?" So when I told her this, you know, she just sunk down in the chair and looked at me, she said, "Excuse me for being rude." (laughs) Now, what else?

Mary: Well, you were going to tell me about those police or policemen or the RCMP?

Joseph: I didn't even get that far. That is right here, no I didn't get that far.

Mary: Did the Indians ever get into trouble for stealing and that?

Joseph: Oh, God, you had to watch your stuff or they would steal you blind. Sure. One tribe would steal from another and fight against one another. Oh, yes, sure they steal. One time grandfather Pritchard got up and had no horses. Sure. He never did find them. They stole a team of horses and that was it. And another time, they were moving someplace and they stopped and during the nighttime - he didn't hear it, he was sleeping - but his wife heard somebody passing by. So in the morning when he got up, went for his horses, he is one short but there is a strange horse there. There was a fellow passed

through so he just traded horses, left his horse.

So old man Pritchard, he got on the horse and he followed him, he could track him in the wagons, no trails around. Just grass and train tracks. So Mrs. Pritchard said to Johnny, that is the little boy, "Come on, hitch up that horse and that buckboard. We got to catch that Johnny before he catches up to that man because he will kill him." (laughs) They caught up to him just as he was getting to this guy. And there he was, he was whipping this old man, you know. The old man would run under the wagon and he would whip him and he would try and run away with his horse. And the kid, the little boy, he was

sitting up on the wagon box and the old man said, "I didn't take him; the kid took the horse." Well, Pritchard said, "You are the old man, you should have known better. Why didn't you stop him?" He said, "Well," and by that time his wife got there and stopped him, you see. But he was there with his whip in his hand and this fellow said, "Mister, Mister, just wait a minute, I'll pay you." He pulled his wallet out of his pocket and Pritchard grabbed ahold of the whole wallet, just grabbed it and put it in his pocket. And he looked and he had a gold watch on his chain. He grabbed that chain too and pulled it right out. And he left the old man right there. He said, "Now, we are going home." "Just one horse and the wagon." The old fellow said, "Now what am I going to do, Mister?" He said, "Well, you should have thought about that last night when you took my horse. I don't give a damn what the hell you do." (laughs) And he left him there.

By God, I'll tell you, those were pretty tough times. Then we heard a lot of this stuff. Like when the grandfathers, the brothers, were shot to death by Indians, bow and arrows. They took everything they had, horse, wagon, and all his clothes. He was just laying by the side of the road, just all pierced with arrows. They went hunting buffalo and they were coming back and something went wrong with his cart. So he said, "Oh, go ahead. I'll catch up." They didn't have too far to go, "I'll catch up as soon as I fix my cart." So they got camped and they waited and he never showed up. So they said, "Let's go and look for him." So they went and looked for him and he was right by the side of the road where they left him. Indians will follow you, you see. They will follow you all day but hide, and that is what they done. They killed the fellow by the name of Edward Sayers. My grandfather's brother.

Mary: You were telling me something about (inaudible) - something about Bresaylor or something.

Joseph: Oh, that didn't happen by Bresaylor, that happened way south. No, the first people coming into this district were, they came from Headingly, Winnipeg. They settled here, they were going on their way to Edmonton. They were going up around that way. And when they got here, it was getting late in the fall so they thought they better put some shelters up and a place to stay for the winter and for their cattle. So they

made hay and looked all over around here and they spent the winter here and the spring. It looked good to them so they stayed here. There were the Taylors, there was four Taylors, the Taylor family, four brothers; and the Brenners, there was three of them; and there was four Sayers. But one stopped on the road and went into the States. But there was three of them

come here. So when they come here, they decided they would stay here because there was everything here. Lots of lakes, lots of berries to eat and lots of everything. Good wood. And in them days they didn't farm, you see. All they done was mostly hunting and just farmed just enough. Well, you couldn't - if you did raise grain or something like that - you couldn't sell it because nobody was selling it. They wanted to name the place so they took three letters out of Brenner, three out of Sayers and three out of Taylors. B-r-e-s-a-y-l-o-r, Bresaylor. And that is how it got it's name and it has been that ever since.

