

NABHM Aural History Project
Narrator: Margaret Elizabeth Hurst
Dec. 12, 1992
At her home in Colchester, Ont.

Interviewer: Janisse Browning
Technician: Wreford Miller

[Introduction: This project is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communication Ontario and the North American Black Historical Museum in Amherstburg Ontario.]

Janisse: Could you please state when and where you were born?

Margaret: August 30, 1915 was my birth and I was born in the Harland Johnson house in Colchester, and that house was moved over on 18 Highway and a new house was built.

Janisse: And Harland Johnson was your father?

Margaret: Father. Yes. And Harland lives there now. Harland Jr. lives in that house now.

Janisse: Your brother?

Margaret: Yes.

Janisse: When you were born in that house did they have anybody helping your mother to deliver you? Did they have a midwife?

Margaret: A doctor.

Janisse: [Were] your brothers and sisters all born in that same area with the same doctor or did you have different people helping with the birth?

Margaret: The same house, but different people helped.

Janisse: And what were both of your parents' names?

Margaret: Harland Ernest Johnson, Harriet Ruth Holland Johnson.

Janisse: Where were they both from?

Margaret: Harland was from here, he was local. Harriet was born in Bronte, Ontario, near Hamilton.

Janisse: What do you remember about your parents?

Margaret: I remember they were strict, honest, Christians in the latter days. My mother was a Christian all of her life - - all that I know -- but my dad he was just saved, oh, a few years before they died.

Janisse: About how old were you when they died?

Margaret: [In my] twenties...yeah. That's as close as I can...[remember]. [Laughing].

Janisse: Do you remember anything about any of your grandparents?

Margaret: I remember my grandfather Holland because we used to push him down the hill and make him move faster. You know, he had -- what do you call those -- double toes? What do you call them?

Janisse: Double toes -- toes that are stuck together?

Margaret: No. Just over.

Janisse: Crossed over?

Margaret: Anyway, he couldn't walk very well and we were just full of mischief and we would get him up on the hill and we would push him down, and make him run a little, you know. That tickled us, because were little fellows, you know, wasn't too little to forget to learn. And he would reach around and try to hit us and he didn't want momma to know that he had hit us. But anyway, that's all there was to it...can remember him running [laughing], and we would laugh.

Janisse: So you were all full of mischief?

Margaret: Oh, always. Yes. Let me see -- I can't remember anything else.

Janisse: Do you remember what your grandfather did for a living?

Margaret: He was an old man when I saw him. You know, he didn't work at anything, I don't think.

Janisse: And how about your parents? What did your parents do?

Margaret: Farmed. Momma always had a big yard and she canned lots of fruit. Dad would get in nuts and just grew all kind of food. Had pigs, they would kill pigs in the fall and have all of our meat through the winter. I think at one time or the other, he killed a calf and had beef, but momma would render that lard down that they would get from the pigs and have it in big crocks like this...

Janisse: A big crock about...

Margaret: Four feet high. And one year she made sausages and render the grease out and put these sausages in this crock...there was [this] crock full of sausages. They were hard to get out without breaking them up because of the lard. But they were really good and I've been trying to make sausages like that and I just can't.

Janisse: It's always hard to make it like mom did.

Margaret: Oh yeah. It was always fresh stuff, eh. And as I said before they made their own syrup and grew corn and had that...[They'd] make chicken feed out of the corn and I forget what they did with it. They grew cabbage and they had apples and potatoes and [my dad would] put them in a pit, and cover that all over with straw and then cover it over with earth and that would keep it all winter.

Janisse: That's the way that they kept the root vegetables in the winter?

Margaret: Yeah. If you didn't have basements, some people didn't have basements. We always had a cow and we had lots of milk, lots of good thick cream.

Janisse: Really thick!

Margaret: Yes, half an inch thick. Good!

Wreford: Did you have cows?

Margaret: No particular kind. We'd have Jersey and Holstein, that's the only kind I remember.

Margaret: No. Momma would take a little lunch pail and put a string or a rope on it and put it down in the well and it would be just like a fridge.

Janisse: So she would keep vegetables from day to day in the well to keep them cold like that?

Margaret: Yes. Same as you would put in a fridge.

Janisse: I guess it was cold enough in the winter?

Margaret: Oh, in the summer too. See, those wells are made of cement crocks and she put it way down in the well and it would be just as cold when it come out of there.

Janisse: Do you have any memories of your brothers and sisters when you were young and some of things you used to do?

Margaret: Oh, I don't think it would pay [for] you to put it on here...[laughing] Oh, we used to churn our own butter -- put it in a churn. It was about three and a half feet high and you would have a lattle and the lid had a hole in it, and this lattle had a handle like a broom handle would go up through this hole and you dash that up-[and]-down like that -

Janisse: How long would it take before you got butter doing it that way?

Margaret: Different times. The purer the cream was, the quicker the butter would come. But if you had quite a bit of water in it, you know, or milk not churned out, then it would be longer.

