

CONSUL MUSEUM INCORPORATED

Oral History Collection – Section 2

Collected by Oral History Researcher Meagan Gough

Gene & Shirley Wenaas Interview 2008 March 6

Catalogue No. 2.11 (E,R,W)

1/5

Conducted at the home of Gene & Shirley Wenaas SW15-5-25-W3 near
Robsart, Saskatchewan

GW = Gene Wenaas: Interviewee

SW= Shirley Wenaas: Interviewee

MG = Meagan Gough: Interviewer

NJT = Nancy-Jean Taylor: Camera

2008 March 6

GW: My name is Gene Wenaas. I was born on December 30, 1933. This is my wife, Shirley.

SW: Gene Goodman.

GW: Gene Goodman Wenaas.

GW: My wife, Shirley Mae Wenaas. We were married in 1960. Before that I went to Calgary and worked as a machinist, took my apprenticeship with the CPR and then came home and went farming. In the meantime I served one year in the machine shop in Moose Jaw. That's where I met Shirley. She's from Moose Jaw.

MG: Your family are farmers?

GW: My dad bought this place in 1938. I was born about five miles from here on a homestead and then we moved to another place. He got this place in 1938 and we moved down here. My brother and I were born on the other place. My sister, Wilma, was born here, and then Walter and Linda were born in the hospital in Maple Creek. They are the two youngest.

GW: My dad passed away in 1985 and my mother passed away in 1986.

MG: What were their names?

GW: George and Esther. Dad was from Norway. He was born at Trondheim, Norway. He came over here in 1913, and then joined the army in the United States. He got onto the ship to go overseas and the war ended. Mom was born in the United States. Her folks came from Voss, Norway. Actually it was (?) Valley and we went to visit that valley in 1981. This valley is about 500 yards long and a half mile wide, so it wasn't a very big place. Mom went with us, so we really enjoyed it; she translated for us lots.

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Dad, he was a good all around farmer, good with welding, good with machinery.

SW: You had to be. You couldn't go to town every time you broke down. You had to be able to do it.

MG: You had to be self-sufficient that way.

GW: I remember one time, I was eleven years old and Dad was hauling coal (coal used to come in boxcars to Robsart). He had a sleigh and he used to haul it. He went down to get coal that one day, and he tried to cross the track with his sleigh. The front runners hit the railroad track and knocked him down, and he broke his shoulder, I think it was, so he was laid up. Then Peder, my older brother (he lives in Calgary now), he was going to school here and he had his tonsils out, so he was laid up. We were milking four cows. Mom and I would milk the cows - I was eleven years old. Then I harnessed the horses and we drove the team to town, took the little kids to town to school. I thought that was pretty good to milk four cows and still get the kids to school on time! We had to have the milk, had to have the milk and cream. We used to ship it on the railroad – separate it and put it in cream cans and haul it in. Once a week we could ship cans full of cream. Then you would wait for the cheque to come. A lot of times it was the only money you had was from the cream cans.

SW: Then, too, you had to have a permit.

GW: Yeah.

SW: You had to have a permit and if you didn't you had to sell it some other way.

GW: Since then, Shirley and I moved down here in 1961 and we have been living here ever since. This was when Shirley first came down here. We were always at a ball tournament. Shirley played ball, and we played ball. We played Consul one day, and Charlie Seifert was a real hitter, a real batter.

SW: From Consul.

GW: He played in Consul, he played in Robsart, but he was playing for Consul this one ball game. Ken Wenaas was reading about things to do in a ball game. What he did is put some balls in a deep freeze. The next day when we were playing against Consul, I was pitching, I said to Ken, "Do you want to throw me a new ball. This one is kind of ratty." So he threw me one of those balls, and Charlie he hit that and it should have gone a mile, but only went to second base. He couldn't understand it. About six months later we told him he hit a frozen ball. Well...

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SW: It was my job to come up here to the deep freeze when I got the signal and pick up this ball, and go back to town.

NJT: So did you beat Consul that day?

GW: Yes, we did. We won the tournament.

