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HIGHLIGHTS:

- General recollections of her school days.
- Mentions the passenger boats that used to visit Walpole Island.

Burton: We'd like to talk about your school days on Walpole Island and also in Wallaceburg. And perhaps you could tell us your name and what nationality you are.

Frances: Well my name, maiden name, was Frances Day. And I came to live on Walpole Island when I was nine years old. I was born in Sault Ste. Marie. And I attended the day school on Walpole Island until I went to high school in Wallaceburg. And my mother's name was Mary Jane Day, and my father's name was Frank Day. He was a descendant of Peter Geeshig and the name was changed from Geeshig to Day; his father's name was William Day, who was a son of Peter Geeshig. And I understand that Peter Geeshig was one of the original settlers on the island, on Walpole Island.

Burton: Yes, that's true. The name appears on many of the papers.

Frances: I went to high school for four years in Wallaceburg, and then got married and moved to Alginack, Michigan, and have lived between Walpole and Alginack. I married Norman Miskokomon in 1935 and had one son, Frank Lorne his name was,

and he was killed in 1962. But we have a granddaughter who is Norma Laureen Miskokomon and she is 15 now. I remember some of the teachers that taught on Walpole Island. There was a mother and a daughter; the mother's name was Mrs. McDougall and the daughter's name was Mrs. McPherson and they were the first teachers that I remember. And then they were transferred to Kenora, and then the new teachers that came in were a man and a wife, Mr. and Mrs. James Bailey. Then I had them until I left to go to high school.

Burton: Could you tell us something about the school, what it looked like, what type of building it was?

Frances: Yeah, it was a wooden building, two large rooms, and there were living quarters in the rear for the teachers. The one room was from the first grade to probably the third grade, and then the other room was for the fourth grade up to the eighth grade. And I remember that they large furnaces that they burnt wood in and they had a pile of wood beside the furnaces in each room. And we used to hang our clothes in the hall as we went in, take our boots off. And we had one teacher for each room. There was a large bell that the teachers rang when we went into school at nine in the morning, and at noon we would have an hour to go home and have our lunch. And then they'd ring the bell for us to come back, and then at four o'clock we'd say our evening prayer and then we could go home. That's about all I can remember.

Burton: What sort of a playground did you have?

Frances: Oh, we had swings and a couple of slides. And I remember that the boys used to play soccer and play baseball -- they had a little diamond there. And then when Mr. and Mrs. Bailey were there they fixed up a tennis court for us and we were taught how to play tennis, which I enjoyed very much. And I do remember that we used to have the fall fairs, school fairs and one year we would have it at the back of the island in the Potawatomi section, and the next year we would have it in the front section at the Chipewyan section. And we would have our work displayed and we would take our pet animals, and we would play games and there would be prizes. And we had quite an enjoyable day of it.

Burton: Did you have any races in those fairs?

Frances: Yes, we had races and baseball games. And what else did we have? I guess that's about all. I know we took our pet animals and exhibited them, we got prizes for those.

Burton: Did you take any animals?

Frances: I think I took a cat one time. (laughs) We had some strange pets come in. Norm, what did... Mouse, that was a house pet.

Gladys: Did you ever go on a passenger boat excursion?

Frances: Yes. we used to come over to Alginack from Walpole Island and board the Wakeeta or the Kashmoe and go to, on the big excursion boat, down to Belle Isle and spend the day, and then come back in the evening. We'd pack a lunch and there would be a band and we'd dance, and have a good time. And at Belle Isle there was of course the zoo, and the aquarium, and the... They had canoes and horses to ride, and I'd say we'd go maybe two or three times a summer, that was the highlight. And then they used to have the Walpole Island fair and the big excursion boats used to come into the dock on Walpole, and the Indian band from Walpole used to play for them and that lasted three or four days in August, towards the end of August.

Burton: Do you remember the names of the boats that used to come in?

Frances: The Wakeeta and the Kashmoe. Do you remember any other?

