

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: MRS. A. HART
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: NORWAY HOUSE

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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Informant gives her views on the Hudson's Bay Company, education and alcohol.

* Excerpt on Tape IH-MS.012 SD.A (20 minutes in).

Hart: Hudson's Bay post at Nelson House and at Cross Lake.

Margaret: And then you moved here?

Hart: Well, we were from here all the time. We moved to

Nelson House. We had a home here all the time. He used to work here before he went to Nelson House.

Margaret: Well, did the family go with him?

Hart: Yes, all our family.

Margaret: How did you go? How did you travel?

Hart: Well, we travelled by a York boat, I remember. We travelled by York boat from the Hudson's Bay dock there. Right down to Cross Lake where it's Wabowden now, where that line cuts. But it wasn't cut yet them days. But when we came back we came back by dog team. We saw them in March, we saw them cutting the trails. That was the first time they started to cut the trails at Wabowden.

Margaret: When would that be?

Hart: Well, it must be about, when -- let's see -- a year in 1913. In 1913 in February and I guess they start off earlier, maybe in 1912 they were. Soon as it froze, I guess, they started off. But we came back from Nelson House in 1913. That's where we seen these. We camped there and we ate there in a camp, you know, where the cook shack was. They had everything there, cook shack and everything, where the men eat when they work. I remember all that.

Margaret: How long did that dog trip take?

Hart: Mind you, it just took two nights from Nelson House to Cross Lake, two nights. It is not as far as it is in the summertime. You got to travel in a, like this now, see, lots of rapids. Portages, portages, you know. But when we come back we came straight, there was nothing to delay the dogs. Just straight down to Cross Lake, and from there, halfway we slept to Norway House. We stayed here a little while. We didn't go right away to Cross Lake. A couple of years after we went to Cross Lake. So after that, when my dad came back from Cross Lake, he retired. So that's it.

But long ago it was hard, mind you. Everything was tied up too much, too much. Poor people, I guess somebody told you, I wonder if somebody told you about there was a lot of poor people living, nothing, no rations. Government didn't help. They were miserable, the old people. They had no rations.

Margaret: How did they get on? How did they live?

Hart: I don't know. I can't tell you. We had, well, I say, us in our family, our dad was working and we weren't out of anything. But other people, I think they just live on like fish, rabbits and meat and garden. Some had a few cows. And some went and trapped in the bush. And they would get very little for their furs. (Inaudible) Nobody can take it from the Hudson's Bay store, not until that fur packed up as high as that gun. Dried beavers, dry lynx, dry muskrats, dry martin,

everything what you can think of. Fishers and all that. Just simply take it out for nothing. You know why it is so rich? Through the poor old grandfathers that is under the ground a hundred years ago, two hundred years ago. That is why he is so rich. It is the poor people that build that store, the Hudson's Bay store. Right now, it is like that yet. It is not, you know, when you go hunting, or muskrat or anything, you get very little price for it. Still they do that. And the cost of living is high yet. It is terrible. And I heard last winter the Hudson's Bay -- I don't know whether it is true -- the Hudson's Bay made \$2 million profit, I guess, all over these outposts where there is Hudson's Bay stores.

And I'm telling you right as I'm sitting here, I am very disgusted sometimes, where people could be educated -- like me, I had no education. I went to school but it wasn't enough. Still it is like that. The kids here, listen, lots of white people here. They should know better to have a good education, kids. That is why there is a lot of relief going on. People can't do anything because they haven't got education. Look at the white people, they just put in that hospital. Come and make money here. Where poor people that was born here should do that. But the government closed everything up, never educated, just a little bit. As long as we could say yes and no, that's all. And I'm still disgusted about that. Where I could see people doing a better job if they had a chance to do it. Do you think so?

Margaret: Yes.

Hart: And what comes first? This Norway House. What comes first? That was beer. Beer came first before anything else to help the people. And that beer is just ruling the nation. Just ruling at Norway House. And I don't like that. Although, me anyway, I don't bother and my old man never bothered. And still you see lots of poor children, you know, wasting money there. And sometimes they haven't got anything to eat. That beer shouldn't come first, that education should come first before that beer. That is what I always say. We had a hard time to live too. I had five children and I raised up two orphan kids. I had seven altogether and we had one heck of a time but we were never poor. We always had lots to eat in the house and we always had a comfortable home. And we always had blankets to use, bedding and beds like that.

