

CONSUL MUSEUM INCORPORATED

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Howard & Alberta McKelvey February 20, 2016

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Conducted at the home of Howard & Alberta McKelvey in Medicine Hat, Alberta

HM = Howard McKelvey: Interviewee

AM = Alberta McKelvey: Interviewee

AB = Ann Behrman: Interviewer

JP = Joan Parsonage: Camera

February 20, 2016

AB: I would like to start out with your full names, your birthdays, and where you were born.

AM: I am Alberta McKelvey and I was born in Pierceland, Saskatchewan.

AB: When?

AM: In 1940. [*Laughter*]

AB: Howard?

HM: I am Howard McKelvey. I was born in Toronto, Ontario, in 1930.

AM: You never lived there though.

HM: No. I was just there for a short time and then I ended up at Consul, Saskatchewan, and have been there ever since.

AB: And your parents' names?

AM: Go ahead.

HM: Alex McKelvey and Lydia [Wenzel] McKelvey.

AM: Gertrude Brower and Clifford Brower.

AB: And siblings?

AM: Oh gosh, I've got three sisters; there was Meryl, Linda, and Sigfrid.

HM: I had a brother, Merriall, who was 15 years older than I was, and he had a farm accident [in which he was killed], and then I have a sister, Phyllis Parsonage, who lives in Lethbridge and she is still doing good.

AB: Where did you go to school?

AM: I went to school in a lot of places; we did a lot of moving around. Then for some reason I ended up at Consul and I met Howard. I left there, but he seemed

AM: I went to school in a lot of places; we did a lot of moving around. Then for some reason I ended up at Consul and I met Howard. I left there, but he seemed to follow me, and he brought me back to Consul.

AB: Did you go to school at Consul?

AM: I only went to Bellfield School for a short period of time, two months, and then I ended up in Lethbridge. I didn't graduate from Grade 12 at all, but I went to Garbutts Business College in Lethbridge. He kept coming up there and pretty soon I was back in Consul.

AB: Where did you go, Howard?

HM: I went to a little school called Bellfield, about 18 or 20 kids there, all grades, and I was only half a mile from school. I think the first winter I remember that my teacher was Margaret Duke or Margaret Kalmring. She was fairly tall and walked pretty fast, and I had to try and follow her. I'd always be falling off the sleigh tracks and into the horses' hoof tracks and falling over, and I was getting kind of mad. Anyway, I got through that all right. In later years I had a dog and sleigh, and that dog would come and pick me up after school, or maybe take me to school and go home and come back and get me, and that was very good.

AB: He pulled the sleigh?

HM: Yes, he pulled the sleigh. On the way home lots of times in those days there were lots of rabbits. They'd be going along the fence line and he would really chase them, but he wouldn't leave the road and we'd make good time going home. Well, I don't know what else. I always had somebody going by to catch a ride with, Ormiston kids mainly. I'd catch a ride with them or walk, whatever.

AM: A whole half mile. Imagine.

HM: Yeah.

AB: When you got finished school what jobs did you have? Or did you go directly to farming?

HM: Me? I went directly to farming. I was needed at the farm, so I just stayed there and kept working for a little bit. I never did work for anybody, and I just kept on at that. I was on the farm for 60 years and then retired, made enough money to retire, and that was about it. Well, I got Berta.

AM: Somewhere along the line.

HM: She helped a lot.

AB: Did you have jobs before you got married, Berta?

AM: No. Well no, I didn't really; I kind of worked a little bit in Lethbridge as I was going to school. I got married and that was my job.

AB: And when did you get married?

AM: In June 1956.

AB: In Consul?

AM: In Consul, yes. In Consul Church of God, actually.

AM: In Consul, yes. In Consul Church of God, actually.

HM: Reverend Harder.

AM: No, no.

HM: Was it Harder?

AM: Sobey. [*Laughs*]

HM: Yes. You're right.

AM: Harder came later.

AB: And what about family? How many kids did you have?

AM: We had three. Two years later our first daughter was born, Debbie, and then three years after that we had Valerie, and another two years later we had Darrell. That completed our family. And they kept us busy. As they started school they got involved in sports.

AB: What did you do for entertainment? Before you got married, and when you were kids, what was there to do for entertainment?