Janisse: But you had lots of good cream because of your cows -- it was probably good.

Margaret: Oh yes. Let me see what else...carrots and turnips and beets you had to save all them in that pit. Momma would make lots of pickles.

Janisse: It was really important for your family to preserve food for the winter?

Margaret: Sure, sure, because you see in the winter time farmers don't have anything coming in. You see everything goes out, so you have to supply your food in the fall for what you want to use in the winter...it was nice.

Janisse: Do you remember a time when -- maybe there was a difficulty getting things together for the winter if

crops ever failed?

Margaret: No. I don't ever remember them failing back yonder, but we always had plenty to eat. Nothing fancy, you know, but everything...we had lots, lots to eat all the time. I never remember not having everything we needed for a meal, until I was married and lived in Windsor. I had food still down here [in Colchester] because I lived over there...[in Windsor]. And I had got down to one can of pumpkin. That's all we had in the house to eat when we was living in Windsor, but we had plenty down here. Just couldn't get to it. My mother came...and gave me some money and brought me some stuff up from our home down here...and that's the closest I've been without.

Janisse: Was it difficult to travel between Colchester and Windsor at that time?

Margaret: No. No, they had cars and all them.

Janisse: But there was a time when you didn't drive cars?

Margaret: Ride horse and buggy. You know they used to have the Emancipation [Celebration] in Amherstburg and we used to drive a horse and buggy up there and back.

Janisse: What was that like for you, and what do you remember about that?

Margaret: The thrill, a thrill of a lifetime to go up there to Amherstburg to visit the park. You would see...it's the same park that's there now. See people that live in Amherstburg that you don't see all year long. Some of my buddies right now, were some of those people...your Aunt Kathleen [Simpson] was one, and we'd see her and different other ones.

Janisse: Do you remember what went on during the Emancipation [Celebration] when you went there?

Margaret: I know they had a big parade and they always had ice cream and...lots to eat, but I forget what it would be. I don't think they had hotdogs then. Chicken, pies and cakes like that, I think.

Janisse: Lots of food.

Margaret: Yeah. Yeah, that's what it was. A day of foods and just picnic and good time.

Janisse: Did it bring a lot of different people together?

Margaret: Oh yeah. From way, way off they'd come, yes.

Janisse: How far do you remember people coming from?

Margaret: I don't know. I can't even remember. You see, I was so small then.

Janisse: And then they moved [the celebration] to Windsor?

Margaret: Jackson park [in Windsor].

Janisse: What was it like then for you?

Margaret: I didn't care about it. There was a lot of strangers. You would see a few that you knew. Some of those same ones would come from far off, but it never was the same after it moved from Amherstburg...to me.

Janisse: Because it used to be more for people within the local community?

Margaret: Or their friends from far off.

Janisse: Did it make you feel proud as a Black person to be a part of this celebration?

Margaret: Not really, because I didn't realize or didn't even think about that. At school -- now there was prejudices and you'd think about [that]...there, but there [at the celebration] no...[I'd] just think about it being a

Janisse: Because it was a celebration of freedom from slavery, but I guess when you're young you're not really thinking about that.

Margaret: Just thinking about that day. Getting a new dress, new shoes...yeah. Momma would make us a dress. She could sew, she was a tailor.

Janisse: She was?

Margaret: Yeah. She could make overalls and shirts and suits and everything.

Janisse: Did your mother work outside of the home doing tailor work?

Margaret: Just doin' the garden work. That was her job before she was married.

Janisse: So if she did any sewing it was mostly for the family?

Margaret: Oh yes. I don't ever remember her doing it for anybody else, but she would make overalls for the boys and shirts...that's about it, I guess.

Janisse: Would you say that the Emancipation [Celebration] weekend was kind of like a Christmas -- was it comparable -- because it was such a big event and it brought people together. Was it similar to what happens around the holiday season, or very different?

Margaret: No. I think it was different because this was all out in the open, you know...[in the] park. Just different. Christmas was more of a family affair.

Janisse: What other holidays did you celebrate when you were younger?

Margaret: We didn't celebrate holidays much because, see, you lived on the farm and that work had to be done...holiday or no holiday. And farmers didn't make money, as I said before, in the winter time. So, we didn't bother with Easter much...to buy clothes, you know, and all that...we didn't do that. Like on Thanksgiving, those leaving town and whatever, would be celebrating Thanksgiving, we'd be out there in the field getting that corn in or those squash in or whatever needed doin'. It could freeze anytime then...I mean frost, it would be around [the] second week in October. We were hauling it in for winter.

Janisse: So that was a busy time for you -- the fall? Was

Margaret: Six of one-half dozen or the other...if you had to get it in, you had to get it off, yeah. Another thing I remember too, they used to haul ice from the lake [Erie]. The lake would freeze over until it was...sometimes two-foot thick and those ice cutters would go out there. I can't remember if they had saws or what they had...but anyway, they'd cut chunks out and they'd haul that to the houses around, you know, all through the summer. And they would pack that away...I believe [in] saw dust...and hauled it up with bob-sleighs and horses and take them out there on the ice.