Margaret: How many boys and girls?

Hart: I had three girls. Just one living, two died. One of them was married. She died after.

Margaret: And the boys?

Hart: And the boys, I got two boys. I got a girl living. She is married and she has got four children. But she is not here, she is at Island Lake, Mrs. Wash. So that is what I always feel bad about it. I feel sorry for the people a way back.

They didn't have enough educated. We should be all educated so we wouldn't have to stuck somewhere. You think so?

Margaret: Yes. I think it is beginning. I think the young people will have a better chance.

Hart: I guess so. But I don't believe it yet, till I see it. We were talking about a high school here a couple of years ago. It is not here yet. Somebody is against it, somebody. Some of these white people against it. They don't want the high school at Norway House. And they should have it because when girls and boys go to high school something go wrong over there. They go there and get drunk and doing all kinds of mischief.

Margaret: Oh, not all of them.

Hart: I know, not all of them, but still they do that. Well, anyway, I got a boy there. Right now he is working. He has been going to school. That is my grandson, that is the one I brought up. He is 22, he will be 23 this August. He is going to school and besides making a little bit of money. He is a good boy. He doesn't touch no liquor.

Margaret: And he can find jobs?

Hart: Yes, he finds jobs. They gave him a job because he was about the best behavior in school. Well, I guess that is what you wanted me to tell you?

Margaret: Yes, and can you tell me more about... Well, when the men went out trapping, the women would be left at home, wouldn't they?

Hart: Sometimes they were left at home and sometimes they would all go.

Margaret: Did you ever go?

Hart: No, no, I never. I used to stay home. It's only in the springtime I was to go out. But not often. The kids used to go to school and I didn't want to take them away from school. But they were clever, the two girls of mine, they were very clever. But they died. And the one is very clever too, Mrs. Wash. And I got a married son, he is not living very far here. He has got six kids, six children, my married son. And I got another son in Winnipeg, he is working there. He came and visit this summer. About a week ago he left. But he is working in Winnipeg anyway. He has got job where they're, somewhere in a factory where they, I think it is in the office somewhere. They ship these boots, these shoes, that is where he is working. And he is pretty good at it. He is smart and he is very wise to it. That is where he is.

Margaret: Well, can you remember or can you just tell me, for instance, when your children were small, and you were alone in the wintertime, well how did you get through that winter?

Hart: Well, Louis, my old man, used to put lots of wood for me, everything like that. And put up something to eat, not to run short of anything. And we used to be alone with the kids all the time. Most of the time we used to be alone. All I had to do was just to get water and take in wood and that was all, and I would do my housework.

Margaret: Did you have any cows or cattle or anything like that?

Hart: I had cows just a little while.

Margaret: And what sort of shelter -- you'd have a shelter for them?

Hart: Yes, sure, sure. A stable, we built a stable for them. We had horses all the time. They hauled wood for us. Two horses all the time.

Margaret: So, you were well provided for?

Hart: Yes, yes.

Margaret: Well, would you have any parties or celebrations at Christmas or New Year's, things like that?

Hart: Not in my house, no.

Margaret: Did they...

Hart: Yes, they used to. When the kids go to school they used to have concerts, Christmas tree. That was about all. And in New Year's they used to make a feast, people used to make a feast, one day, that was all. In one place.

Margaret: They would come from all around, would they?

Hart: Yes, all around. Not these people that went back, backgrounds out in the bush. Not them.

Margaret: They would stay out all winter?

Hart: They stay out all winter. They would come in the spring, open water. Out in the camps most of them. They can't stay here because there is nothing to do. (Break in tape) There used to be weddings and oh, sometimes we went to weddings. That was all. And nothing ever happened, we just enjoyed it, that's all. No fights or anything like, our days. Nothing like that. There was no liquor of any kind. Everybody was happy.

Margaret: You would have seen the York boats come in with the big spring supplies, wouldn't you? Do you remember when you were a young girl?

