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INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: NORWAY HOUSE/BERENS RIVER

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DATE OF INTERVIEW:  
INTERVIEWER: MARGARET STOBIE  
INTERPRETER:  
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\*NOTE: A repeat of a large portion of this interview can also  
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Jimmy: For a silver fox people used to get \$500. And now a  
silver fox isn't worth nothing. But that was all in trade, we  
never seen no cash. And I told all my kids, before I boiled it  
up I'd never eat it -- just only what you call Four X. And  
then no lard, just tallow, long ago.

Margaret: Well, there would be fish oil and bear oil and...

Jimmy: People use to make fish oil too, you know. And then they used to make sturgeon oil too. I remember when I was a kid, the people used to sew it together, the sturgeon hides, the skin of sturgeon, and that is where they used to put sturgeon oil. They used to sell it in Hudson's Bay. And the Hudson's Bay sell it back to the people.

Margaret: Well, you would have known York boats and things like that, wouldn't you?

Jimmy: Oh yes, yeah. My father used to build them. My father and his brother, they used to build them. Well, I got a picture of that now. The old, I mean before they tore the buildings down. It is different now. Before they tear the buildings down. I'll show you where they used to build boats. They used to build them inside the building. And they used to send the York boats to Little Grand. Mr. Smith is the one that teases me, but he's getting old. You know that time I went down to Herron Bay? That's the pulp wood, that's those boats, loading up the boats. This is what they call Fort Churchill.

Margaret: I've seen that.

Jimmy: You see the two companies, they say they used to fight long ago. And the strongest man used to get the fur. And they eventually joined together. Now there, that's the Hudson's Bay at Norway House before they took the buildings down. See this big building here with three doors? That's where they used to build the York boats. You see the steam box there. And this here, that's where they used to pack fur. They used to repack fur from the outposts. And this is the district office here. And this is the mess house here and that was where the bachelors used to stay. And the ones that are married men, they used to stay here. And the district manager's place here, the bungalow. And this is the two storey here. And this is what they called the pork shed. That is where they used to keep the pork. And then you can't see another one here between these buildings, the old jail. That was a little old jail. They used to keep them in there. I think they are still using it. The time I went up three years ago, they are still using it. Just only the powder magazine. The powder magazine is

away down over here, over this side, that's where the hospital is. A little over that side.

Margaret: Yeah, I've been there. Is this the arch that is still there?

Jimmy: Yes, the archway is still there.

Margaret: The bell?

Jimmy: Still is, they keep that up. I used to drive...

Fred: That was before, now they got all these new buildings,

where is it, in here. This is all tore down, this is all new buildings, it is all new since I been down there.

Jimmy: I used to drive a team of horses with a wagon right here inside the yard. And you'll see this here, that's the bell. They used to ring that 7 o'clock in the morning to start work. And then 12 o'clock quitting time. And then 1 o'clock start again and then 6 o'clock. Oh, I used to wish that bell would ring soon, you know. (laughter) Because there is no lunch between.

Margaret: Well, would they build canoes in there too as well as...?

Jimmy: No, they build no canoes. People were building their own canoes, birch bark canoes, you know. And then they got those, what you call, Peterborough.

Fred: There was no canvas on it. It was built with bass wood. The Peterborough canoe company used to make them in Ontario.

Jimmy: That is the old Upper Fort Garry.

Fred: Oh, you got the old Upper Fort, eh?

Jimmy: See, I got this book from the Hudson's Bay, people have been lending it away. They want to read it, you know, the history. And then the kids have been tore it. And that is only what I got out of it.

Fred: That is the way it looked in Winnipeg, you know. Up on Broadway, at the Fort Garry Hotel where the old gate is? Well, this is the original buildings that were there. That is the first time I seen them too. Johnny was showing them just now. The old stone gate is still there.

Margaret: Yes, I see it.

Fred: That is all that's left of it. That is the way it looked there at that time.

Jimmy: And there was an old Scotch fellow that used to stay up, well you know old Stewart McRae? When he first came to this part of the country he said there were only a few houses outside of the Fort Garry. He said where the ministry is, he used to go there on a Sunday hunting prairie chickens. He said there used to be a slough.

Fred: Sure, that's all it was, a big marsh there.

Jimmy: And then he told me now there is a big town there. It is good to keep these, though.

Margaret: Oh yes.

Jimmy: I was thinking of trying to get this fixed here.

Fred: Well, you can. You can have that all retaken and enlarged.

Jimmy: This is just only a bay, you know. That is what they call Robertson's Bay. That is where I was born, right here.