Janisse: And then what would people do with the ice?

Margaret: They had iceboxes. And the top of the icebox would hold the ice and there was...one of these [pipes] that went right down...to the bottom, and underneath the icebox was a pan to catch all the water that dripped. One of those chunks would last...oh, two or three days. Then the iceman would come again and bring some more, and you'd pay the iceman for the ice.

Janisse: So the iceman played an important role?

Margaret: Oh yes, oh yes. And it also gave people jobs

Janisse: Did you ever do that?

Margaret: No, no. That was for the men that knew what they were doing.

Janisse: It was very specialized work?

Margaret: Yes.

Janisse: Did you ever watch them do it?

Margaret: Oh yes, and haul it and put in a...trying to remember where that ice house was...I guess it would be where that restaurant is down there in Colchester, right along that road. We'd see them when we were coming home from school...carrying and hauling that ice, yup.

Janisse: So it sounds like people did a lot of different kinds of jobs in this community.

Margaret: Oh yes. Whatever needed to be done.

Janisse: And it also seems like it took a lot longer just to do the day-to-day things.

Janisse: What was it like in the summer for you?

Margaret: I don't know words to...just that we'd look forward to playing, however. [On the] swings, and we used to roll tires...and that was the boys too, see. They'd hit those tires and you would guide them wherever you wanted them to go. We had a certain amount of work to do if you didn't duck it [laughing], of which I was quite capable. We had to hoe and pick things...peas and beans all that sort of thing to pick...pick up potatoes.

Janisse: There was still work to do in the fields in the summer then?

Margaret: Oh yes, all summer. Go from one thing to another. Berries to pick, cherries to pick and apples to pick.

Janisse: You had fruit trees?

Margaret: Yes, yes.

Janisse: What would you do with the fruit?

Margaret: Can it...can it. Couldn't freeze it. Wasn't nothing to freeze it with then.

Janisse: So it sounds like because you didn't have a freezer you needed to work with the iceboxes and canning and everything, that just the day to day existence was a lot of work.

Margaret: Oh yes. The women mostly made their own bread. Momma wasn't one to make bread with yeast, but she made... flapjacks, I guess you call them...homemade bread about this thick...and good.

Janisse: Homemade bread about 2 inches thick?

Margaret: Maybe not that...maybe inch and half [thick], and it's according to how much baking powder you put in and the size of the pan, whatever. You could do that in the oven or do it on top of the stove. Put it in a frying pan and put it in there...you take your pan and "zoop" it up like that and flip that bread over, and it would come right back in the pan. I did that one time and splattered grease right down my nose [laughing]. I had a scar on my nose for a long time. Oh, we used to go swimming all the time -- everyday almost, because it was real hot, especially. Then we'd go alot of times at night...warm...lot of people down to the lake.

Janisse: You went swimming at the lake?

Margaret: Yeah.

Janisse: Has it changed much since then?

Margaret: The lake itself? Quite a bit. It's out...I know one time there was a big rock...Oh it must have been from here to that garage.

Janisse: About a hundred yards?

Margaret: You could say that...I couldn't tell you...but anyway, it was a good distance way out in the water. We used to climb up on that rock and jump off it. The water was that deep, now where that rock was is beach the water has gone out that much. And another thing, too, is the chappel in the cemetery down there, that's a replica of the one that was there, I guess you would say, it was way out close to the edge of the bank and Uncle Buddy said he remember when they could play ball between the end of the bank and that Chapel, which is that far away. Now it's caved in until it's way, way back...that little old chappel's gone. But they built a new one now up, way up here. That's it, I guess.

Janisse: So you went swimming at night down by the lake, did you parents let you go?

Margaret: Yes.

Janisse: So they weren't too strict?

Margaret: No. Well, I guess I wouldn't say they were too strict, because I was as strict as they were [laughing]. I couldn't help it, if I had it to do over again I would have to do the same thing, although, I used to feel sorry for the children sometimes, myself.

Janisse: Could you talk a little bit about being a mother and a little bit about your family?

Margaret: What can I say? There are so many things that I tried to teach them, I even forgot that I had taught them that. I know Shirley [my daughter] was telling me here a short time ago, that I said to her... "A job worth doing is worth doing well," and I don't remember ever telling them that. Well, the children helped around lots. We had garden crops all out in that field there was stuff to be picked and hoed and they all had their share to do.

Janisse: [Laughing] And you're a mother and grandmother?

Margaret: A proud mother and a proud grandmother.

Janisse: And a great-grandmother.

Margaret: And a proud great grandmother.

Janisse: And a great-great-grandmother?

Margaret: I don't think I have any great-great's. There's Shirley and Sharon and Chuckey and his baby.

Janisse: So your daughter, your granddaughter, your great-grandson and your great-great grandson and their daughter.