Hart: No, no, no. I don't remember that. No, I don't remember that. I just remember when I went to Nelson House

with the York boat. But I used to see them anyway from... We used to go from the Hudson's Bay here, you know, and I used to see them coming from Oxford and Cross Lake, maybe, or wherever they used to come from, to come and get freight. I used to see that. But I never used to -- I remember to see the York boats. They used to come from Winnipeg to Norway House to bring the freight. But I don't remember that.

Margaret: Did you ever see the others with their sails up? Sailing?

Hart: Yes, yes. And I saw these gas boats now. They used to have sails. In the treaty time, you know. They used to come from all over, Selkirk traders, they used to come by sail boats. They didn't have no engines in their boats. A big boat like now, the gas boats, they were as big as that. But they didn't have the engines to it, they just had the sails. They used to come about six or seven boats. From Selkirk though, when treaty time and they used to put their tents all around. It was nice and they were selling cheap then, the Hudson's Bay Company. Everything they used to sell, groceries and all that. And after the treaty is over, they go back. I remember that.

Margaret: It would be quite a ceremony at the treaty.

Hart: Yes, yes, it used to be very nice like that. But now, a few years, oh, I guess about 30 or 40 years now, they don't allow anybody in that treaty ground. Nobody can come from Selkirk to come and put up a tent there at treaty time. It is altogether different. They don't allow anything like that. But they should. They should. And another thing I'm going to tell you, they should put a meat market here. They should put a meat market here. Look at this hydro now. The meat is awfully expensive, 90 a pound. And even that chicken, you know, for a 2 lb. chicken, \$3.95. And it's not like that at Selkirk. A dollar something, ninety-five. So, I used to remember that, you know, they used to bring things from there and people used to buy large stuff like that, they used to buy. And they made bannock. They used to be glad, you know, when anybody comes. They were cheaper from south. I remember that.

Margaret: And people would dress up and it would be a sort of ceremonial?

Hart: Yes, yes.

Margaret: Do you remember what they looked like in the gathering?

Hart: No, I don't remember what they had on. That was before -- I can hardly remember. They used to do that anyway but I didn't remember that. But my mother used to tell us.

Margaret: Well, in the wintertime here, when you were a girl, would you toboggan and skate?

Hart: Yes, yes. We used to skate, that's all, and toboggan,

that's all. We used to slide in a nice, good hill. (laughs)
That was all I remember. When that feast I was telling you,
that New Year's feast, that is where they had lots of toboggans
and they used to slide, you know. Besides making that feast,
you know, and in one of the houses, they would dance. I
remember that.

Margaret: And the people would come with dog teams and bells?

Hart: Yes, yes, yes. They dressed up so nice, the dogs.
(laughs) Bells on them and ribbons on them. There was a lot
of dogs but not now. They don't use any dogs. Everything is
changing.

Margaret: Well, were there ever any dangerous times here?
Were there ever fires or anything like that, that came close?

Hart: No, no, never.

Margaret: There have been bad fires, you see, further north.

Hart: No, not that. We never had a fire here. Since long
ago, I guess.

Margaret: So, there was, it was a hard life but there was some
happiness too.

Hart: Yes, yes, it was a hard life but it was always nice,
always good. Oh yes, it was very nice. And the people used to
go to church. There was just full churches. Now, they don't
go to church. Just a few. A handful of people goes. I guess
it's all over like that. But long ago, lots of people they
used to go too, you know. Sunday mornings we used to travel
there to the United Church and you used to see lots of people
there. My mother used to bake Saturdays and she used to clean
up our things, you know. Wash them to be nice and tidy when
you go to the church. And we had a big box full of meat and
stuff like that, you know. So we had our lunch there instead
of coming back. After the church is over, about half past
four, we came back home again. Every Sunday we used to do
that.

Margaret: You had a great day.

Hart: Yes. Lots of people used to gather, lots of them,
bringing their lunches, you know.

Margaret: And then you would hear what had gone on during the
week and visit too.

Hart: Yes, it was very nice long ago. It will never be that
again. And you used to see these wigwams, you know. Some of
them used to go, oh, nice and tidy, nice and clean. Everything
was nice and fresh.

Margaret: How would they make them?