We got a nice little park here, a little camping ground here, oh, pretty nice, yeah. But it is all settled now. There is an awful lot of Taylors, an awful lot of Sayers, all around. They all had big families. And I have seen them cross this river in the summertime. The hay was good across the river. So they had mowers, you know, not very good but they were usable, and they used to go across the river and make hay. They would take the mowers to pieces, take the pieces off them and put them on one boat and row them across and that is the way they used to... Well, the Indians used to do the same thing with their cars. When they come from the south here, to go across the accessway, they used to pull the cars to pieces, take the wheels off them, (well they float you see) put the wheels, put them in the boat and that is the way they used to do it. And swim their horses, swim one horse behind the boat and the rest of them all follow. And the horses used to be so used to that that they knew just as soon as you started to gather them what was what. And lots of times, they would cross the river on their own. To go across the other side to eat grass. And it is just as good here but you know they liked it over there, so they used to go across there. Lots of times, Taylors especially, they lived by the river. Sometimes they would get up and they had no horses, the horses had crossed the river. And one old mare, we had her, she crossed that Saskatchewan River with hobbles on. She swam with hobbles on.

Mary: Did old people ever make any kind of baskets to sell or...?

Joseph: The old people, oh, no, no, no. The only thing was they raised a little - and they used to freight. That was the only way you could get any stuff here. They used to go to Swift Current, that is the end of the line, the CPR was there. And they used to leave from here with oxen. And the most they would make was ten to twelve miles a day and if it was a good cool day, they could make fifteen. And they would go down there and come back, it would take them over a month. And get their freight down there and bring it to Battleford. That is

the only way you could get stuff. We have to go to Battleford and there was no coffee breaks either.

Mary: Is that where they got traps too if they were trapping? Would you know how much they were or did you trap? Did they trade with furs for them or...?

Joseph: Oh yes, the Hudson's Bay had traps there, yeah. That was for trapping. Yeah, but nothing was expensive then, stuff was very cheap. A lot cheaper than it is now. Oh yes, they trapped. And the Indians made and set snares, most of them caught stuff by snares. Then the snares wasn't made of wire like what they got now, you know. They used to use string, which was given to them by the - and they used to get fish cord for putting in nets. Well, they used to set snares for lynx, lynx are stupid. You can snare them with a string like that but coyotes and foxes you can't. Now what else?

Mary: You tell about those (inaudible)... already? Those guys that gathered those things? I think you did.

Joseph: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Third Person: What about the, when Dad used to go and buy some...?

Joseph: Oh yes, later on Dad started a store here on the farm and then he started a store at Meadow Lake and another one at Green Lake and another one at Ile-a-la-Crosse and Blue Bell. And he made out very well and he used to bring lots of furs from those parts. And he kept this little store in town. Eventually there was a fairly good big store in Bresaylor here and they had a store in the butcher shop, painting. And by the time I started painting here, things were good, everything was in packages. But before, everything come in barrels, like sugar, salt, and chewing tobacco. Tobacco came in cases and they were all together, like chewing tobacco, we used to call caddies. They were all stuck together. You had to pry each plug out. And all the fruit, the dried fruit, there was prunes, apples, and this line of fruit that you sold. Of course, there were lots of them. And there was apricots and pears, but they all come in boxes and you had to dig them out and weigh them out. Tea was the same way; tea used to come in bulk, in fifty pound boxes. You had to weigh that all out. Well, I was just thinking one day here, brown sugar gets hard so you would have to pry it up. And tobacco, it was stuck there, you would have to pry it out too. Your fruit, all your dried fruit, raisins, currants, everything come in a box, plums and all that stuff. You would have to pry them out. So I used to use a screwdriver. I used a screwdriver for the whole works. Sometimes I would be prying brown sugar with a screwdriver and then tobacco. (laughs) The only way you could tell it was a screwdriver was by the handle. The rest of it

was sugar and the other stuff stuck on the screwdriver part of it, you know. And it was about half an inch through. So some

people ate brown sugar and chewing tobacco. And candy was the same way, candy used to come in big pails, and that was stuck together in hot weather. Well, you would have to jab them to loosen them up. And...

Mary: It was tooth decay that time that came with the candies.

Joseph: I don't remember. And then there was only two doctors in this land, in this part of the country. And they were in Battleford. If you were sick, you just simply lay down and died, that's all. And they weren't much, they were doctors; that is about all I give them. Probably get better horse doctors than they were human doctors.