Margaret: Daughter.

Janisse: So you have a great-great-granddaughter?

Margaret: Yeah. Her name is Desiree.

Janisse: Do you have any other great-great grandchildren?

Margaret: One other little boy...Lance. That's it, I believe.

Janisse: It must be hard keeping track of all these families?

Margaret: It is, it is. And, I used to try and send birthday cards to all of them and try and get them gifts ...but I just can't do it anymore.

Janisse: And how many Christmas presents did you give out last Christmas?

Margaret: Not last Christmas...it was either the Christmas before or the two before...73 [presents].

Janisse: It's mostly just for your family?

Margaret: Well, a few others...that would mean the mailman, the garbage man. That's it, I think.

Janisse: Speaking of mailman...

Margaret: Yes, I was a mail^{man}.

Janisse: Want to talk about you experiences as a mail person?

Margaret: I loved it. I loved it, and most of the people were really nice. You would come across a bad one now and then. They'd bawl you out for doing this or doing that, but you'd just go on and do it. Oh well, we were stuck different times -- in the mud or in the snow, or slide in the ditch a little, but there was always somebody that would come along and help us everytime. My mail route was thirty miles plus.

Janisse: Everyday?

Margaret: Everyday.

Janisse: Except Sunday?

Margaret: Yeah. Then they fixed it so that we didn't have to go on Saturdays. I don't know which one I was on since then, but that's it anyway. And the people who worked in the post office, they were always nice. When we resigned or gave up the route...one gentleman that was on the route went around to the different families. [He] had a whole list of people. They donated, and one lady drew a picture of a mailbox on the top of this sheet, and then all these people's names were on there. And they gave us three hundred and some dollars -- I forget how much it was -- just as a gift.

Janisse: How long ago was that?

Margaret: That was...I got the route in [19]67...through '78...9 years.

Wreford: How did you get around?

Margaret: Car.

Janisse: And who did you do the mail route with?

Janisse: Your sister?

Margaret: Yeah, and we had a ball. We did everything on the route [that] was possible. We cried, we laughed [laughing] we did everything. One day she fell...didn't fall right in the ditch...but she fell almost down in the ditch, and I had hold of her coat and she was laughing and so she couldn't tell me to let her go, so she could get her balance, you know, and get back...[laughing] we were both just laughing and finally she...I don't know if she stepped out or what she did, anyway, she got back in. And everytime we'd go by there we'd laugh about that mailbox.

Janisse: Were there many women doing mail routes around here?

Margaret: Yes. At that time there were only four mail routes, and there was one, two...three of us were women...I mean, on the route. They always had a helper with them. I can't think who that fourth one was...

Janisse: Sounds like it was a fun time for a job.

Margaret: Oh, it was a fun time. We laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed. Had many a big laugh.

Janisse: What other big jobs have you done outside working on the farm?

Margaret: Well, I worked on a farm clear up until I was left alone. I had never been in a factory in my life, but after that I was in the Clark's factory [in] Kingsville. Two factories...tomatoes and tobacco...and still another tobacco factory. Then one down here, east of Harrow...and I think that's it.

Janisse: So you did a fair bit of factory work?

Margaret: Quite a bit.

Janisse: What kind of work did you do in a factory?

Margaret: Well, I know, one time we were canning peaches in Kingsville and we had to put a tablet...it was calcium...a tablet in each can as it went by on the [conveyor belt]...and I had to help to peel peaches and tomatoes. Another time, when I was out here in Harrow, I was on a belt...you had to pick stones or mice or whatever come along and, you know, wasn't to go in the cans and take 'em out. If it hadn't been for me some of those mice would have gone on by, because those women were afraid of those mice. I caught that mouse by the tail. [Laughing]

Janisse: [Laughing] These would be inside of the cans?

Margaret: No, no. This is the tomatoes all on a belt before it goes in the can or anything.

Janisse: So was it mostly women who worked in the factories, or men to^o

Margaret: There were a few men, but there were mostly women. Then the tobacco factory we had to pick out the stems or any kind of foreign object that would be in that...would be on a [conveyor] belt.

Janisse: So you had to work fast?

Margaret: Yes. As fast as I could, which I am very slow. But some of the women that was right across from here, they was fast, fast...Oh, and I worked out here to Pollard's too, in the sunflower seeds...forgot about that.

Janisse: What did you do there?

Margaret: The same thing, pick out anything that shouldn't go over the belt.

Janisse: So how did you find that kind of work?

Margaret: I didn't feel very satisfied with it because I was slow, but I did my best. That's all I had to go on. And... oh, when we were picking sunflower seeds, when you first start you have to have...pick like that, you know. All day long and just wears that thumb nail right off, and you talk about some sore hands...for a while, until they get toughened to it, you know, and it's alright then.

Janisse: Were you making okay money?

Margaret: Yes.

Janisse: Because I wonder why there wouldn't be very many men in these factories.

