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CONSUL MUSEUM INCORPORATED

Oral History Collection – Section 3

Collected by Consul Museum Incorporated – Oral History Project

Joe Geiger Interview April 8, 2015

Catalogue No. 3.11

1/17

Conducted at the home of Joe Geiger, Medicine Hat, Alberta

JG = Joe Geiger: Interviewee

AB = Ann Behrman: Interviewer

BS = Betty Stokke: Interviewer

JP = Joan Parsonage: Camera

April 8, 2015

AB: What were your parents' names and how many brothers and sisters did you have?

JG: I had six sisters and five brothers. And the folks' name was [Nikodemus and Justina Geiger]. Mother's name was Amann, A-m-a-double n. They were both raised in the same area in Russia.

AB: They came to Senate from Russia. Why?

JG: Well, they left Russia. I guess Russia was a little bit worse than we realized then; I mean than we can imagine. I guess it was something else. The kids were over there. Terry and Cindy were over there in Russia last year or the year before, whatever it was, and they said some of the stuff that must have went on there at that time must have been something else. But Russia was—. I guess they thought Hitler was bad, but I guess Russia was worse.

AB: Oh. So did they work for Arnolds when they came here?

JG: No, but they did work together. Dad and old Mike Arnold worked together in Weyburn in the wintertime. They were building or they were cutting ice. Like they had no fridges then, you know, so they cut ice and stored it. That was their biggest job in the winter. You know, those people at that time they were putting in the sewer and stuff in Weyburn, and they were doing that by hand and it [the ground] was froze. They had to chip it out with a chisel and sledge hammer and stuff. That's how the big part of the sewer in Weyburn was put in.

AB: So did you go to school in Senate then?

JG: No, I went to school in Line Coulee which was a school just west of home about a mile, out in the country. It's just north of Halladays'. It was out there in the middle of the prairies, like most of them were in those days.

AB: Who did you have for teachers?

JG: Well, the first one I can remember was Beulah Halladay.

AB: Really, oh!

JG: And I had Art Hardwick, and Joe Ell was my last one. And oh, Anna Kleivgard, and Laura McKee.

AB: So how long did you go to school and then what did you do when you were done?

JG: I guess I went to school eight years and then I got smarter than the teachers. No, I hated, I didn't like school at all, so when I could get out of it I did.

AB: So then what did you do?

JG: I was at home probably most of the time. I worked for the neighbours when I could to pick up a dollar or two for a little bit of beer money. We didn't worry about anything else then, you know.

AB: Yes. So did you go anywhere else to work?

JG: In the fall of '47 I went out to BC to Kimberley to work in the mine there for the winter. Then I came home in the spring.

AB: How did you like that?

JG: I liked it. I'd have stayed out there, but that's when Dad got sick, so I come home to help at home. I liked it in the mine. The weather was always the same. Winter and summer. *[Laughter]*

[Editor's Note: Joe's father got cancer and died in 1952 at the age of 67.]

AB: What was Senate like when you were a kid? What were some of the things that were there?

JG: Well, there was two stores, a dance hall, and you know, they had a tennis court in Senate at that time. A lot of people don't believe this when I tell them but they did. About where— Do you know where Ken and Ria [Sanderson] lived?

AB: Yes.

JG: Yeah, it was right about on that same spot. I remember them playing tennis, and I thought, boy, that was really something.

AB: When did Kalmrings open the store in Senate?

JG: Oh, it was before my time that I could remember. They had that store in Senate, and then they bought Finkle's when Finkle left which must have been after the war. Yes, it was I'm sure. I can't think of it, but anyhow, Kalmrings were in there and then when Finkles left they bought them out. Then they run it until, I guess, until Senate folded.

AB: Well, did they have a store in Govenlock, too?

JG: Not Finkles, but Kalmrings did. Yeah, they bought out—. Let's see. Yeah, they bought out McNalley. I think that's how it was. McNalley had the original. McNalleys built the first store in Govenlock. I shouldn't say that. They actually built the first store, yeah, because Dawson had the store in Govenlock but he was set up in the hotel. In Andy's hotel, the Gaff Hotel. He set up there and if you look in the history book, at the picture of Govenlock, you can see a picture of the store. It was J. M. Dawson General Merchant. That was in Govenlock in the hotel. They just rented that. Then if you remember, too, in latter years, Andy McRae had the store in the same place. The shelves and everything. When Andy took it back over again he didn't have to do any renovating. The shelves and everything were already in there.