Norman: (husband) The Owana, Putten Bay, and...

Burton: You spoke of earlier excursions. Were these ever arranged by the schools, the school teachers?

Norman: Yeah, not school teachers. My dad used to arrange them.

Frances: No, I don't think so. Your father used to arrange them?

Burton: Well, what I meant is were they for the schools at any time?

Frances: No, not necessarily, everybody could go.

Burton: But they were invited to...

Norman: General excursion.

Frances: Yes.

Burton: But the school pupils went along on the excursions?

Frances: Right. That's right. Norman, my husband, often talks of the opening of the bridge in Detroit. What's the name of that big bridge? Ambassador Bridge, Detroit, when the students from Walpole Island from the schools were invited to the opening of the Ambassador Bridge. And they dressed in costume, and they took them down in a large excursion boat to Detroit for the parade and for the ceremonies.

Burton: And you stayed overnight?

Frances: Yes.

Burton: Getting back to schools, what were the everyday routines in the the school?

Frances: Well, in the morning we would begin with a prayer and a passage from the Bible, and then we would begin our classes. And somewhere in between I know we'd all line up and we'd have to take cod liver oil (laughs). And we'd have to be inspected to see that our teeth were brushed and our ears were clean and our hands were clean, and if they weren't we were sent home. (laughs)

Burton: Did you ever do any singing?

Frances: Yes, we sang songs, and I do remember, like we used to have Halloween parties and we dressed up in costumes. And in the wintertime we would have skating parties and come back to the school for hot chocolate and something to eat. And we had very enjoyable times that I can remember. And we would gather at people's houses and have taffy pulls, and corn roasts in the fall, and swimming parties in the summer.

Burton: Did people ever put on concerts at the hall?

Frances: Yes, we used to have the Christmas concerts. And I can remember that we used to practise for three or four weeks for the Christmas concerts, and everybody would take part. And there would be skits and plays and singing. And, well, anyone who had any talent would appear and the parents and all the children would come to the concerts. And we'd have a big Christmas tree and the children would always receive gifts and candy and fruit.

Burton: Do you remember every exchanging gifts with other schools?

Frances: No, I don't.

Burton: Or corresponding?

Frances: No, I don't remember anything about that. I do know that we had the two schools. There was this school that was at the front of the Island was predominantly for the Chipewyan tribe, and then the one at the back of the Island for the Potawatomi children. I attended both schools. When we first came from Sault Ste. Marie we settled in the Potawatomi area and I attended the school at the back of the island. What was the teacher's name? I forgot now.

Burton: Would it be Mrs. George?

Frances: Yes, Mrs. George. And then my father built a new house down near the river and we lived down there for the rest of the time.

Burton: How many years did you go to the Number Two school?

Frances: Well, I think I only went about two years. Having come from the city I was quite advanced, because I had started school when I was four years old and the children on the Walpole didn't start until they were six. So I took the governmental exams when I was eleven years old and passed them -- that was the senior fourth class they called it, the senior fourth at that time which would be the eighth grade. But they told me I was too young to go to high school, so I sat around

until I was thirteen. That was two years that I didn't go to school until they would allow me to go to high school.

Burton: How did you go to school in Wallaceburg, which is perhaps five miles away?

Frances: Oh we had... One of the boys that was going to high school had a car and we would pay him so much a week to go back and forth to school. And I can remember in those days that there weren't any very good roads. They were all muddy roads and in the wintertime we'd get stuck going to school. Sometimes we'd have to park the car and walk the rest of the way. And we had quite a rough time in the wintertime and in the spring trying to get back and forth to school. But sometimes when the weather was bad in the wintertime and the ice was coming down the Sny then the ferry wouldn't run so I used to board in Wallaceburg. I'd stay over with some people.

Burton: Do you remember having to push the car out of the mud at any time?

Frances: Oh yes, lots of times we had to push the car out of the mud. (laughs)

Burton: And do you remember any of the teachers' names in Wallaceburg?