Margaret: Well, they would do different jobs, the ones that were there...there's machines to keep up and...I really don't know. Then they'd haul the fruit away, I suppose.

Janisse: After you left the factories did you come back to the farm?

Margaret: No, no. I came out of the factory to my mail route...that's the story of my life.

Janisse: And now you are a great-great-grandmother. That

must have been a big job raising children?

Margaret: Yes. Yes. Responsibilities were heavy, but...it's a pleasure, too, so you can't just...

Janisse: Could you talk a little bit about the way the family works, because some people when they think of family, they think of just a few people, but when you think of family, how big is family for you?

Margaret: Everybody around here is family to me. I don't know how to say it, I don't know.

Janisse: I was thinking about the idea of the extended family, where you have your cousins and your nieces and your nephews and brothers and sisters -- it's a rather large family that you have here in this community, don't you?

Margaret: Yes. And I love everyone of them.

Janisse: I'm sure they love you, too. You were talking a little before about your dad and your Uncle Buddy and the kind of work that they used to do on the farm that you remember, could you talk a little more about that?

Margaret: Well, they just raised everything.

Janisse: And they produced syrup?

Margaret: Yeah.

Janisse: Could you describe how syrup was made here in the Colchester area?

Margaret: Well, there were no other makers around here, they were the only ones. I think there's one in Kingsville, later on. But anyway, just like I told you before -- is that what you mean? Then we'd plant the seed, grew it until it come up and hoe it, take care of it until it got matured, until the seeds were black, almost black.

Janisse: And this is sorghum cane -- right?

Margaret: Yeah. And then we'd cut the tops off..oh, say, four feet including the seed. And they would turn them upside down and tie it and hang it up on a building to dry out for next year's seed. Then, they would strip it down with a sharpened lath, and they would strip that cane. Then they'd cut it off and put it in bundles and take it up to the arch house...that's what we called the place that had the fire and the vat. They had a grinding mill and this mill had two big cogs -- wheels -- and you put those cane stocks through these cogs and that would squeeze the juice out. That juice would go into a big barrel, and from there...this

mill had a big log handle. The horse was hitched onto that [handle] at the end with a single tree, and he would go 'round and around all day long, 'round and around. As it went 'round and 'round it would turn these cogs all the time, and you feed that cane into there [between the cogs]. Then we got the juice all ready now, and take it in and there was a big vat that sat on a flat fire place, you'd call it...and that keep the fire. And they cooked this juice until it was almost done, skimming it...take all that scum off until it had started to turn brown and as they skimmed that, after it was brown, they would save the juice that was in the bottom of it, and that was the best part of the syrup. It wouldn't keep...but it tasted better. It was lighter and just everything...I can taste it now! They'd save that and we'd have to use that up first. As it got done it would thicken up and get real brown and when they figured it was done, they knew just how to fire it -- if it needed a little more heat they would put more wood on, or take more off. If they saw it was getting too hot or whatever, they managed the fire that way. Then they would scoop that vat off the fire onto two wooden horses, and leave it there for awhile, and let it kind of cool. Then they'd take the ends of these vats and tip [them] up and down, up and down, and kind of cool [them off]. Then, they'd finally get it down on the ground and leave it there. Then they'd dip it out and put it into jugs or crocks or whatever the people had brought to put it in. And people came from all around to bring their cane and get

their syrup made there. They'd have great big piles of those bundles out in the yard. Each person would have his own pile when they made that up, and put his syrup in his jug. The next day or the next time they'd take the next pile and they keep that up until it was all done, [untill] the whole season was done. And another thing we used to do, too, the fire had coals in it at the end...as they got through with the syrup, and we'd take apples and put [them] in there, and potatoes, and corn -- and roast them. I guess that's about all.

Janisse: Then you would use the syrup for your pancakes?

Margaret: Oh yes, oh yes. Gingerbread...Ooowh, man! And they [dad and Uncle Buddy Johnson] had a name for being able to make the best syrup there was.

Janisse: Really?

Margaret: Yeah. Yeah. Sorghum they called it.

Janisse: Do you remember any sounds from that time of making syrup?

Margaret: The crackling of the fire. When they made syrup it would be in the fall. It'd be cold. And they would put a door or some kind of board or something up there to break the wind, and that would be the warmest place to be. Beside that

fire in that arch house, it was a comfortable place. And everybody used to gather there, and they would sit up there and visit, because the men would be there all day pretty well. And they would sit up there and visit. Noises...let me see.

Janisse: Maybe the grinding?

Margaret: Yes, but it didn't make a loud noise. You see, that stuff [sorghum cane] is green. We used to take those stalks and twist them like that...twist like that...and drink that juice out.

Janisse: Awh...that sounds amazing!

Margaret: It is! It was! I don't know if I'd like it now.

Janisse: Too sweet?

Margaret: Well, no, it wasn't sweet...be something on the order of apple juice, but it didn't taste like apple juice or anything. But it would be on that order.

Janisse: So the wind would be sometimes pretty strong at that time because it was winter?