AB: Oh, ok. What year did you get married?

JG: '55.

AB: In Senate?

JG: Pardon?

AB: Did you get married in Senate?

JG: No, we went out to Cranbrook. Out to BC. We made a great big trip out to BC.

AB: Oh yeah. Who did you marry?

JG: Sharon Wagner.

AB: I forgot about that. [*Laughter*]

AB: Kids. How many kids did you have?

JG: Just the two boys.

AB: What are their names?

JG: Terry Nick was the oldest, and then Richard Mervin is the second one.

AB: Where are they at?

JG: Terry married Cindy [Eremenko] and they are at Drayton Valley, and Rick lives in town here.

AB: Oh. How many kids does Terry have?

JG: He had three. How many grandchildren do you have, Betty? I think five.

AB: When did you get your pilot's license?

JG: Oh gee, what year was that? I would have to look it up. What year did Bill get his?

AB: In the early '60s, wouldn't it be?

JG: Yeah, it would be. Yeah.

AB: And who all took training with you at the same time?

JG: Well, there was Billy Parsonage, Dick Kalmring, Don Trumpour, and there was somebody else, I'm sure.

AB: Hugh Frame?

JG: Hugh Frame took it but he was a little ahead of us. There was Dick Kalmring and Vern Hansen.

AB: What did you do? Like, how did you use your flying?

JG: To tell you the honest truth, all I wanted to do was take an airplane off the ground and put it back down again in one piece. Anyhow, I never expected to own one or go any further, but that was my life ambition. My life ambition was to fly and I managed that.

AB: Good for you. And you owned a plane?

JG: Yes.

AB: What did you own?

JG: It was a Piper PA-11. It was a really good airplane. Very forgiving.

AB: So did you and Sharon fly to different places?

JG: Oh, we did some. We come to Medicine Hat a few times and went to Havre a few times. Really nothing. Like I said, all my intention was to take it off the ground and fly. I never expected to own an airplane.

AB: What about coyote hunting with it?

JG: Coyotes! Oh, that was really sport. I can tell you one nice thing about it and that was a coyote never suffered because you'd get over him and let him have it. The shot went right through him, when everything worked on our side. When you shot from the side, the shot, because we were shooting from behind, the shot went under the hair and they were dead instantly. They never suffered any.

AB: Who would go hunting with you?

JG: Broderick. Ben Broderick was my main gunner. Christ almighty, you didn't want to mention hunting to him.

JG: The one thing that I will have to admit, Bill and I had a lot of good times together. Bill was a really good friend of mine, Bill Parsonage. They come down in that country when I was just a kid yet and they lived just a few miles from us; we got to be pretty good friends.

JP: Did you have any wrecks with your plane?

JG: No. Well, maybe I shouldn't say that. I did one time. I landed in—never even thinking—just south of Vern and Kay's [Hansen], just had a strip down there. I had the spray booms on and, of course, they are pretty close to the ground, and out. I landed in there and it was a good enough strip, but the grain was up pretty high and it started catching the booms and spun me around and I went nosed. I went down, but I never went in far enough or over enough to hit the prop.

AB: Good.

JG: So it didn't hurt anything in that respect, but it wrecked the booms. We took the booms off and took them over and [Les] Fairbrother, of course, welded them up, and away we went again.

AB: What are some of the things that you did at brandings? The nice things.
[*Laughter*]

JG: I know we had a lot of fun.

AB: They are kind of getting to be a thing of the past anymore, aren't they?

JG: It certainly is.

AB: It used to be the social event of the year.

JG: It used to be a lot of fun. People would get together. They'd wait until the branding was all done, and then they had a party and maybe a beer or two too many.

AB: Do you remember Pat Beach [a former RCMP corporal at Consul]?

JG: Oh yes. See that picture up there on the wall.

AB: Oh, is that Pat?

JG: That's old Pat.

AB: Do you remember some of the nicknames he had for people?