Hart: Well, they would put sticks like this, you know, and they would tie them up here. There was a big hole and sometimes they would put the fire in the centre. I remember that. And they would sit all around, you know, their blankets around. Everything. But they were clean, they were nice and tidy.

Margaret: And they would have their beaded jackets?

Hart: No, I didn't see that. But I guess they used to have that long ago.

Margaret: Well, Mrs. McIvor in Wabowden was telling me and showing me pictures of her making rabbit skin robes.

Hart: Yes, I used to see them making rabbit skin robes when we were at Nelson House.

Margaret: They must have been beautiful.

Hart: Yes. You know they skin that and they just go around with it like this, you know. That skin, till it's nothing to the neck. So they roll it up like this, you know. One in the other corner do this, you know. And they would roll that deer skin and that rabbit skin and after they would make a frame and they would tie it like this, one after the other. Every hole like this. At last it's a big one and they would keep you very warm.

Margaret: And beautiful.

Hart: Yes, quite. (laughs) I used to see them too. When we were at Nelson House, I used to see them making it.

Margaret: Well, the women were very skilled with many things.

Hart: Yes, and they used to make deer skins too, you know. They used to make deer skins. They used to take the hair out of the deer skin and after they scrape all that, they would put a pole like, you know, a pole, stick a pole under the ground. And they would turn it this way, where the meat is, so they chop some and they would chop with a bone like, you know. They would make it like a knife so they would chop it like this and all that things come out, that meat comes off. Nothing left there, just the skin. So after they do that, they put it in big tub, wash it up good. And they hang it up outside and they make that oil, grease, something like lard and oatmeal, they mix it together and they put all that, they grease it up on the other side, both sides. So after that they put it inside, close to the stove like, and that deer skin will hang there about three weeks. Then after that they put it in a tub and wash it. They wash that grease off, nice and clean, you know. Lots of water. So, after that they rinse it good, you know, and they dry it up, dry it up. They used to use a stick, you know, just to take all that water out. And after they do that, they push

it, you know, the other one on each side. At last it's dried and just soft like flannel. That is what they did. I saw them. I remember that much. Still they do that with moose skin. But it is hard work, it is heavy. Still lots of women here make moose skin.

Margaret: And then they would make jackets?

Hart: Yes, they make jackets and maybe beadwork. I guess you see some beadworks around.

Margaret: Well, over at Mr. Willie McLeod's this morning, it was one of his daughters was showing me a beautiful jacket that she had bought from Island Lake with beading all down here and beads.

Hart: Oh yes, oh I guess so. They used to sell that here, that beadwork. Not very long ago they told me they were selling beadwork here, handicraft like. I guess they're quite expensive in Winnipeg somewhere.

Margaret: Fewer and fewer people are working with their hands so it is getting rare.

Hart: Yes.

Margaret: Well, you've taken trips down to Selkirk on the Kenora?

Hart: Yes, I used to go to Winnipeg with the Kenora. It is a nice trip. It is a very nice trip.

Margaret: It can be rough though.

Hart: Yes, it's pretty hard when it's rough. It is very hard.

Margaret: Well you're, right now at any rate, it is easier than it was.

Hart: Yes, yes, it is easy. Long ago we used to wash our things with washboard. I guess a lot of them does it.

Margaret: My mother did too.

Hart: Now there is the washing machine.

Margaret: And electric lights.

Hart: I don't have any right now. It costs too much money.

Margaret: Well, I hope things do... Oh, they must get better for the young people. But it has been so interesting for me to meet people and to chat with them and hear what they did. You know so much more than if you just read about it.

Hart: Well, that's what people did too, long ago, just working

very hard. Men too had to work very hard.

Margaret: Yes, they would be out all winter getting a living.

Hart: Yes, course if you don't work, if men didn't work, the kids won't have anything to eat. Of course, there was nothing to help, to get help from the government, nothing. We just got that five dollars in treaty times, that's all. That is all the help we had. The rest they had to do it themselves. And now it is different, they are getting help but that help they are getting, they are going on too far.

Margaret: Well, if there were more jobs it would be better, people could work.

Hart: I guess so. Nobody ever talked to you about that laundry work, they should put here. That laundry, you know. Somebody should have that here.

(End of Interview)

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