Margaret: Oh yes. Not winter -- it would be fall. Yeah.

was really severe or anything. But we mostly walked.

Janisse: How far did you have to walk?

Margaret: One mile.

Janisse: One mile to school? No matter the weather?

Margaret: Now on Zero mornings, your nose would feel like there was something in it...it was that frost, you know.

[Sniffs and laughs].

Janisse: You could imagine how strange it might have been for your grandfather to escape from the South to come here up to Canada where it was cold.

Margaret: Yes, my goodness.

Janisse: Do you remember any stories of your grandparents?

Margaret: Not much. I remember, I don't know who told me, but when the slaves were escaping as they ran they took cow manure -- these plops of cow manure -- and dried them out and put them on their feet, tied them on their feet so the old boss couldn't track them down.

Janisse: Really? Can you remember anymore about that?

Margaret: No. Fred and them are the ones that can tell you them, because, Uncle Buddy...our dad never talked nothing about...nothing like that much. What we got, we got from Uncle Buddy, or "Pat", we called him.

Janisse: You're such a good story teller. As you got into the description it makes the picture more and more clearer.
[Flips tape over to continue...]

Margaret: We had to carry our own water from the well or haul it from the lake, whatever, to have a big amount of water to wash. So we took big barrels and put them by the corner of the house where the eavestrough would come down...the roof would come down, and catch rain water. That was the best water for washing your hair. Soft water for washing your clothes.

Janisse: You had to kill your own chickens?

Margaret: Oh yeah. We had to kill our own chickens and we had to clean them.

Janisse: So what kind of animals did you grow up with on the farm?

Margaret: Oh, horses, cows, pigs. Lots of people had sheep,

but we never had sheep or goats. But dogs and cats and...
ferrets.

Janisse: Ferrets?

Margaret: They would hunt with ferrets. They take that
little ferret and put it in a hole and he would chase the
rabbit out, and they'd shoot the rabbit. Yeah. We used to
do a lot...I never...but dad used to hunt all through the
winter and we'd have rabbits. Got so there were jack rabbit
around too. There weren't at first.

Janisse: Did a ferret make a sound?

Margaret: I can't remember that. I didn't handle him
much...I didn't handle him, period.

Janisse: They can get pretty vicious sometimes?

Margaret: I know they can, and they can be good pets too.

Janisse: Did he keep them outside near the barn?

Margaret: I don't know. He had a little cage, I don't
remember where they kept them. But they used to hunt quail
partridges, pheasants...in the latter years...pheasants, wild
turkeys -- I don't remember them being right around here, but

they did have them. That was about it.

Janisse: Would he have seasons where he had to shoot the different birds?

Margaret: In the winter time. But now on pheasant day you have to have a permit to shot pheasants.

Janisse: You didn't need permits then?

Margaret: Nothing.

Janisse: It was just a way of life?

Margaret: Yes.

Janisse: So things have changed quite a bit since you were young?

Margaret: Oh yes, oh yes.

Janisse: Yeah. What kind of changes do you notice the most?

Margaret: For one thing, you have to spray everything now...it's go so you have to spray raspberries. We didn't know anything about spray for no raspberries, strawberries or anything -- just the plain old thing.

Janisse: What do they spray [with] ?

Margaret: Some kind of insecticide, I don't know. And you have to put fertilizer on things, you didn't used to, of course. They had cow manure and horse manure and like that that they used. But now it's mostly insecticides.

Janisse: How does it change it for people who farm here?

Margaret: Well, it's expensive for one thing. And, well, it's more work to put the fertilize and insecticides on and everthing.

Wreford: If it is more expensive and more work, why do it?

Margaret: Have to live, got to do something.

Janisse: They spray the fruit and everything to keep the insects away, but you didn't have that problem when you were younger did you? Do you know why they have to do that now?

Margaret: I don't know, it's one of those pestilences in the Bible, I guess. Everything is either worms or bugs or something that tries to eat 'em up if you don't prevent it. Then you got trouble on your hands.

Janisse: Do you find a change in the taste of food today?

Margaret: I think so. It's not as tasty as it used to be, I don't think.

Janisse: Do you shop at a grocery store for food?

Margaret: Oh yeah.

Janisse: But you didn't do that as much when you were younger?

Margaret: No.

Janisse: What did you used to buy from the grocer when you were younger?

Margaret: Candy! But flour and sugar, baking powder, baking soda, bread. Some people made their own bread. They made their own cakes and that [was] something...[to] have a [store] boughten cake. In fact, one time we were at a lady's house for Christmans. Fred was there and she had some she got from the bakery, you know. As they pass this cake around they said, "Mmm, boughten cake" -- ^{we were} just little fellows -- "boughten cake" [laughing].

Janisse: They could tell the difference?

Margaret: Oh yes.

Janisse: Did they like it better or did they not like it as much?

Margaret: That's according to the person's taste, I don't know. Some like and some wouldn't.

