

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: MITCHELL PINNANCE
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS:

INTERVIEW LOCATION: LAPOINT-FISHER NURSING HOME
WALLACEBURG, ONTARIO

TRIBE/NATION:
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 03/09/78
INTERVIEWER: BURTON JACOBS &
PATRICIA SONEY

INTERPRETER:
TRANSCRIBER: HEATHER BOUCHARD
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- The interviewer is seeking information on Henry Ford's plans for the economic development of Walpole Island. The informant, however, has virtually no information on the subject. As such, there is no material of value to be indexed.

Burton: ...taping stories of people, you know, to tell us about their experiences in the past. But what we'd like to work on right now is Henry Ford's scheme to develop Walpole Island, you know, a long time ago. He wanted to help out the Indian people with tractors and steam tractors, steam engines I think he gave. And he wanted to build a school, technical school, and he also wanted to build a bank. And I think you had some connection with that plan. You were one of the drivers that were chosen to go to Detroit to learn to operate these tractors that Henry Ford gave. So that's basically what we want to know, the whole story on that. Do you remember the approximate date when this took place? You don't have to be exact, as long as we know a fairly good fix on the year, that's all.

Mitchell: You want to find out what year it was, was it?

Burton: Yeah, that's one of the things we'd like to find out. Also a few other things, I'd like to get the story on that. But we can start off with a date, I mean the year that took place.

Mitchell: I don't know what the year was when we went down there.

Burton: Well, maybe we can skip that for a while. Do you remember all the people that went down there to train to run the tractors?

Mitchell: Oh yeah, Bill Fisher was one of them, and my brother, 'Lij.

Burton: Did Bill Dodge go along? Bill Dodge?

Mitchell: Yeah.

Burton: Was he one of them?

Mitchell: No.

Burton: How about Ackland White?

Mitchell: No.

Burton: There couldn't have been very many then.

Mitchell: No. Yeah, just Bill Fisher, 'Lij, me.

Burton: How many tractors did Henry Ford give to Walpole Island?

Mitchell: Three.

Burton: And they came equipped with plows and discs, eh?

Mitchell: Yeah.

Burton: Anything else? Did the tractors come with anything else?

Mitchell: Martin ditcher or whatever you call it.

Burton: Oh, a martin ditcher, yeah. Do you remember seeing Ford when he came to Walpole Island?

Mitchell: I remember seeing him in church. He used to come to church quite a bit.

Burton: You mean on Walpole Island?

Mitchell: Yeah.

Burton: Oh yeah. He came on his boat, eh?

Mitchell: Yeah.

Burton: His yacht?

Mitchell: Yeah, come on his yacht.

Burton: How big was his yacht? You know, just approximately how long was it? A 100 feet or 200 feet? I remember seeing it but in those days I was kind of small and I didn't know the, I couldn't judge very well. I know it was a big boat. Do you remember where he docked his boat?

Mitchell: Yeah, right on the dock over there.

Burton: Oh, right on the Walpole Island dock. I understand that he also gave a car to the Reverend Simpson Briggum.

Mitchell: Briggum, I think so, yeah.

Burton: Did you ever hear anybody telling about Simpson Briggum going to Dearborn to preach, you know, right in Henry Ford's church?

Mitchell: No, I haven't.

Burton: No, you never heard anybody?

Mitchell: No.

Burton: So you, you don't remember very much about Henry Ford coming to Walpole Island, you know, to a general meeting to talk about his proposal to develop Walpole Island?

Mitchell: No.

Burton: You never heard of that part of it, eh? How about this steam engine that he gave? Do you know anything about that?

Mitchell: Eh?

Burton: That steam engine that he gave, do you know anything about that?

Mitchell: (laughs) No.

Burton: You don't know about that, eh? Yeah, he traded Jim Kicks old antique and gave, well, I don't know whether it was meant for Walpole or meant for him, but anyway he brought over a steam engine and traded. And I understand that that one he took away is right in the Dearborn Museum. Do you know anything about that?

Mitchell: No.

Burton: Yeah, Norris Soney was telling me about that and I never got a chance to look around at the Dearborn Museum the last time I was there. I did take a look at the big steam engines.

Mitchell: Oh, he's got all kinds of stuff over there. You know, from here and there, souvenirs, whatever they call it.

Burton: Yeah, antiques. Let's see. How long did you receive training to operate these tractors? How long was it that you went over there?

Mitchell: How long we stayed over there you mean?

Burton: Yeah, yeah. One week, two weeks, three weeks?

Mitchell: Oh, more than that. We worked in the farm over there too, you know.

Burton: Oh, oh yeah. Oh, Henry Ford had a farm there, eh?

Mitchell: Yeah.

Burton: Experimental farm, I guess.

Mitchell: Yeah, experimental farm. Yeah, I worked in the farm there.

Burton: Yeah, I remember seeing those old Fordson tractors. They were all metal and they were grey, and they used to burn, was it coal oil?

Mitchell: Coal oil, yeah. Start it with gasoline.

Burton: Oh, you started them with gasoline.

Mitchell: Yeah, little tank there.

Burton: So you think that there was only three of you that went to...?

Mitchell: Yeah, I think so, yeah.