JG: Yeah, quite a few. Like, Howard Buchanan was Doc; no, Slash Bag.
[*Laughter*] Old Frank [Wagner] was Doc because old Frank did the vaccinating, and Raymond Stirling was—

AB: 777?

JG: 777. That was his brand. And another one I like was he called— Remember when Harold McConwell got sick. They were digging a well. Him and Buster were digging a well, and he had got this cold and got sick. What did he get that time?

AB: Polio.

JG: Yeah. Anyhow, old Pat named him The Slave. Because he was down in the well and Buster was at the top, he called them Simon and The Slave. [*Laughter*]

He had a few other names that I can't think of. And Old Tex Reamer was Light and Power. He got the power with wind chargers, and yeah, he didn't get any well, just the power, so old Pat named him Light and Power, and that stuck. There were a few others.

AB: There was Henry Weisgerber.

JG: Oh yeah. He called him Loop.

AB: What were some of the things you did as a community? Like get together and play cards or dance?

JG: Yeah. Well, as far as the community went, we went and had those square dances. We got together and played Canasta pretty well once a week in the winter time.

AB: When did you build a new house?

JG: The one on the farm?

AB: M-hmm.

JG: That was in '58, I believe it was. Yeah it was '58.

AB: Where did the kids go to school?

JG: Well, they went to school in Consul.

AB: They were bussed in?

JG: Yeah. You know, when Terry first started he rode that there goldarn bus from seven o'clock in the morning 'til dark in the wintertime because it went all the way up to Nuttall's at that time. Of course, Gloria [Halladay], we got to thank Gloria a lot with the kids. She was already on the bus by the time the kids started. Anyhow, she said Terry would come into the bus in the morning, flop down beside her, and lay his head in her lap and that was it; he was dead until they got to Consul. God, he was only seven years old and up at six o'clock in the morning. That goldarn bus. He rode all the way to Consul and so she kind of looked after him, and you know. Yeah, we really got to thank Gloria. Then when Rick started school I don't think the bus went up there anymore.

AB: Oh.

JG: It went to Merryflat, I think, but they didn't go all the way to Nuttall's. Oh, that was quite a trip. You know, I mean, Christ, it would be dark when they got home. Can you imagine a kid in the wintertime getting up and walking out to the road in the dark, getting on the bus, and riding that thing? But he managed.

AB: Where did you go square dancing, Joe?

JG: It was in Govenlock.

AB: In the hall?

JP: Who provided the music?

JG: Just had the records, I think, unless Marlin, he was the station agent there, he supplied the music; he had records and stuff. If I remember right, that was all the music. We didn't have live music.

AB: How important was the train in your life?

JG: Well, it used to bring the Eaton's parcel. [*Laughs*] That was really about the only goldarn thing we worried about. There was probably a lot of other things, but it wasn't important to us kids.

AB: So what came in the Eaton's parcel?

JG: Oh, it would be underwear and socks.

AB: Once a year?

JG: Once a year. We really looked forward to that. And they always fit. It didn't matter how tight the shoes were. [*We'd say,*] "Oh no they fit", because we knew damn well if they sent them back it would take at least two weeks by the time you sent them back and they come back again. So they always fit. [*Laughs*]

AB: So when did you move to Medicine Hat?

JG: That was— Let's see. When was that? '96 I think. [*Editor's note: Actual year was 1986.*]

AB: Where did you live when you moved up here?

JG: Oh, we bought a house in Crescent Heights. On the north side of the Dairy Queen.

AB: So ice cream was handy then, was it?

JG: Oh yeah. And behind the chicken, Kentucky Fried Chicken. I had lots of Kentucky Fried Chicken by the time we got done smelling that all day.

AB: When did you move in here [Meadowlands Retirement Residence]?

JG: In this place? I guess I been here a couple of years.

AB: Do you like it?

JG: No. [*Laughs*] But what the hell are you going to do? They look after me pretty good. I like the staff. I will have to admit that. I like the staff. When we first moved in here the grub was terrible, but it has improved a lot. But at first it was the shits. But no, it isn't bad now, and like I say, the staff is awful nice. It's just getting used to it.

BS: There were some graves east of you there that you talked about one time.

JG: Were they east?

BS: You said a guy you thought that had been buried there and a woman? At some time or other?