Janisse: More sugar maybe?

Margaret: Probably so.

Janisse: When you were growing up, most of the Black People who lived in this area -- they farmed, right?

Margaret: Yes, or worked for farmers.

Janisse: There's a man here that you have a picture up here...[of your] Uncle Tom and your Aunt Minnie Bridges. Can you talk a little bit about what he did?

Margaret: Well, he was a mason and he laid blocks. And he used to make those big flower pots...you know...cement flower pots about...oh, two feet high and say, a foot-and-a-half across the top. And then it would slant down just like a pail smaller at the bottom, and he would put stones all in this cement -- designs -- and he'd put shells in some of the

others and they were beautiful. That's about all I know what he did.

Janisse: So people did different jobs around the Colchester area?

Margaret: Yes.

Janisse: Do you know if it was difficult finding work outside of farming?

Margaret: Well, I guess there wasn't much work to find, other than farming. Everybody would get jobs from farmers. Then, oh, twenty five or thirty years ago, people started going to town and getting jobs. They'd go to the factories. All kinds of factories. Windsor, Amherstburg. Harrow had some but not a lot. I don't know what else down East. Leamington...yes, they went to Heinz. Tobacco factories in Kingsville. Salt factory in...mine...whatever it was in LaSalle -- I think it's LaSalle -- Windsor. That's about all I can think of.

Janisse: That shift from the farm to the factory probably meant that people were working outside of the home more. Did it?

Margaret: Yes. Yes, because they'd be gone to the city all

day.

Janisse: Did that change the family structure at all?

Margaret: Some, I would say, yes.

Janisse: Do you see any changes in the ways that families work nowadays in the 1990's and 80's than when you were younger.

Margaret: Young people don't want to do anything, especially on the farm. They want to get rich over night, you know, and you just don't do that.

Janisse: I guess you know from experience it takes patience, eh?

Margaret: Sure does. Now Mr. Wylie Grayer, that's [my sister] Edna's father-in-law, had a mail route for...oh, I don't know how many years. He's had different mail routes. Edna had one too...Edna and [her husband] Virgil...and so it was some of our folks on mail route for that long.

Janisse: You said when you were younger you remembered that there was some prejudices at school.

Margaret: Oh, loads of it...loads of it. You know how

devilish kids are...and they learn it at home, and they just...

Janisse: Just the kind of teasing...

Margaret: Oh yes, name calling and when...well, we had to put our clothes...all the coloured kids had to put their clothes on one side...all the coats and things, and the other [White] ones put [theirs] on the other side. There were shelves back in behind the furnace and we had to put our lunches back in there no matter how hot it was -- and you can imagine that, you know, you go and get your lunch at noon and it's dried out and everything...but it had it's good points, too. By being over there it was in the warm part of the furnace in the winter time. I was the first one that started hanging my clothes over there...coats over there...I never will forget that old ugly coat. Somebody gave it to me, and I hated that coat. I took it and hung it over there anyway, and the rest of the kids all started doing that, then. There was no fuss about it.

Janisse: You started hanging your coat on the other side of the school? Nobody said anything?

Margaret: If they did I didn't hear, because I was a scrapper [laughing].

Wreford: Get in lots of fights?

Margaret: Not lots. I got in some.

Wreford: Enough to get a reputation.

Margaret: Oh yeah, oh yeah, and I played with the boys all the time. I was tough [laughing]. But I had to be to keep up with them...I'd fight like a trooper.

Janiessé: How was the teacher with you, because it was, like, one big room that the school was in, right?

Margaret: Well, when I first started, they had the coloured kid's all in one row...off to themselves. And, if they had Christmas concerts or anything, they'd keep the kids off to themselves. I know one time, we had to march somewhere in the school for something. I forget what. Anyway, the coloured kids would be...I would have to be with you...the next would have to be...paired off to themselves like...just make a little difference. It may not have even been a difference...might have been in my mind. So, I forget what I did. I wouldn't go in or what. But, anyway, the teacher took me out in the entry and ask me, "Why such-and-such..." what I had said, or done, or whatever, and I told her just what, and she said, "Oh no!" But she was a lovely teacher...lovely teacher, the best teacher we ever had.

Janisse: But they believed that the students should be separated depending on what race they were. Do you know when they started teaching that? Was that in your day?

Margaret: Yes. It was just gradually, gradually. And some teachers would come, they would be above that sort of thing. Some of them, well, they just thought the coloured kids weren't as good as the white kids, that's all.

Janisse: And they treated them that way?

Margaret: They treated them that way. I know, I had one old teacher she just had a disliking for me, I think, and she used to keep me after four [o'clock] and give me a fannin' everyday...nobody known but me and her...she and I [laughing].

Janisse: She told you not tell anybody?

Margaret: No. No. No. No, but I couldn't stand that woman until the day she died, because she just had a pick on me. Everytime...every chance she'd get, so I just rubbed her the wrong way. But she wasn't like that with any of the rest of the kids.