Frances: Yes, I remember, let me see now, there was Mr. Lang -- he was the principal. Before Mr. Lang there was Mr. Dickinson, a little short rotund man who scared me half to death because he used to put his glasses on the end of his nose and look over them. He taught Latin and I know I took Latin for three years. And I was so afraid of him and I didn't want

to take it for another year and I had to go and ask his permission to change my subject; I wanted to take Spanish. So I went into his office and he looked at me over those glasses and he said, "Now, are you afraid of me?" And I said, "Yes." So he started to laugh and he said, "All right, you can take Spanish for your last year." So I always remember that. And then Mr. Lang was the next principal, he was a very nice man. And we had Miss Sutherland was a teacher, and we had a French teacher who came from Paris and she taught us French. And I remember some of the children were French who took the French and they thought, "Oh, this is going to be easy," you know. And I had to find out that Parisian French and the Canadian French are two different languages. So the children that were French

had a worse time than what we had learning the language.

Gladys: Can you remember some of the other students that went to high school with you?

Frances: From Walpole Island?

Gladys: Yes.

Frances: Yes, there was Edward Pinnance -- he drove the car. And there was Laura Kyowash, and Vera Kyowash -- they were sisters. And what was their sister's name, Norm?

Norman: Mildred.

Frances: Mildred Kyowash, Peggy Kyowash, and who else was there? Your brother John, John Miskokomon, that's about all I can remember.

Burton: What was the enrollment in Wallaceburg? How big was the school?

Frances: I really don't remember. I think probably between two and three hundred in all the classes. And we went up to grade thirteen. There was a business that they had, like you could take a general course and then you could take a business course. And the girls who took the business course they learned to use typewriters and took bookkeeping courses, and they didn't have to take all the general subjects that we had to take. We had to take English every year and some type of math, and then we had to take a science, and we took art, and I know that we used to do an awful lot of homework. Not like the children these days, they don't bring the homework home that we used to have to bring home.

Gladys: Did the high school have shop courses?

Frances: No, they didn't have shop courses. There wasn't anything of that sort then. We stayed in our classroom and the teachers used to come to us. We had one teacher that was our class teacher but then the other teachers would come in for the various subjects. But we didn't have any large meeting hall. I know there was a large hall in the bottom floor and when the principal wanted to talk to us then we all gathered and stood there and listened to him. We didn't have a cafeteria -- there was a basement, and the basement was separated from the boys' side of the basement. There was a girls' section and a boys' section, and there was a door there and the boys weren't allowed to go in the girls' section and the girls weren't allowed to go in the boys' section. And we used to sit in the room with benches around it and we took our lunch, ate our lunch, and it was quite cold and dismal down there. There was really just bare walls and some benches, that's all.

Burton: To what extent were you subsidized by the Indian Affairs?

Frances: I believe that they gave us so much a week to help towards the purchase of our books. Otherwise, I know my folks had to pay for me to travel to school. That's all that I can remember, that we were given the one allowance in order to purchase our books. And I believe that they did have to pay the school system for us attending at that time. But a lot of the children couldn't afford to go that probably wanted to go to high school because of the fact that they couldn't afford the transportation.

Burton: Did you have to take your own lunches?

Frances: Oh yes. We always had to take our little bag with us. (laughs)

Burton: Well, nowadays there's a cafeteria there and quite a lot of them go to town for their lunches.

Frances: No, we couldn't afford to go to a restaurant in those days. We were lucky if we could afford a lunch. I know there was more farming on Walpole Island in those days than there is now. Everybody had their gardens and some had quite large farms. I know my father, we had about four acres and then he used to lease some farm land and put in the crops. And we had our own pigs, and chickens, and rabbits, and ducks, and geese, and so we raised most of our own food.

Burton: Do you remember ever getting stranded in Wallaceburg on account of ice flows?