SW: Those days, too, you had the booth which you took all your stuff in there. You didn't have that much ice to keep things cold, and we also served a dinner plate at night. We'd have ham and potato salad and all this stuff, and a dessert. That's what you did. After you'd play ball all day, and then...

MG: You had a feast.

GW: Farming, we have bought some land and sold some land, whatever.

MG: So, what did you farm? Or, what do you farm?

GW: At that time, we farmed ten quarters. Now we have sold all except one quarter, and the quarter we have is grass, and I harvest that for seed. So I have kind of retired, so the place is for sale, but you never know. In the meantime, I like doing carpentry, but I don't like cupboards and finishing and stuff like that. We built a stagecoach about twelve or fifteen years ago. Well, first of all we built a democrat.

MG: What is a democrat?

GW: A democrat is just a four-wheeled buggy. It's a go-to-meet-in-town buggy. Then I built a doctor's buggy, just a two-seater. We had it appraised. We had a team of Palominos, and then we built our stagecoach and had it in different parades and had it in weddings, different weddings. After that we built a vis-a-vis; it looks like the queen's buggy in white. When Lynda Haverstock was the Lieutenant Governor we were asked to drive her with this wedding buggy and the musical ride was there. Funerals. We never did do a funeral!

So, this is the doctor's buggy there (looking in photo album).

MG: I am picturing the doctor's buggy on "Little house on the Prairie".

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GW: The wheels come from the Amish in Ontario and so do the tops. I sent for that. I haven't done any more, really, with building. A few things in the house, that's all. But I enjoy getting old tractors to run. I've got a few I'm working on now.

MG: What, in your opinion, is the difference between farming and ranching?

GW: Well, I don't know really. Farming, you just grow grain. Ranching is just mostly cattle. It all depends what side of the fence you are on. Some people think ranching is more glamorous than farming, and farmers think farming is more glamorous than ranching. But I don't know. I loved horses, but we never had many horses until after we got married.

That's the trail ride. The trail ride went from here. We started in Ravenscrag actually, stopped at Gilchrists; we stopped at Brosts. We stopped different places along the road. Then, Wednesday night we had to park everything and then the bus took all the drivers back to Ravenscrag. We had vehicles to sleep in Wednesday night. It was a big undertaking alright.

We had people from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Alberta, so we had to divide them up into groups. We purchased bandanas and then everyone in a group had a certain colour of bandana.

MG: So how many people were there then?

GW: There were 700 people. There were about 100 wagons and probably 600 riders. At Manyberries (we ended up there on Friday night), they had a big powwow there for us and then we went to Etzikom. That was the end of it. The next bunch took off for Fort Macleod the next year.

MG: So you call it the Boundary Commission Trail Ride?

GW: Yeah.

MG: And was it every year, or how often was it?

GW: Every year. I think it started in 1991.

MG: And it brought people from all five provinces?

GW: I was president in 1997. Then in '98 we finished it.

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MG: So, the Boundary Commission, back in the last century then, tell me more about the actual historical event that you are recreating.

GW: See the Boundary Commission is based on when they staked out the border; that's why it's called Boundary Commission.

MG: What are some of the biggest changes you have seen in this community, your reflections on that?

SW: I think when we lost the school (Robsart) and the service station in town, and the grocery store. It just all goes.

MG: When would that have been?

GW: So it must have been about 1966 or 1967 it closed. Then it was sold to a furniture manufacturer and somehow the paint caught fire and it burned down.

MG: So, that town (Robsart) has changed very quickly, like in a few generations.

SW: Oh yes.

GW: We lost all our elevators; they all went. Then our post office, our store went and so we pretty well rely on Consul. You can get just about whatever you want in Consul except major repairs, but other than that...

So that's about the story of our lives, alright.

MG: Pretty good story!

GW: Marty lives about seven or eight miles from here. He has four kids and we really enjoy them. Catherine lives in Saskatoon, and she has a boy in Boston playing hockey and going to school, and two girls, so she's busy.

MG: Do you have any closing remarks about the community before we wrap it up? What makes it a good place to live here?

SW: Oh, the people! Everybody has got something to give that's exceptional – like everybody.