Margaret: I was in there seeing the McIvors and Rosses and Robertsons.

Jimmy: That is where I was born.

Fred: The Robertson you seen down there, he's a relation.

Jimmy: And this here, oh that's higher. And here that, that is the portage going down to the mission. That is a long point. See, there is a mission here. But you can't see it good enough. And that is a canoe dock. And see the monument here? The chief factor got drowned at Thief Falls.

Margaret: It's still there?

Fred: Yeah, they have a big rock cairn up there.

Jimmy: They couldn't take it down. It was too heavy, you know. And this flag pole is down. The old flag pole, they used to raise it to top mast and lower it down. And that... that is where they used to know the mission people. In the winter they used to hoist the flag.

Margaret: And the people would come from all around?

Jimmy: For their mail, yeah.

Fred: In them days, they used to get only one or two mails a winter. The summertime they would get the mail more often because they could travel faster. In the winter it was nothing but dogs.

Jimmy: From all through, from Norway House to Red River.

Margaret: Did you ever do that trip?

Fred: That was the trip he was on for years. He used to be the mailman at one time here. He's travelled a good many miles up and down this old lake here on foot. (laughs)

Margaret: How long would such a trip take?

Jimmy: Sometimes it would take seven days. Just depends on the weather, you know. And sometimes more than that. Sometimes you had to get a wind going. And when you had good dogs... One time we started off from here. We camped here, you know, at his grandmother's place there. That is the time I was with Don Donalds and Hamilton sent us to go and get grub. That is the time I was staying at Rapid Point a week and a half. We got drunk. Oh, drunk. At last we started seeing things, you know. And the boss came, Hamilton came. Oh, if he

didn't get mad. And he says to me, "How long you stay?" And he say, "You must have been lonesome. I'll send Jocky down to come and help you." And he says to me, "Don't go alone. You're the mailman and you need help." Well, one fellow is still alive yet at Fisher River. Old Jimmy Heron. We started off from here in the morning and we camped at Black River. And from Black River to Norway House.

Fred: That's a long hike.

Margaret: How did you shelter yourself at night when you stopped?

Jimmy: They had camps along the lake. They had camp at Bigstone.

Fred: And then shack at Merchant Point.

Jimmy: Yeah, and there was Whole Point.

Fred: And then down the shore.

Jimmy: And then Montreal Point, another one. And from here they had a camp up there, I don't know whose camp. Many times we used to boil the kettle there. Catfish, you know.

Fred: Oh yes, the catfish. Old Hugley and them used to be up that way. Did you know, somebody else before him had a shack there. I think it was some of the guy's fishing around there.

Jimmy: And then there was one at Split Rock. I think that's the one they call the Two Rivers isn't it?

Fred: Yes, it's just a little north of the Two Rivers.

Jimmy: And there is camps there, fishermen camps. And then...

Fred: Winter fish camps.

Jimmy: Winter fish camps. And then there is a camp -- Jockey McLennan used to keep it. I mean, what you call, (inaudible).

Fred: Oh, way up there. That was at Rapid Point there.

Jimmy: At Rapid Point, yeah. And then of course them Collins that was....

Fred: From there Collins was at Big Bullhead. And from there the next one was Norquays at Mill Point.

Jimmy: Yeah, Ramsey's.

Fred: Ramsey's Point they called it at that time. Then from there it went into Riverton.

Jimmy: Yeah.

Fred: That's where the Darcys had a stopping place there. The bottom of Washow Bay.

Jimmy: Yeah. And then, what you call, that, he had a stopping place there, (Inaudible).

Fred: Yeah.

(Break in tape)

Jimmy: ...and there is (inaudible) there, you see. There is one here. There is a guy there watching it now, opening. And where they peel the bark, you know, two miles from the dock and they stop him. Half an hour before we quit.

Fred: Oh, I see.

Jimmy: And then start half an hour again. Oh, the water runs. And then every time they were a hole like that, there were six holes.

Fred: Four fill each hole.

Jimmy: After, when you fill six holes then put them on a dig.

Margaret: Well, when you were out on winter camps, did you ever have to shoot your own food?

Jimmy: Yeah, we used to. And then, the fall and winter like that, you know, we used to what you call fall fishing by the dogs and further along we used to hang fish. We used to hang them whitefish here. They used to do that here too.

Fred: Yeah, I can remember when they used to do that here. It's not so long ago that they quit. The government put a stop to it, they wouldn't let us kill any more whitefish. That's what's making it so tough for the people that actually live along the lake. You take 90% of the fishermen here now that's got all the big outfits, they are all farmers from up south. The Icelandic settlements up south; Riverton, and (inaudible) and Gimli and that (inaudible) Island.