JG: There is a couple of graves supposed to be east of home there, but I don't know and nobody else knew who he was either, and as far as I know he was buried just on the road, in the ditch more or less, just north of the old Parsonage house. That's where he is buried. And old man Worthy [Roy Worthy], the old man, was buried there, but apparently they dug him up again and moved him to Consul.

BS: And where were your folks buried?

JG: They are buried in Shaunavon.

BS: But there is a cemetery at Senate there, isn't it?

JG: Yeah. It's a real— It's not looked after at all or anything like that.

AB: Where is that at, Joe?

JG: Straight east of Gary Zentner's. Across the road. A cross used to be there, but Gary's cows knocked it down. There is still a big cement deal there that the old man, one of the Hoffman brothers, put there. His sister is buried there and so is his son. They are two of a few of the marked graves. There is another grave there; Johnny Schafer's mother is buried there. And old Mike [Schafer], he had built a cross. Old Mike was a blacksmith, a good blacksmith, and he made a cross. It was a real work of art. I think one of Johnny's kids got it. It was all handmade, even the letters were made and were blacksmith-welded onto the cross.

If you ever get a chance to see it— like, it is all handmade letters. He buried his wife there. They made this cross and put it in the cement, and, of course, it rusted off. Anyhow, it was laying there and Gary's cows were walking over it. I told one of Johnny's oldest girls—. What was her name?

AB: Linda.

JG: Linda. I told her you'd better get it, I said. It will get just dumped out in the junk pile. She did, I guess. I think she has got it. Supposed to have. But it would have been a shame to see it go to the scrap pile, you know.

As a matter of fact, I think today I could tell you a few graves; I could show you a few graves that I know. The Brauns, I think they have four in there, but they are fresh enough yet you could still see the mound, you know. Mrs. Schafer's, I know where it is, and then there was that Hoffman girl. That was old Pelkey. Do you remember [John] Pelkey? You wouldn't remember him but his wife died in a—.

AB: Yeah. Dora McKinnon.

JG: Yeah. Well she is buried there. Her mother was Mrs. [Marie] Hoffman, the old Mrs. Hoffman.

[Editor's Note: That is incorrect. Marie Hoffman was actually the mother of John Pelkey's first wife, Martha Hoffman.]

She was the midwife in that corner; she delivered all the kids in that [area]; she delivered me for one and all the rest of us. She was quite an old midwife.

AB: And she lived in Senate?

JG: They lived just north of home a couple of miles. They were on the farm.

AB: Where you and Sharon lived, was that the home place?

JG: Yeah, that was the homestead.

JP: Can you tell us about your early farming years. How did your farming change from the time you started to when you ended?

JG: Oh god. That was quite a change. I never kept up with it, mind you. I wasn't able to. The farming, when you compare now to when I first started. This equipment they go in there with, 60-foot machinery, where we were lucky if we had six-foot. No, no, it has changed to something else. Even the haying; they go out there now and knock down a big field of hay, and bale it up next day, and stack it after supper, just about. [Laughs] We sure didn't.

AB: What do you think about what is happening with the PF [Government-owned community pastures]?

JG: You know, I'll tell you one thing, I'm glad I'm out of it because I don't know what the hell they are going to do with that. There is a lot of land there to dispose of, one way or another.

AB: What do you think they will do with it?

JG: I think the only thing they can do with it is keep it. The government has got to keep it and rent it out because to sell it, or anybody buy it, I can't see how they can afford it because there is a lot of land there and a lot of improvements. Those fences and dugouts and dams and stuff. I don't know, but like I say, I'm glad I'm out of it.

AB: I worry about the guys that that's where they have pasture and they don't have any other than that. What happens to them?

JG: Well, it's quite a deal; there is a lot of land there to dispose of.

AB: Well, even the irrigation and the water—

JG: Well yeah. How are they going to look after that? We had a good setup in Consul; at least I thought it was. I didn't like it at the time, but they made us buy our land, our irrigation, which is the best thing they did. Like I said, at the time I sure didn't think so but at least we had something when we quit, to sell, and it always produced. It is quite a problem. I could see where it seemed it was a hell of a problem for the government.

AB: I don't know what will happen.