HM: A lot more than there is today.

AM: You think.

HM: There was always something going on. Card games and games, and you visited the neighbours not very far away, and always something going on in the community Friday and Saturday night. There were always good times in those days. Everybody came from 20 miles around, so it was very good.

AB: Lots of dances.

AM: Lots of dances and lots of times we shoveled out just to go to the dance.

HM: That was in the wintertime.

AB: And the kids would sleep under the bench.

AM: Actually, by the time our kids come along I think they stayed at Grandma and Grandpa's in Consul when we went dancing. It wasn't back when they used to take them to the schoolhouses and some slept under the bench all right. We were kind of past that. Some card games, and you visited a lot, and you'd just pop in, whatever. Lots of visiting.

HM: In the summertime it was a nice outing to go to a Cypress Park dance in the evening on Saturday night. That was always good. Might have a beer or two or whatever.

AB: Drive to 1-21 [*Cafe*] for coffee after the dance.

HM: Yes.

AM: Yes, you might do that.

AB: What were some of the things that the kids were involved in? Community

AB: What were some of the things that the kids were involved in? Community things?

AM: The girls were both involved in figure skating and Darrell was in hockey, so I followed the girls and Howard travelled around with Darrell with the hockey.

HM: We met on the road once in a while. It was a busy time. I still have my '76 Oldsmobile that hauled lots of kids all over the country.

AB: Oh. *[Laughs]*

AM: The rink was the main entertainment for the kids. Then we were a group of friends and every weekend we always had skidoo parties, toboggan parties, and we always took turns going back to somebody's house. There would be a big potluck supper, and cards, and the kids played. Sometimes I wonder how we survived that. I don't know how many kids were involved there, but the houses weren't big, big, but they were in one corner and we were in another. It always worked out. Anyway, had lots of fun. What was there? 2, 4, 6, 8 of us travelled around then. In the summer we always went up to the park [Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park] and camped for a couple of week. The kids took swimming lessons, so they all learned to swim. Eventually we got a boat and had lots of boating and waterskiing on Cypress Lake. And then one time I was away from home in the spring, when all the ditches were full of water, and when I came home, here's a big truck going down the road and a couple of kids on water skis in the ditch. [I asked,] "What have you guys been doing? Okay!" Anyhow, I won't name names, who that was or why they were—

AB: If you had it to do all over again, if you could start out and do something else, what would you do, or would you choose farming and stay with it?

HM: Well, I wouldn't have done anything else because it was a good life. We started with nothing, so once we got going it was very good. We retired early; I was 60 so that was good. Our son took over the farm so I helped him for a while so I would have something to do, and I would do it all over again. Oh, one thing I might do— When interest was so high, I bought a few cars that I shouldn't have. Instead of putting that money in the bank, making a million, I spent it, but I could have done better.

AM: Why? You might as well spend it. You enjoyed it.

HM: Oh yeah.

JP: So cars were your passion then?

HM: No, not really.

AM: Well kind of, because you always had a new car, or whatever.

HM: Berta had a new one to drive. After the kids left home, and weren't spending all our money, we traded cars every four years and the truck every second year. When we come to the city that ended. The cars never got worn out, but we did buy one or two.

AB: Did you keep your other cars as you bought them or traded them in?

HM: No, I traded them in. So we had to quit that because we weren't doing enough driving, so didn't have the fun of trading cars either, so that's out.

HM: No, I traded them in. So we had to quit that because we weren't doing enough driving, so didn't have the fun of trading cars either, so that's out.

AM: Now his hobby is just fixing cars.

HM: Yes.

AM: He still does that.

AB: You've got a place up here?

AM: No, just in his garage.

HM: I've got a double garage.

AM: There is always somebody that needs a car fixed. It's the older ones, of course, not these brand new ones with all computers.

HM: I buy the odd one that people quit driving. They can't afford to take it to the garage and get it fixed, and it's really nothing for me to fix. I buy that, and tune it all up, and sell it to somebody that hasn't got much money. I make sure it's got good tires and everything is good, so they've got [a chance to] get quite a few paycheques before they even think of having any trouble. That helps them a lot, so I don't have any trouble selling.

AM: That's how he got started was helping out people that needed help; he was always pretty good at helping people out.