Burton: I always thought there was a little bit more than that. How about this club that was started up, you know, to look after the tractors, I guess it was -- the Farmers' Club. Who started it up and how many were in there? Was it Joshua White that started that Farmers' Club, or was it somebody else?

Mitchell: I don't know who started that up.

Burton: Do you remember any of the names of the members? (No answer). Well, that part is all right. How about... Was it only the members that received the benefit of these tractors, or was it anybody that was willing to pay?

Mitchell: Well, it was like this. There was so many of us, you know, driving the tractors and they went just like hiring somebody. Yeah, hire somebody there to go and plow and they pay so much. I forgot how much they paid to go and plow for them.

Burton: It seems to me it was a dollar an hour. Would that be a reasonable figure or accurate figure?

Mitchell: Something like that, I guess.

Burton: Seems to me, yeah, they worked by the hour and not by the acre.

Mitchell: Yeah, by the hour. Yeah, by the hour they plowed.

Burton: Yeah, a dollar an hour in those days was a fair amount of money. That was a long time ago, you know.

Mitchell: Yeah.

Burton: Did Henry Ford also give a threshing machine?

Mitchell: Yeah, I think he did.

Burton: And also a... Well, you don't know this part, also a saw mill; threshing machine and a sawmill. You don't know that part of it, eh?

Mitchell: Where was that?

Burton: Yeah, I understand that he also gave a threshing machine, a steam engine, and a saw mill. You don't know that part of it, eh?

Mitchell: No.

Burton: Did Henry Ford come to fish, or did he just come around to the churches?

Mitchell: He usually just come around. I don't think he fished. (laughs)

Burton: Did he have any bodyguards with him when you saw him, or...?

Mitchell: No.

Burton: I understand that he dressed up like an ordinary person and not very flashy. Is that correct? He dressed up plain, in just plain clothes and not very expensive looking clothes. Is that right?

Mitchell: Who, Henry Ford?

Burton: Yeah.

Mitchell: Yeah. Old Henry. (laughs)

Burton: Did you see him at all when you were in Detroit? Did he come around to see how you were getting along, or did he have his man do that, his manager?

Mitchell: Well, he had a man named (inaudible). He goes to certain field, you know, plow that and just keep going like that.

Burton: Yeah. Do you remember who took charge of these tractors when they were brought over? Do you remember who took charge of these tractors when they were brought over to Walpole?

Mitchell: By gosh no, I don't remember that.

Burton: I think your brother took care of one, didn't he?

Mitchell: Oh, you mean the...?

Burton: Those tractors.

Mitchell: Coming over.

Burton: Yeah. When they were on the island who took care of them? Where were they kept in other words?

Mitchell: Well, I took care of one, and Bill Fisher took care of the other one, and 'Lij took care of the third one.

Burton: He only gave three tractors then, eh? Was it three?

Mitchell: Three, yeah.

Burton: Was there much demand for plowing in those days?

Mitchell: Eh?

Burton: Was there very much demand for plowing gardens, you know?

Mitchell: Oh yeah, yeah.

Burton: Quite a little bit, eh?

Mitchell: Everybody wanted to try it, you know.

Burton: Yeah, I've been kind of interested in that story there, but there's not too many people that know about it.

Mitchell: No.

Burton: I think it's very important that people should know. Do you have any idea of who I could go to to ask about the Ford story? There's not too many, I guess, not too many living.

Mitchell: You're looking for the Ford story?

Burton: Yeah, yeah, about what he did, you know, what he tried to do for Walpole.

Mitchell: There wouldn't be nobody would know very much either, now.

Burton: No, they're all...

Mitchell: They all died.

Burton: They all died, eh?

Mitchell: Yeah.

Burton: Maybe Parker would know a little something about it.

Mitchell: He might, yeah. That's right, he might. That's his father, you know, had something to do with that.

Burton: How did it come about that you three guys were picked to go to Detroit?

Mitchell: (laughs) I don't know.

Burton: I guess you just happened to be in church, eh?

Mitchell: (laughs) Just happened to be picked up, I guess. That's about all.

Burton: How old are you now?

Mitchell: Eh?

Burton: How old are you now?

Mitchell: Oh, 74, around there, 74 or... Well, I'll ask that lady there, she'd know. Miss, do you remember how old I am?

Nurse: Just a minute, I'll look up your records.

Burton: You've been on Walpole Island most of your life, eh?

Mitchell: Eh?

Burton: You've been on Walpole Island most of your life?

Nurse: Okay, your birthdate is December 3, 1896. That'll be 77 and 4 -- 81.

Mitchell: I'm getting old. (laughs)

Burton: Oh God, that's wonderful.

Mitchell: I'm 81 years old.

Patricia: Were you born on Walpole Island?

Mitchell: Eh?

Patricia: Were you born on the island, on Walpole Island? Is that where you were born?

Burton: Were you born on Walpole?

Mitchell: I was born on Walpole, yeah.

Burton: And you were also a war veteran, eh?

Mitchell: Yeah, I was a war veteran.

Patricia: Were you married?

Burton: Well, yeah, he was married but I think his wife died quite a while ago.

Patricia: Do you have any kids, children?

Burton: Yeah. How many children have you got?

Mitchell: One, two, just three.

Burton: Three. Well, I think that's all. We got enough information. We'll try and find somebody else that knows something about this Ford deal. And I want to thank you for your time.

(END OF SIDE A)

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