Jimmy: And they're the ones that's...

Fred: They are the guys that's really controlling the lake now. They resent the natives of the lake, you know, making their living off the lake.

Jimmy: After I quit with the Hudson's Bay Company, I started on a sailboat. And then whitefishing must have been breaking the law left and right from the first start. Because I was working on the sailboat. They were using four and a quarters, you know. Because I was fishing, you see. That's what I told the inspector here. A lot of poor people, you know.

Fred: That's a fact.

Margaret: Well, in the fall did you go out on duck shoots?

Fred: Well, in them days they used to shoot ducks any time of the year. They never went out like they do now, just go out for a sport. Because more or less they went out, when they went out it was when they needed something to eat, they went and got it and that was it. It didn't matter what time of year it was. They didn't go to extremes and go and slaughter and bunch. They just went and killed what they needed and that was it.

Margaret: But they'd come at certain times?

Fred: Oh yes, take like the....

Jimmy: There is one thing I couldn't understand. The treaty people, the government allows them, they'll kill everything. And a poor outsider can't. No, he can't kill. He can't kill a moose. Now the outsiders here, they don't get help from the government. And now at Norway House the government helps but here not. Even they're building houses at Norway House. Because I seen it because the time I went up. And here they don't help. The government doesn't help them and I don't know why.

Margaret: Well, this morning Mr. Whiteway and Mr. Everett...

Jimmy: Yeah, John James.

Margaret: ...were talking about when the York boats would come in and the canoes would go up the river taking supplies.

Jimmy: Oh yes, I used to see a lot of them coming from Nelson House and Split Lake and Cross Lake and Oxford House and Gods Lake, Iron Lake. Where they used to come and meet together. Now, for sometimes two or three days nobody could get in the store.

Fred: Oh yes, I wouldn't doubt that.

Jimmy: All the stuff was cheap long ago. Now there was, we used to call it tobacco, we used to call it Meegahay(?), twist tobacco, you know. And they used to pack this, a big pack. They used to pack it just like as hard as a board. And then they used to sell that eight plugs for a quarter. And now what is it now?

Fred: If you can get it you would pay a dollar and a half a stick for it. (laughs)

Jimmy: We would get eight for a quarter. And any kind of chewing tobacco, they used to charge ten cents a plug. And now fifty-five cents. (laughs)

Fred: Forty-seven cents a plug. And they make the plugs smaller than they used to be for ten cents. Well, it's the

same on the outside, everything has gone up. A package of cigarettes, you used to get a package of twenty-five for

twenty-five cents, now you have to pay fifty-seven cents. And now, you see, taxes, that is what does it. Too many government employees, I guess.

Margaret: Well, do you remember any particular one of these trips that you used to go on? When you were carrying the mail, were there any particularly hard ones or ones that stick in your memory?

Jimmy: Oh I used to sometimes have a hard time. One time here we stayed Mossy Point two days back in the bush there, windbound. All at once the wind changed, you know. And then when we start off from Bullhead and we started to Doghead now and we didn't know -- it was snowing -- we didn't know the wind keep on turning, you see. And we got lost, we pretty near went down to Bloodvein. (laughs)

Margaret: Well, did you take shotguns or rifles with you on these trips?

Jimmy: No, nothing, nothing, just an axe and that.

Margaret: No hunting?

Jimmy: No, just an axe and snowshoes.

Margaret: Well, what sort of guns did they use then, were they muzzleloaders?

Jimmy: Long ago? Yes, that is what the people were using. And then the old, what you call, flintlocks we used call it. You know, they are kicking around now, those old fashioned guns, you know.

Margaret: And then would they go out, a number of them together?

Jimmy: Yeah, and then these what they call muzzleloaders came. And then rifles, you know. Oh yeah. And they used to make their own axes there at Norway House too.

Margaret: I've heard they did.

Jimmy: Yeah, and they used to get oak for dog toboggans and they used to turn them at Norway House. There is mold there, they were using it. That's where they used to turn it. That's where they used to turn the carpenters out there. And they used to soak them oak boards in a steam box.

Margaret: Well, the other day here, a moose came swimming by and they got him pretty quickly, I gather. But there would be a lot of moose. People would shoot them for food.

Jimmy: And there is a place there on the other side of the

landing. The big island, we call it Kettle Island. I guess you've never seen that.

Margaret: No, I haven't.

Jimmy: Right in the rock, you know. Just like three kettles. Oh, they tip the boat that way. It has the same diameter because we took to bail it out one time. We wanted to find out how it looked underneath.