JG: The funny part is I can remember as a kid when they put them fences in. I can remember—I hate to guess—but all down the fence line digging post holes with the old augers. That was back in the '30s, say '38 or something like that. They were happy to do that because they probably got fifty cents a day, probably enough to buy a package of cigarettes or package of tobacco.

BS: Did they hire local people to build the fences?

JG: Anybody that come along got a job because they needed all kinds of help, and then they had another crew. They had guys coming (excuse me) to dig the holes, and then there was another crew come along and set the posts, then another crew come along and put the wire on. It was miles and they all worked. I'll tell you, some of those goldarned holes they had to dig in that hard alkali, that took work to dig a hole in that ground. [Laughs] Up on Merryflat— Well no, I guess there was no PFRA up on Merryflat, but up in that cobblestone I don't know if that would be worse or not, but I know that that alkali flats is like digging in cement.

AB: Did you ever ride for the PF?

JG: Just the odd day. Like, help the managers gather cows or something like that. No, I was never on the payroll.

AB: Who were some of the managers?

JG: Well, Johnny Murray was the first one that I can remember; then Joe Kisell, then Bob Frame.

AB: Johnny Hansen.

JG: Johnny never rode while I was in there. Ronnie Mutrie. I just can't think of any more.

AB: What kind of cattle did you run?

JG: Herefords. At that time it was all Herefords.

AB: Straight Hereford.

JG: Yeah.

AB: When did they start changing?

JG: When was Bob Frame there? That was about the time they brought in some Shorthorns and then you had your choice. You could run your cows with Shorthorns or Herefords because they had Shorthorn and Hereford fields. That was when Bob Frame [came here], whatever year that was. I forget now. When the heck was he there?

AB: It had to have been in the '50s.

JG: Yeah. He was there and old Pat was there.

AB: Pat Peacock you mean?

JG: No, no, Pat Beach.

AB: Oh. Pat Beach.

JG: No, Peacock was always in Govenlock. He kind of would have liked to have got that Nashlyn Pasture, but I think the guys had their—. They liked old Raymond Stirling. [*Laughs*]

AB: Can you tell us any stories about Pat Beach?

JG: [*Laughs*] I can't think of any just offhand, except if he ever got into a bottle of booze, that was it. I remember when Terry was born, I stopped and gave old Pat a drink on the way home from Eastend. I went to Shaunavon because we didn't have a liquor store there, home, or anyplace, you know. So anyway, I went to Shaunavon and I really splurged. I bought a 40 [ounce bottle], a 26 [ounce bottle], and a mickey. I bought a mickey because I figured on stopping and giving old Pat a drink. Well, the old bastard, I stopped there and we drank that. Well, his tongue was still hanging out.

I said, "Well, I got another bottle out in the car."

"Have ya?"

I said, "Yeah."

So I went and got it; I brought in a 26. I figured when we got this drank, I was going home, that's for damn sure. Well, I was going to go home before but it didn't work out that way. We drank the whole damn works and, of course, by that time I was getting pretty smart, too, you know. [*Laughs*]

I said, "You know, I've got another bottle out there."

"You don't!"

"Yeah, yeah, I do."

"Well, go get the damn thing."

So I did, but it was a 40. Well, his eyes lit up like that, you know. Well by god, I finally had to just grab the bottle and run. [*Laughs*] He followed me out and he

said, "You can't go home now," he said, "I'll pick you up for drunk driving."

[*Laughter*]

And then Mrs. Beach come out, and I was trying to get in the car and keep him out. She come out and she talked him into going in, which wasn't easy. I think I had about that much [*indicates about five centimeters*] in that 40. I was just smarter than hell when I got out and got in the car.

AB: Do you remember the trip that you and Sharon, and Bob [Behrman] and I, and Dick and Janice [Kalmring] went to Regina and they got their teeth out? Do you remember that trip?

JG: When we got our teeth out?

AB: Yeah. Sharon and Bob and Janice got their teeth out. There was you and me and Dick that could eat. Remember? We got back as far as Swift Current and we were determined we were going to eat Chinese food.

JG: Oh yeah.

AB: Remember Dick with that great big plate trying to—. Oh God, what a mess.

JG: We had supper at Mings Kitchen or something; it was a common name anyhow. [*Laughs*] Yeah, we took old Dick along and he was more hindrance than he was—

AB: The other three were sitting bleeding coming home.

