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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Account of his work as a young man.

Hamilton: My brother is Gibeau too.

Margaret: Gibeau? And your brother's name is Rorick?

Hamilton: Rorick.

Margaret: Well, will you just tell me what sort of thing you
did when you were a young man?

Hamilton: Well, I can't tell you much. I was working. I was working as a young man down at York Factory. All the time since I left York Factory and I came to Churchill. Then I work here at (inaudible) -- I don't know how many years -- and now I can't work. I'm getting blind. They wanted to make me work again. The welfare man comes here sometimes, that man what gives you grub, you know, welfare? Comes here sometimes. That's the guys that are going to work, yeah.

Margaret: Well, how old are you?

Hamilton: I don't know.

Margaret: 1902. You're sixty-three then?

Hamilton: Yeah.

Margaret: That's a good age. Well, did you do a lot of fishing and hunting?

Hamilton: Oh yes, we fish all the time. Good fishing up there, you know, by Kenora. We had to ship there, you know, and you pull up the fish. The men were scared, you know. But he caught fish in the winter, freeze it, you know. But here you can't do it. No, you can't do at Churchill, no fish around here. Only sometimes here, but down there, good fish for living down there. Not like in Churchill here. Yeah. Everybody left, that is why I left too. I left, we were the first ones left up there. I was up there. I was fishing and hunting. Not far to go and hunt, lots of islands, eh. Like here, you can't go nowhere here. Fishing is getting poor now, yeah.

Margaret: You went into the bush then?

Hamilton: Sure, in the bush. I travelled with the Indians from York Factory, those dogs teams. They had no grub, you know, that was my job. Go down to Severn(?).

Margaret: Take food to them?

Hamilton: Yeah, take food to them.

Margaret: Well, were you what they used to call the runner?

Hamilton: Yeah, I was one of them. My brother too, Rorick, he was one of them too.

Margaret: Well, how far did you... What was the farthest trip you ever went?

Hamilton: Down to Severn(?), twenty days. Yeah, you can't even walk when it's bad weather, you have to camp. Oh, the lakes you know. If it was a fine day then you... twenty days, yeah. Heavy loads, the dogs were hauling the loads, you know,

freight, mail, you know.

Margaret: And you'd have to take enough food for the dogs and yourself.

Hamilton: Yeah, and I would take food for -- when you come back from Smart River to York Factory. (Inaudible) All over the place, Indians were all over, down in Smart River too, yeah. It was 214 from York Factory, the dog team through the bush you know, when the rivers are froze. Go across the rivers on the railroad tracks. With those dogs when I was there. No more now. They using the plane now. (laughs) Yeah.

Margaret: Things have changed.

Hamilton: Yeah, I guess so, changed, yeah.

Margaret: Well, when did the runners stop? Was that, about what time? How long ago?

Hamilton: Oh, well, it stopped soon as we left York Factory. Nobody was there. They closed it up, yeah. Sure, they stopped then. Then I came to Churchill. There is lots of fellows who still coming here. They come in with the plane, like on the river in the winter. The plane would go back and then dogs would take them back where they come from. Down at 214 or Gillam there. And they're all dogs, you had dogs up there. We got dogs and brought them up. We used them, you know, for trapping and for hunt, trapping in the winter. Sometimes when we got spare time. And haul wood with them -- there's no coal down there, now only wood, you know. Right across the river there's lots of wood, used to haul it home, going to cut it. But here you don't need no... you buy coal.

Margaret: It must have been quite a job to do that.

Hamilton: Yeah. It's quite a job when it's cold weather in the winter. In the summer you would work over there. The boys come here, a big boat come here with freight. They landed, you know, and you go back again and bring another load, you see. Yeah. They had horses over there too.

Margaret: Oh did they?

Hamilton: Yeah, they had a team of horses at Hudson's Bay. They were hauling firewood from across the river. All the Indians cut the firewood for them, you know. Like this cordwood, you know. The horses would take them across many times. We had at home two horses. We had a big pile of wood there, Hudson's Bay cuts it after freeze-up in the fall. I was driving, I was driving about a year, I think, there, the horses, then I quit. Another man kicked them and I didn't like it, it's too cold. The horses too slow, you know. So I took a dog team then. That guy, some guys were running the store, you know, boys. Said they wanted to go to Gillam. I said, "All right." I had my four teams of dogs. Go through the bush,

made a carryall for him and put him in the carryall.

(Inaudible conversation)

Margaret: Well, do you remember any particular trip that you took?

Hamilton: No.

Inter: You took so many of them?

Hamilton: Yeah, so many. Well, this was (inaudible). All of the, all of these boys here who came down from York Factory, they all good trappers. They had dogs, you know. Jimmy Spencer and them, they were all there.

Margaret: Well, I talked with the Spencers.

Hamilton: Yeah. He and his dogtrain. He is still trapping, you know.

Margaret: Well, were you born down there?

Hamilton: Yeah, I was born down there.

Margaret: And have you people over there?

Hamilton: No. My people all died out.

Margaret: But did they come from there or did they come from other places?