Margaret: How deep was it?

Jimmy: Oh, about that. And the time I went down to Norway House I told Healy to go and see that. Looks like three kettles like that, you know. And the big one right here, you know. Quite a ways from the water too.

Fred: Yeah, the water must have been awful high. They got one like that up towards here on this Berens River going up to Little Grand Rapids. They call it Pothole Rapids. There's three there but they are way deeper than this here. And they are about four feet in diameter. Now there is a small rapids down below but they claim at one time that that was a big rapids and that it had rocks rolling around and around there with the current, that's wore them holes in there. You can see it's been like it was ground out. And it's not all a straight even wall, it's ridged like. You can see that there's something that's been wearing in there. I guess that must be the original way because there's rocks down inside of it.

Jimmy: You remember the time of the first drilling at the Farewell Lake Mine?

Fred: Yeah.

Jimmy: That's the fall when I left the company, I quit.

Fred: That's when you quit?

Jimmy: Yeah, and in the spring the boss sent me to go with the two white men. So I started off from Norway House to Iron Lake and from Iron Lake to Sandy Lake. There's one big portage there took us two days to go through.

Fred: Oh yes, that's the fourteen mile portage.

Jimmy: Took us two days, took all their luggage, you know. We camped halfway. And then the road was too hard and then they came down by Deer Lake by Berens over here.

Margaret: Well, when did you first come to Berens River? How old were you when you first came to Berens River?

Jimmy: It's going on now twenty-two years this fall since I left Norway House.

Fred: He come from Norway House.

Jimmy: Of course my wife was born here, you see. And my wife died here. And then was too hard, you know, and we came around this way. Took the steamboat from here, went home. Oh, that time I didn't think nothing of packing an eighteen foot canoe. That's what I told my boy now. Even now he couldn't pack a feather.

Margaret: Well, you've done your share.

Jimmy: And I made good money. I stayed there two months and a half. That's when they just about closed it, you know, quit, because he was no good. You know Quincy?

Fred: Yeah.

Jimmy: And I seen him down there.

Fred: You seen him there?

Jimmy: Yeah, when I was carrying the canoe. I was the one that took the canoe off and all at once he says to me, "Come on there, hold your canoe." And what do you think of that, he started to talk Cree. (laughs)

Fred: He give you quite a surprise, I guess.

Jimmy: Yeah, I didn't recognize him, you know. Quincy, he started to talk Cree, eh. He used to be up north, you know, Split Lake. He used to be a Mountie.

Margaret: Oh, I see.

Jimmy: He married to, what they call, Alex Stout's adopted daughter, Della. That is what he was telling me.

Margaret: Well, there must have been great celebrations here too, New Year's and times like that?

Jimmy: Here?

Fred: New Year's?

Jimmy: Not much, eh Fred?

Fred: Not an awful lot. The treaty was the big time of the year here in the old days.

Jimmy: And even long ago they used to be great times during treaty time, you know. All the traders used to follow the Indian Agent. They used to use sailboats. And then down across the mission there, you know where the garden is there, between the Hudson's Bay and the mission house, that's where the traders used to have their tents. Just like a street. They had those big tents. They done the same thing here too, eh?

Fred: They did do it here, yeah. It used to last a week. It was just one big celebration. See, they all got their treaty money and then the traders, they had all this stuff they used to bring out, trade goods. And they used to, the Agent and them, they used to have a bunch of stuff they used to give out, like shot and powder and fish hooks and stuff like that.

Jimmy: Yeah, grandfather used to be an Agent. Old McKay, Angus McKay, his grandfather. Now those people they say that he used to be the best Indian Agent they ever had.

Margaret: Yes, he was a famous one.

Jimmy: Yeah, he was an Indian Agent long ago. He started off from here and he started to pay from St. Peters Inlet.

Fred: Yeah.

Jimmy: And then all around the lake.

Fred: He used to pay, go up to Little Grand Rapids. I think he used to pay Norway House but I don't think them other ones were taking treaty.

Jimmy: Yeah, he was down at Big Grand Rapids too.

Fred: Yeah, but I mean to Cross Lake. He went down there too?

Jimmy: Yeah, he went down to Cross Lake too.

Fred: He must have really had money because it was practically a whole summer of work.

Jimmy: There was just only one Indian Agent that time. And then he had his station here.

Margaret: Then it would be a celebration all the way up the lake?

Fred: From one reserve to another and it was that way the whole summer.

Jimmy: And they were using a little schooner. And they called it Hustler, you know. He used to take lots of traders in there too.

(End of Interview)

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