Frances: Oh yes. That was when, before the ice would, you know, like right after Christmas. Generally by New Year's the ice would start to flow so then I would go and board in Wallaceburg and stay probably through until March, or when the ice would break up, and go out again. Some of the others would try to make it through. I know some of them didn't always stay in Wallaceburg, like the boys who were driving would try to make it through to school.

Gladys: Did you ever drive across the ice in a car?

Frances: Oh yes, yes. We used to drive from Walpole over to Alginack on the ice and drive across the Sny when the ice was on. And I remember even them bringing large trucks with loads of wood over to Alginack in sleds with horses, with cords of wood and selling them, selling them in Wallaceburg and over in Alginack.

Burton: Can you drive across today? I mean...

Frances: No. No, since those large chemical factories in Sarnia have come into being I understand that the ice is weaker now. And also they try to keep the shipping lanes open and the boats coming and going keep the ice broken up; so it isn't safe even enough hardly to walk any more.

Gladys: Can you tell us the kind of activities the children were involved in, like after school hours, the kinds of things they would do for entertainment?

Frances: For entertainment in the wintertime there was a lot of skating on the river; the children would clear it. Ice hockey rinks, and there would be skating. And in the

summertime a large number of us would collect down to the big dock where the ferry landed and we used to swim and dive. We had diving boards down there from the large spials(?), and we would do a lot of swimming. And we had baseball -- there were the church teams and they played the, they travelled to different places and played softball -- the mens' teams did. And there was girls' softball teams -- I played on the girls' softball team in Wallaceburg and Chatham and other girls teams would come in to play us. And mostly I loved to swim. I was in the water from May until October. (laughs) And I got so that I could swim across that big river there, and that was my favorite sport. And going down to the school and playing tennis. Then of course the big highlight of the season was the fall fair and we used to save our pennies for the the fall fair for all the rides and all the good times that we had at the fair. But the War, the Second World War, ended that, because the excursion boats weren't allowed to come in and people of course didn't have the gas to come with their cars, and the attendance dropped and it wasn't profitable to have the fall fairs any more.

Burton: Do you remember when the, approximately what year the fair ended?

Frances: Oh dear. I know I worked in the office as a secretary for several years at the fair. When was... The War was ended in 1947, wasn't it? I would imagine it would be about... the War started in 1942 and ended in 1947? Well, it was during the War years that the... It must have been probably about 1942 or '43 when the last fair was held. Somewhere in there.

Burton: You said you used to swim across the river. Do you have any idea how wide that river is, and which river are you talking about?

Frances: Well, I'm talking about the St. Clair River and from Walpole over to Alginack is probably the widest part of the river. I don't really know how wide it was. But I know that swimming from Walpole to about half way over the current wasn't too bad, but when we would get into the current closer to the Alginack shore then it was very, very strong and it was quite a feat trying to swim through that current. I never did it by myself alone in the water. I always was accompanied by a rowboat, because we didn't have the cruisers and the motor boats in those days, people used rowboats. But then if one of the large steamboats came down the river then it would be dangerous and if you were accompanied by a boat and you were in

danger you could just climb in the boat and get out of the way. But I can remember swimming from the Walpole Island back over to Russel's Island and playing with the children over there and then swimming back again, and we weren't accompanied by a boat then. Sometimes there'd be two or three of us go at a time. I remember swimming in the Sny too, but it was dangerous because I remember one time...

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Frances: ...and I got caught in the undercurrent and I was really afraid. I was exhausted by the time I made my way to the top so I never went swimming there any more.

Burton: Going back to Number One school, do you remember how the students got to the school?

Frances: Well, everybody had to walk in those days. And I think some of the children had to walk probably four or five miles to get to school. I was lucky, I lived within a quarter of a mile of the school, I didn't have too far to walk. But it seemed to me in those days that the snow -- there was more snow to plow through and the winters were much colder than they are in these days.

Burton: I think we've covered this subject very well and I want to thank you for your cooperation.

Frances: Well, I hope I've been of some help.

(END OF SIDE B)

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