Mary: Did they perform surgery?

Joseph: Oh yes, if you let them, if you want them to kill you.

Mary: Did they put a person to sleep?

Joseph: No, good God, I got some. I got a couple teeth pulled. I went down to the doctor, no dentist, and I sat in his chair there. And he just took over that thing and he grabbed a pair of pinchers there and he grabbed that tooth you know, and he shook it first and then he pulled. Then he got back to the other one. Holy Christmas, I thought he was tearing my eyes out. Yeah, it was far better to let the tooth ache than to go down there and get them to work on it. Should have known those things were really deep. They just seemed to pull them. And no, you know, you had to eat from then with your gumbs, cut up your meat in small pieces and there wasn't no such thing as a meat chopper. So, it was pretty bad.

Mary: Do you have to come out there to have an operation or did you have a hospital?

Joseph: Oh no, there was no hospital. Them people that was in there, one of them Doctor Bruin and the other one was Doctor McAdam. McAdam was an Indian doctor. He went from one reserve to another. And I bet you there was a lot of medicine men on the reserves that were better than he was. No, they didn't cure him. And then Doctor Miller come, well, then he was a surgical doctor. He performed operations, you know, but the only darn thing he operated on was appendicitis. And by golly, if you go for an operation, I would bet you there would be about eight out of ten would be killed - die.

Mary: They probably didn't even have any knives to cut with in the first place, I mean surgical knives.

Joseph: Oh no. They used any knife.

Mary: It must be hard to get cut up when you're not sleeping. Would the nurse stay with you?

Joseph: No, heavens no, there was no such thing as a nurse.

Mary: Were they payed a lot for killing a person? (laughs)

Joseph: Yes, the doctor did charge a lot, yeah.

Mary: They wanted money I guess.

Joseph: Well, they didn't need too much money but they charged a lot. Because you know, you killed a person, you got to pay a lot.

Mary: What about, did you go to war or something?

Joseph: I enlisted in this last war. I was in the army for 71 months, that is just one month short of six years. But I was in the office in the store, see I never went... but I took my training.

Mary: Where was that?

Joseph: I took my training in Quebec, like mostly through the American Motors and I was stationed in Montreal, right in there, in Montreal. So here they had me on the register here, the day before yesterday here, you know they had the little time here and this young lad and his wife, a young couple come along and they registered from Montreal and I said, "What part of Montreal did you come from?" He said, he told me and I said, "Oh," and he said, "Do you know Montreal?" I said, "Yes, I know Montreal. I know it very well. I was there for six years and I have been down there at different times. The last time I was down in Montreal was in 1951." "Well," he says, "it has changed a lot." I said, "I was stationed there in the Longueuil Barracks." He said, "Longueuil, my dad was there too." "Well," I said, "what's your name?" I looked, McLaughlin. I worked with him for five years, can you imagine, and I meet his son here. Small world after all, so we had quite a chat.

Mary: Well, was Montreal a big city at that time?

Joseph: Oh yes, there was over three million people at that time. I don't know what it is now. And I was walking on the street there one day in Montreal and I see this young lad coming across and he looked like he was in a hurry, kind of half run so I stopped. Well I let him go by so I backed up and who do you think it was? Charlie McDonald, young Charlie McDonald from Paynton. Well, holy Christmas, so I took the afternoon off then and I never seen him after that again. So one day, I was going to the bank, I wasn't in no rush. The red light came on and I am standing at the corner. I wasn't waiting, I should have crossed that other one but I thought I'm not in no rush and he poked his head out the car, he said, "Well," he says, "Joe Sayers," and the other fellow said, "Holy God Joe." They had girls, they were rooming with them. But they weren't married yet but they both married them. I took a look and I didn't know them and they were laughing and not

expecting them. Johnny Misou and Ed Blah from Paynton here. So we put in a good day. Small world after all. One day I am standing there, I am looking at...