HM: The girls at the food bank were working for about \$6 an hour (I worked there for 19 years). They weren't getting much money, and single moms and stuff, and they had to have a car. I would fix up theirs, or whatever, or fixed up one for them, or sell them, or whatever. I was always available for those girls when their cars wouldn't start and the kids had to get to the school. [They'd] get me out of bed, "Howard, will you come and drive my kids to school?" So I did that quite often, too.

AB: That's good.

HM: Yes.

AB: You didn't find moving to the city really that hard then?

AM: The first year was hard, for me. Maybe more for me than him because he was back and forth and helped on the farm, but I just felt like I was closed right in. Everybody is looking at you. You think that. You just felt that way. But after a year, [I] got used to it. That was good. We could go back to Consul so often; otherwise I probably would have—

HM: I think if we had sold, it would have been a different story; we would have really been lost because we wouldn't have had any connections back home. We were there a lot to start with, for the first few years, back and forth. I was anyway, so that helped out a lot.

AM: We probably would have stayed longer on the farm, too, if Darrell hadn't taken over. But it was time, I guess.

AB: Well, he wanted to do it.

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AB: Well, he wanted to do it.

AM: He wanted to do it, so that made a difference. It is a third generation farm. I don't know if it will go into a fourth one.

HM: It was one hundred years old, two years ago?

AM: Yes, whenever.

AB: You don't think Ty will go back and forth?

AM: I don't know. You don't know. Right now, I don't think he will, but you never know.

HM: He never was a farmer and I don't think he will start now.

AB: He might fool you though.

AM: He might. I know when he first started college he went home one day and he told his mother, "I don't know. I might just be a farmer." [*Laughter*] But then he settled in and he liked college, and he is doing what he really likes to do. He's into computer, and that is what he likes doing. But nowadays you have to know computers. You can't even run a farm without knowing computers.

HM: He was very good at it. He self-taught himself when he was going to school, and then a couple of years in college on top of that really made him good. He's got no problems at all.

AB: That's good.

HM: Yes.

AM: Yes.

AB: How many grandkids do you have?

AM: We had six, and we lost our oldest, and we have five.

AB: What are some of the changes that you've seen in farming since you started?

HM: Well, just about everything. We started with practically nothing. Machinery kept changing, and everything else, and the ways of doing stuff, and then started using fertilizer. I didn't use much fertilizer. I was just getting started and then Darrell took over, so then he started with bigger machinery and more fertilizer and stuff. Everything just went good after that. Of course, I farmed in all the dry years and he has had everything good for the last 20, so that made a big difference, too. The computer stuff put me out of business because I couldn't follow all that computer stuff and run that machinery. He got bigger machinery, too, and it is all lights flashing here and there, and you don't know what is supposed to be on and what is supposed to be off. It got so it was too much. I just never even tried to run it. Just the ordinary stuff.

AM: He kept the old one [combine], so he could run that.

HM: I still have my combine; I go and use that. I used it quite regular until the last year or two. When somebody needs straw saved, I go and combine that. I've got that, that I can call mine.

year or two. When somebody needs straw saved, I go and combine that. I've got that, that I can call mine.

AB: Even the size of farms is so different. What it takes to make a living now [compared] to what you had to have in the '40s is different. Everything, and the prices, all different.

AM: A lot different! The farms are getting bigger than they used to be.

AB: Yes.

AM: Not only that, it is getting pretty expensive to get into farming, so that's why they get bigger.

HM: That's why it's so hard to do. If you give somebody something and then they go broke—things didn't go good—and then it's lost. Our farm is the original homestead, so I didn't like to see that happen, so then we turned it over to Darrell, and he's done very good ever since. You were talking about expenses. When we got married in 1956, I put gas in my truck for 25 cents a gallon and—what was it?—about \$4.50-\$5.00 would fill it up, and away I'd go. Of course, that was my last money, too, probably, to fill the truck up.

AB: Oh no, you'd have to buy beer. That was the last.

HM: I wasn't much of a beer drinker, but I had my share. Not of beer, but the little harder stuff.

AB: What do you think the future is for farming?