Hamilton: Yeah, they come from other places. I was there when my dad was there, you know. He was a pigeon(?) man, he was working for the Hudson's Bay all his lifetime.

Margaret: At York Factory?

Hamilton: Yeah. That's why they keep me over there. I was going to come over here to Churchill, you know. They stopped me and told me not to go in here. When the old man was alive, so I stopped. My mother too passed away.

Margaret: Was she from York Factory?

Hamilton: York Factory, yeah. And my dad, then I was by myself. Just me and my brother. Then I came away too. Nobody was there. I came to Churchill.

Margaret: You were saying that they kept horses there?

Hamilton: Yeah.

Margaret: What did they do? Did they build a sort of byre?

Hamilton: Yeah, they got a good barn. Lots of grass, cut hay

for them in the summer on the island, you know. They were all right. They got to live good, the horses. They would let them go, get their own grass.

Margaret: Well, did they have cows too?

Hamilton: Oh yeah, they had cows up at the village up there. They had lots of cows.

Margaret: Well, what about when the boats came in in the spring? There must have been quite a celebration then.

Hamilton: Yeah, oh yeah. Oh boy, lots of guys there, all the guys from Shamattawa, they come work for the boats, a whole bunch of them. Yeah, they carry it up. A big walk from here, you know. There is a quite a bit of stuff. It's all carried. Lots of Shamattawa guys. They comes down, you know, they know what time the ships come in, you know. They wait for them. Wait for the shipment at York Factory. They got houses down the hill, up there, you know.

Margaret: About how many people were around the Factory itself?

Hamilton: Oh, I don't know. Lots of them but they're all dying out now. Look at Shamattawa. There's not many of them there now. They're all dying out, yeah. The old people are. All the young fellows are there. Yeah. Lots of guys that time, boy. A whole bunch of them comes around there when the ship comes. They don't take up the cargo to the depot. There's a depot, a great big house they had. Take it up there and pile it up. That ship would go out in the night tide again and go for another load. Three nights it takes to come to Churchill. Boy, that wind would start blowing, you know. When it's blowing you can't come in the bay here because, you know, there's currents and deep water, eh. He's not prepared to come in when it's dark, you see.

Margaret: Did your mother and father tell any stories of when they were young there?

Hamilton: Oh yes. They tell us stories. My dad was working around Hudson's Bay store but he quit Hudson's Bay store. He died with mother. He went to Winnipeg. He was glad to go there till he got work. He goes up there and works for Hudson's Bay sometimes. You know, he stays too, and my mother was working up there.

Margaret: Did they tell any stories of the old days?

Hamilton: No. They never tell no stories like that.

Margaret: Well, what about, were there any dances?

Hamilton: Oh yes.

Margaret: With costumes?

Hamilton: Dances and marrying. Oh, lots of times, you know, the ship come in. Ship don't come in, now at night there's no tide at night, the flood don't come till at midnight. They have to wait for that ship to come in. They dance until the ship come in by the river. Some of them getting married.
(Inaudible)

(Break in tape)

Hamilton: ...long time, around in the winter. Yeah. That's the way it goes.

Margaret: What about New Year's and times like that?

Hamilton: Oh boy! Down at York Factory. Yeah. Here, you don't even know you're at Christmas, not here. Here in Churchill. No.

Margaret: Well, they didn't have a sort of week of Christmas and New Year's, sort of week?

Hamilton: Yeah. Well, they keep Christmas. New Year's comes at midnight. Get a team of dogs and put harness on them and put ribbons on your dogs, and bells. Sure, it was a good time that time. But I never see that at Churchill since I came, no. I don't even, they never even know Christmas and New Year's here. No. But down there at York Factory down there, know everyone, you always have a cup of tea, you know, and little cakes, you know. When you come to church in the morning, you have service in the morning for the Indians and you go to visit them up there. Yeah. No more of that now.

Margaret: It must have been quite a sight to see.

Hamilton: Yeah, oh boy, quite a sight.

Margaret: Dogs and...

Hamilton: Yeah, dogs are living good up there. They got all kinds of food, you know. Fish and whales, there's lots of seals, but here you can't keep dogs here. Nothing here. Only in the summer some little whales come in here. (Inaudible) we can't get any. They are supposed to save the whale, they are doing it around here. The law is. But down there you are safe whaling. We get to put seven in one tide but here you can't do that. You have to spear them here and you don't pick any. They get away from you, some of them. Shoot them here. But down there you don't shoot them, that's why they come to the river. Just put their name down in case they get caught. That time we get seven at one tide. Yeah.

Margaret: The buildings down there, were they...?

Hamilton: Oh yeah, old buildings down there. They had a big church there too. They just made it before we came away from

there. Bishop Hale made a new church at the village. There's a good bell on it, too, still standing.

Margaret: And nobody there?