JG: [*Laughs*]. We were a sorry looking bunch of toothless buggers. [*Laughter*] I wonder if that old dentist is still around; I doubt it.

AB: I doubt it.

JG: As far as old Pat, that's him in both of those pictures actually. That's when he was riding the border. That was the last time the border was rode by saddle horse down in the eastern part of the province.

JG: Pardon.

JP: Can you tell us anything about that?

JG: Oh, he talked about it. There's an old bugger—Betty met him—old Doug, what the hell was his name? [*speaking to Joan*] You probably met him, too,

because if he was at Merryflat he would be dancing with you girls all the time.
Doug— [Minor]

JG: Yes, and he never smoked in his life but he got throat cancer.

JG: He rode the border with old Pat Beach. Yeah. This other guy. Doug—. Oh shit, I knew him real good because he stopped at home several times. Even after we were in the Hat here he would stop and stay with us overnight. He was a funny old bugger. Only trouble was he was hard to understand and he liked to talk.

It is funny how small this world is. Back in '38 I had a cousin murdered down at Weyburn and this old cop—I didn't know it at the time—but anyhow, when he was here I got to know him through Ben and I asked him.

I said, "Do you remember? You were down around that Weyburn country when I had a cousin murdered there." I said, "Did you know him?"

"Know him! I sat with the body overnight," he said.

He was just a recruit then. He said, "I would never ask one of my men to do that." He was just a kid and he had to sit with this body. Yeah, as soon as I mentioned it he [remembered].

AB: Why did they have to sit with the body?

JG: Oh, I guess it was just [procedure]. Even today they can't leave a body. Like, today they have better [procedures].

AB: They're not going anywhere.

JG: No, they're not going to run away.

BS: They're investigating.

JG: I guess it was the law, and he had to sit there, and he said he sat there all night with him. The roads were plugged at the time and the only way they could get around was on the speeder on the railroad.

JG: I know you girls probably all danced with him. When he was at a dance, and he went to several, if there was any girls sitting on the bench, she didn't sit there long. I guess he was a good dancer. I don't know; I never danced with him.

[Laughs]

AB: Do you know anything about when Pat rode on the border? Were there any incidents or anything that you could remember?

JG: The only one that I can remember him telling me—. No, this old Doug told me. Him and old Pat were riding the border together, and anyhow, they stayed at this place. He says there was one night they had a couple of girls. They were staying some place, a cabin or wherever they were, and he said in the middle of the night there was a knock on the door and he said, "Who in the hell is that?" "You know," Pat says, "I think it's [your] wife". [*Laughs*] Whether it was true or not I never heard, but it was a good story. Like, this old Doug, he could tell you a good story. Anyhow, he said they got out. [*Laughs*]

AB: Who was the music at the dances?

JG: At that time?

AB: Yeah.

JG: Paul Kalmring.

AB: Mostly Paul?

JG: Yeah. Paul Kalmring used to play in Senate, and on New Year's [Eve] they would go out to Manyberries and play there. Like on the train. And then they would catch the train home the next morning again. See, Paul Kalmring was the main [entertainment], but then the Schafers were playing too. They had a sister out at Manyberries, so that's what got them out there.

AB: Have you ever used a computer yet, Joe?

JG: The what?

AB: Do you ever use your computer?

JG: I'm too stupid to learn that.

[*Laughter*]

AB: What do you think of all of the new technology?

JG: Oh, I think it's really something else! It's just unbelievable. You know of all the things that have changed even in my lifetime, but then you take somebody like Jim Halladay that was ten years older than me. He went through the steam engine and oxen and stuff like that. I never did see any of that stuff, you know. I didn't put up with any of that stuff. No, I think it is really something else.

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AB: Did you ever farm with horses?

JG: Oh yeah. Back in 1940, I think it was.

AB: What do you think the future is going to bring?

JG: You know, I think it is going to come to where you sit in the house and just watch the machine, run it from your seat, which they are just about now. Christ, you take these god darn big equipment they have. They go out and get it lined up and then sit there, and I think they read a paper while they are—

AB: Watch TV.

JG: Yeah. No, it's just unbelievable.

[Editor's Note: Sharon Geiger passed away on December 30, 2012.]