HM: Well, I don't really know. It's getting better every year with all of the technology and everything. I couldn't really say, but things can't be much better than they are right now because cattle and grain is a huge income right now. You have got to learn how to handle the money. I've seen it in my day when they wanted everybody to buy everything, and everything else. No end to money and everything else. They built pig barns and all that kind of stuff, got more cattle, and then all of a sudden— Oh yeah, and buy land. All of a sudden— Well, grain was up to about \$6.00 a bushel for a year, year and a half, something like that, buy land and then everybody got going, and then all of a sudden the grain price went down. Lots of land went back to the government or whatever company they borrowed money from. Farm Credit was probably the big one. That was bad then, and it has happened then, and that's what I tell people or told them before. It's happened and it can happen again. I think it's happened a couple of times since we were in business.

AM: I think farms are getting bigger and, I don't know, young people aren't going to go into farming like they used to because it is pretty expensive to get into, and there's so many other opportunities, too.

HM: I don't know what's going to happen because it is pretty hard to sell a big farm. I hate to see Hutterites buying everything. You're better to give half of it away and keep the community going than have a big bunch of money and have to give it to somebody. That would be a good thing if people would just realize that and not charge a whole bunch of money, just sell for what they'd make a good retirement on or whatever, would be the best. Our farm wasn't great big; it's big now. But the same thing, I didn't want to see it— You can maybe borrow money to buy the farm, but then if you are a fair-sized farmer you've got to have all that big machinery to go with it. You can't do like I did, buy one piece at a time when you've got money. You have to have everything right now or you just can't operate, so it is very hard. You can't do much about it, but that's the way it is.

when you've got money. You have to have everything right now or you just can't operate, so it is very hard. You can't do much about it, but that's the way it is.

AB: Do you think that they'll get so there is a big landowner and then little guys working for them? Because they'll have to produce food somehow.

HM: That could happen, but there is nobody left to— Well, there might be now, but there hasn't been anybody for quite a few years, that would bother coming to help the farmer even at harvest time because they had oil company jobs and everything else like that, but now there's going to be a change [due to the low price of oil currently].

AB: Yes, that's kind of fizzled.

AM: Yes, it's fizzled. Oh, there will always be some.

HM: They're still going to want fairly good money, but I don't know if they'll get it.

AM: No, but that's what's going to happen, I think. It will be big companies. Between that and Hutterites, that's the way it'll go, I think.

AB: What about the PF? What do you think is going to happen with that? With irrigation?

HM: Well, I think they better try hard to keep it going because it is cattle country at Consul, and you have to keep that going. It has to be pasture. Lots of people have seeded a bunch down to grass and stuff, but we need that summer pasture real bad, and they should try to keep that going. I haven't heard much about it. I'm kind of not around that stuff, but I think when they talked about it a while ago they were going to change everything over and have private guys run it, but I don't think that is happening very much anyway.

AB: Not yet.

HM: In our country. East maybe in smaller places. It's sold a little bit to private guys, I think, or companies.

HM: There was kind of a bad storm, it really was, lots of wind and wet snow. It was late in the spring. We knew it was going to be storming bad, so we went out and gathered the cattle up and brought them home. We thought they were in the shelter, and everything was good, and the calves were all excited. While we were in the house, we thought everything was going good then we went back out. A bunch of calves were gone and the cows were bawling after the storm. I think we lost about 20 calves. They ran out in the pasture again and laid down probably behind a sagebrush or something. Anyway, they smothered, got covered up with snow. That was a big loss which we didn't really need. That was part of our income, or helped quite a lot, and we were just getting started, so that was a bad thing to have happen. Still we had enough, we kept going anyway. But that was a good lesson right to start with: make sure everything is really good when there is any kind of storm. In the early days like that, we could have two or three days that you couldn't see anything, could not see the corrals or anything else for storm. There was lots of snow all the time in those years, but that doesn't happen anymore.

JP: Did you always have a furnace or did you have to have something that burned wood or coal?

HM: To start with we packed wood and coal.

HM: To start with we packed wood and coal.

AM: For the first year of our marriage, we had coal oil lamps because we did not have power.

HM: No. No power. We didn't get power until 1958, was it?

AM: 1957 it came in. That was a really good year that year, getting the power, but before that we had propane stoves and propane fridge, that kind of thing. Eventually, another year later or so, we had running water and that was really a good day!