Hamilton: Nobody there. They are all at Churchill now. Oh, the bishop was talking about it the last time he came. I think he flew up there into York Factory. Talking about the church. He said, "It's too bad everybody left York Factory. There is a

good church there." And the organ is there too, you know. He was talking about the church. He said, "It's too bad," he says. Everybody left York Factory. There is a good church there. You could play the organ there. It's a big church. And no York Factory people. It is very small. They had a good big church. They got lumber from the Nelsons here, lots of houses where the white men left. Took it all over to York Factory with scows, you know. That how such a fine church he's making. They fixed it right and good fine windows on it, yeah. The bishop was talking about it last time he came, but he can't do nothing with it. Can't move it, no, it's too big. Can't bring it over to Churchill, you can't bring it down. All the houses standing there.

Margaret: Well, in the wintertime, what did you use for light? Candles?

Hamilton: Oh, use coal oil.

Margaret: Coal oil.

Hamilton: Coal oil. They ship us some coal oil for light. Gas lamps you would use.

Margaret: But there were never any fires?

Hamilton: No. No fires here.

Margaret: People must have been careful.

Hamilton: Yeah. Well, no fire there and sometimes they use small candles, coal oil mostly. They don't use gas.

Margaret: Well, how old were you when you started with the company?

Hamilton: I was young. Just to start, to start when I was a young fellow. Yeah, to make use my showshoes. I had to, I'm driving a team of dogs, see. I had to keep my load up in the track when it's bad weather, snowing. I got used to it. Yeah.

Margaret: Did you make your own snowshoes?

Hamilton: Hudson's Bay had them. The Indians they send them. They give you some when you go off on a trip, you know. Yeah, you turn it back if you don't break anything. Sure, that's what they bought. What they used. But I use my own thing. I

used my dogs, my harness and my toboggan; you get paid for that. Yeah. They had dogs down there too. But they were no good there. They died out. You know, I don't know how many

teams of dogs was there. Boat brought them there one summer. They got a sickness and it killed them all. They breed dogs there, you know, put them in a little cage, about five of them. And breed them and use them in the fall. They're good dogs too, boy. (Inaudible)

Margaret: Well, everyone says that it was the type of thing that happened. (Inaudible)

Hamilton: Yeah, yeah.

Margaret: Were there any groups in the fall, did men go in groups duck shooting?

Hamilton: Yeah. Well, in the winter you would go for wood up the river, you know. Go and get a lot of wood, you know. Go and cut it there. Stay long, bring a big load of wood. Then get the horses to haul it up on their backs. Don't cost you nothing. Yeah. We take tents, you know, and everything. Go in there and get it. Lots of mosquitoes. Used to carry that wood down a long way too. To the road. Before you make a raft, pile it up. Then you go down, make a raft and go down, and it's all right there. When you come down and the horses pull it up. No more of that.

Margaret: Well, when you went out as a runner in the wintertime, how did you protect yourself against the cold?

Hamilton: Well, I use lots of clothes, use a lot of clothes. I got caribou shoes, you know; put some duffel underneath, your feet never get cold.

Margaret: And at night would you...?

Hamilton: Night take it off and dry it.

Margaret: Did you use tents?

Hamilton: Tents, yeah. They have to use tents, yeah. Bad weather sometimes, snow. Sometimes we have a tipi camping when you go through lots of bush, you know. You take a tent and when it's bad weather, you stop in tents. Down at Severn(?) we take tents. You can't go nowhere. It's all bare, you know, or you might get a creek. You couldn't find a good one to set it in, you know. You go in that creek and set up a tent. Yeah, pick a little wood somewhere, make a fire in your tent.

Margaret: You must have been glad to get back again.

Hamilton: Oh yes. It was a long trip. Oh, the dogs was all right. They didn't get played out. They had lots of food. There was lots of food down at Severn(?) too, you know. Mr.

Blarn(?) was over there, the old man what died down at (inaudible). He used to come when he was a post office man. He killed lots of seals up there and put them in a big house and freezes them in the winter. Good for dogs.

Margaret: Well, what sort of food did you take with you?

Hamilton: Well, take corn meal. It was light, you know. Maybe you'd find a seal along the way. You know, take a piece home for the dogs or some whale, you know, comes ashore. They shoot them, you know. The dogs had lots of food.

Margaret: Did you make your own bannock?

Hamilton: Yeah, we made our own bannock. Never eat bread that time. No. Because bread take 24 pounds of flour, lard, baking powder. Making bannock in your camp, it's good like that, I'll tell you. Sure, a bit of frying pan, you know, pile the wood on (inaudible), that's what we did. When we travelled we never seen no bannock that time. When I came to Churchill I eat bread all the time. Down there they never eat bread down there. They eat flour, they make their own bannock. That's what it is. Lots of people were here that time but no, not many of them now. They all died out. Somebody was here.

Margaret: I was speaking to Mrs. Gray. Are there any others around?

Hamilton: No. There's lots of guys down in Shamattawa.

Margaret: What about Split Lake?

Hamilton: Oh boy, Split Lake there is lots of guys there all right. Not old people, not many old people there. Only young people. They've grown up. I went there too, you know.

Margaret: (Inaudible)

Hamilton: Oh, when I was up there, long time ago. I was trapping.

(End of Interview)

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