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Joseph: So after I come out, he come up and he walked into the alleyway. I took a look and I didn't pay much attention to him and he come over to me and he said, "Good God, I know you." I looked at him and I said, "Where have I seen you?" "Well," I said, "maybe when you went through here. I was working in the stores and giving uniforms out and sometimes I was in inspection." "No, I didn't get my uniform here. I come from." "Well," I said, "where did you enlist?" He says, "I enlisted in Lake Louise." "Oh," I said, "you don't, you never seen me. You must have seen me at the YMCA here." "No," he says, "I just drove in. But I know, I have seen you. Do you come from the prairies?" I said, "Yes." He said, "So did I. I come from Paynton, where did you come from?" I said, "Paynton?" and I grabbed ahold of him by the shoulders and pulled him around and looked at him, I said, "You're not one of the Morrises are you?" He said, "Yes, I am Johnny Morris."

Mary: So I guess a lot of people enlisted then?

Joseph: Oh yeah. I said, "What are you doing here?" "Well," he said, "they sent me in here for a discharge," he said. I said, "What on earth did you do? What is wrong?" "Oh," he said, "I am all right." Well I said, "What did you do?" He said, "I gave an officer a hell of a lickin," he says. They were going to discharge him.

So, what else?

Mary: Did you know a few that were killed in action in the war?

Joseph: No, I didn't. There wasn't too many killed in action that was from around here. See, that Misou boy was missing, they don't know what happened to him. And young Taylor, Tommy Taylor, he got killed before he ever left here in a plane accident.

Mary: Well, they had airplanes already, eh?

Joseph: Oh yes, sure they did. Remember that airplanes, they gave them schooling here in North Battleford, in town?

Third Person: Was that the time Walter Sayers went too?

Joseph: Yes, Walter was another one like that, yeah. And uh, there was a few, what was another one - Young, George Young, that is about all. Oh yes, Marinoski, yeah there was a few.

Mary: Well, when you were kids did you have any kind of toys to play with or...?

Joseph: No, heavens, no toys. There wasn't even a Santa Claus. (Laughs)

Mary: Where did that come in, Santa Claus?

Joseph: You had to be a big boy. (laughs) The first Santa Claus I saw was after I had been going to school for about three years I guess. They had a concert at the school so Santa Claus comes in and nobody knew Santa Claus. Nobody had ever heard of Santa Claus, nobody ever seen him. They sent a preacher up from Battleford to be Santa Claus and he was good.

Mary: Did you really believe there was a Santa Claus?

Joseph: Sure. Till I got home. Yeah, he was turning somersaults, stand on his hands and walk, oh God, that Santa Claus.

Mary: Did he bring you presents or...?

Joseph: Oh yes, sure. He had presents all over the tree and the tree was full of presents, you know. People, the older people got them, you know. And I remember he come in there with a bag on his back, all peanuts with the shells and he threw them in the crowd. Most of the people nearly went crazy. Oh, golly, you had to look out. Everybody was trying to get

peanuts. You had to watch out you didn't get your fingers tramped. But I knew what Santa Claus was. We lived about 200 yards from school. And that is where he got dressed home, after we went to school, you see. After we went to the concert, at the school.

Mary: Was he dressed the way they are today?

Joseph: Oh yes. All of a sudden Santa Claus came in and after the thing was over, they were going to start a dance. But we were just kids, my brother and I hurried home and we caught Santa Claus at home. He was undressing. (laughs)

Third Person: Well, I never seen Santa Claus until I was in school too. But ever since I could remember, the story we had was that. So that is supposed to be Santa Claus. We would hear a lot of stories about this. And I always wanted to see him, but there was never a Santa Claus at home, like. Until I was in the convent, I didn't go to school until I was pretty near fifteen.

Joseph: Yeah. I have done both, Santa Claus and Thunder, you know. Everybody was scared of Thunder. And there was a fellow here in Delmas here, he was around here. I forget what his name was, but he is an awful liar. Anyway, he went to the Rocky Mountains, his first trip to the Rocky Mountains and he came back and he said he saw Thunder up in the mountains. People

thought Thunder came from the mountains, eh. He said, "Yeah, a great big animal," he said. "And he was laying down but," he said, "he wasn't laying facing me."

Mary: Did any houses ever get struck by lightning?

Joseph: Not in them times, not that I know of, no. The houses weren't big enough for lightning to hit them.

Third Person: Then the sod roofs too, they didn't let the lightning in.

Joseph: Yeah, that is right, yeah. What? We'll let that do for a day, come around again some other time, okay?

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