HM: Dug a new well by the house and put water and sewer in; I did most of the work myself so that wasn't a big problem.

JP: So your area had a good supply of water underground then.

HM: It did, but we didn't know it. We kind of knew there was lots of water. When you [would] dig a new well, about a two foot hole, the water would blow in and bring about ten feet of sand in with it. Then the water had to come up through the sand, so if you pumped it a lot it would get kind of murky for the cattle if a bunch were drinking. [With] the house well, that would not happen.

We knew there was lots of water there, so the thing was to get the sand out. We dug a six-inch hole, and [with] the first one I had dug, the guys didn't want to use plastic pipe. They didn't know anything about it. I think they were seismograph guys or something, so we put cast pipe in.

AM: And sand screen.

HM: Yes, we got down there and the water just blew in with the sand, and that wasn't real good either, but there was a good gravel bottom with lots of water. We dug another well, and they hauled this driller's mud in and plugged the sand off, and got down to the good clean gravel bottom and sealed the sand off, so that fixed the problem. When Darrell built a new house he drilled another well over by his house instead of piping the water over. [He] thought it was going to be cheap, but it was so strong [that] they had to haul a lot of driller's mud from Medicine Hat, so it was pretty costly. It was 30 gallons a minute, so you could just about irrigate out of it.

AM: There is lots of water there now. If we had had that! Before sand screens came in, you had to watch how you used the water.

HM: A quarter of a mile [away], up on the hill (our wells were 60 feet deep and up on the hill it was 70 feet), but they didn't have the sand. Half a mile west, you could pump all day and there was no sand problem there, at Carmen Smith's place by Bellfield School. That's the way the water went in those days; you did not know what was going to happen.

JP: You are pretty lucky because south of Consul, water seemed to be a pretty big problem.

HM: Oh yes.

AM: Even just west of us. Not too far away, seven miles away, west and south, the water was no good. There are spots.

HM: At the Frame homestead and the Lumans, I think they maybe had a little better water. but at the old Kalmring place the water wasn't any good there. At

HM: At the Frame homestead and the Lumans, I think they maybe had a little better water, but at the old Kalmring place the water wasn't any good there. At Berta's uncle's place, Kurt Browatzke, the water was yellow, alkali.

AM: You couldn't drink it.

HM: Just the cattle drink that.

AM: It is funny how water goes.

HM: What causes that, not very far away? Anyway, that is the way it ran. North of us two miles, the well is 70 feet deep and gravel bottom; you can see the water running through the bottom. Our water was very cold. In the wintertime we would pump the water and there would be a skim of ice on the water. Two miles north of us you pumped the water and it thawed the ice out of the water trough. Our water in the summertime was just a nice cold drink. A lot of funny things happen that you don't know that can happen, but that is what happened there in our area.

AB: What are the activities or some of the things that you do up here to keep busy?

AM: I got into bowling. I used to curl when I was on the farm, but I didn't want to be tied down because the season is a lot longer up here, so I went into bowling. That is something you can do and if you are going to be away you can bowl off, or find somebody to spare for you, or you can just go and let it be. That was good and I enjoy it. It is a good social outing; I go once a week in winter. In summer I just keep busy around the yard; I have a yard to look after and I enjoy that. I joined an exercise club; I have been doing that for quite a few years and got to meet a lot of friends there, and that is about it. We don't dance near as much as we used to, but the odd time we still go out and do that.

AB: What about you, Howard?

HM: I don't do much of anything; I am always busy doing things, nothing special. If I am sitting down, Berta says, "Howard, you do this, you do that", so I just don't have any spare time. *[Laughter]*

AM: Oh yes, he does. He keeps busy in the garage and he does a lot of volunteer work. That's another thing—there is always lots of room for volunteer work, and that's good.

HM: I have to do a little work around the yard. Last spring we painted 200 feet of double fence; that took a little time. It looks a lot better now.

AM: And it gives you something to do. You have to have something to do. We keep pretty active that way.

AB: What are your plans for the future?

AM: Oh brother! We hope to just stay in our own home and hopefully not have to go into a home, but you never know those things. But that would be the ideal way. Yes.

HM: I am just keeping my fingers crossed that I am among the lucky ones, just here today and gone tomorrow.