Janisse: Did you have very many Black kids in your class?

Margaret: Class...school. It was only [one-room] school though, all classes where in the one. Not a lot, but quite a few...quite a few.

Janisse: Mostly relatives?

Margaret: No, no.

Janisse: This is a fairly sized Black community around here?

Margaret: Yes. But not...you see, we went to this school right down here and that would just take in the kids around this way, just a certain district. And there's another school out that way, and another one over there, and another one way over there.

Janisse: So you went to school near Harrow...or Colchester?

Margaret: Colchester. We ended up...No...High School was in Harrow and then, Linda [daughter] went to this school for a while, and I think, while she was in there they started busing them out to Harrow.

Janisse: So how long did you go to school for?

Margaret: Altogether? I just went to grade 9, I didn't go

through grade 9.

Janisse: Did most of the kids that grew up in this area just go for a short period of time to school?

Margaret: No some of them went on. I never liked school.

Janisse: I can relate to that.

Margaret: Too lazy to study.

Janisse: Well, you also had a lot of jobs to do didn't you?

Margaret: I couldn't say that I did [laughing]. But now, Fred would be in studying when we went home from school. I'd be out playing. That was it.

Janisse: Just about everybody in your family has a nickname. Do you have a nickname?

Margaret: Your mother...grandmother [Betty] calls me "Deek" right now. Edna calls me Henry. I guess that's about all. This is all the same man's name...you've heard a song called Henry Lewis?

Janisse: No.

Margaret: Didn't you?

Janisse: Is this a private joke?

Margaret: No. Not really, no. He used to kiss me, and I was just a little kid and they would tease me about that, and after we get off this I'll tell you about the other [laughing].

Janisse: So how did people wind up with nicknames?

Margaret: It's just a habit, I guess. Dad and Uncle Buddy, both were good for that. Yeah.

Janisse: It ran in the family?

Margaret: I think so. It seems like it to me.

Janisse: And then when you get a nickname it sticks?

Margaret: It stays.

Janisse: What did you do for entertainment when you were young?

Margaret: Just played around home, played games and make up our own games.

Janisse: What kind of games?

Margaret: Hide-n-seek, bows and arrows, sling shots, pop guns, whistles...I always intend to show my grandkids how to make a whistle, and I never did. You make them out of willow or lilac [branches].

Janisse: Can you describe it?

Margaret: First you go to the...elderberry. You get an elderberry limb...a good size around about three inches around. And you punch that, what do you call -- that center. There's a soft center through there like bone marrow, and we'd take a lath and whittle it down until it was about the size of your little finger, but you would leave one end big. So that would be the handle of the pop gun. You know what haws are? They are...look like a little green apple and it would fit in this hole where this stuff was punched out [of] the center. But first we'd make a handle. The thing that the handles on goes through that. We'd have to whittle it down so that it was small enough to go through that hole. Then we'd take a haw and push it on through with this stem. Then we'd push it right to the end, but not out. Then, we'd take another one and put it here and make him fit nice and snug, and you take that and punch it through there, and that press from this first one going into that next one would

shoot that raw right out. You got a gun? And, you know, it could hurt you pretty good...it would sting you good.

Janisse: You would try it out on people?

Margaret: Oh, I imagine I did. I don't remember [laughing]. And another thing, we used to make a squirt gun. You make it the same way, you punch that stuff out and -- I forget how they made the hole in the end for the water to come out -- but anyway, you would have to put a rag on the end of this stem...the handle and the stem, and you would put that stem through that hole and bring it up like that...with that rag on it, and it would suck that water up-in. Then you shoot it and you got a squirt gun. Yeah. But I don't remember how you get that hole.

Janisse: What did the pop gun sound like?

Margaret: Not much, just pop.

Janisse: [Making popping sound], Like that?

Margaret: Yes. [laughing]

Janisse: What did the whistle sound like?

Margaret: Oh, I can't explain that...you take that

and slide it off, then you would have to cut it down. Make a little place...like that...out like that, then you would shave off that top part, and then you fit that bark back on there. I think you cut a little hole in that too, and when you fit that bark back on, of course, that left a little space for that air to go through and that would make a whistle.

Janisse: Could you make the sound that the whistle made?

Margaret: I really forget anyway. But it was a good strong whistle. Man, you make me bring back things that I forgot was on Earth!

Janisse: [Laughing] Do you remember the sleigh bells?

Margaret: Oh yes.

Janisse: That your granddad had?

Margaret: Yes. We used to hear them way over on Erie Road when they come from Harrow.

Janisse: That's about a mile away?

Margaret: Oh, more than that.

Janisse: Three miles?

Margaret: No. I'd say two or three miles. You know where the sleigh bell are?

Janisse: At the museum.

Margaret: Yeah, yeah. That's the same bell. You hear them, "Jingjingjingle." They had bob sleighs.

Janisse: Do you know the story behind the sleigh bells?

Margaret: Not really, no.

Janisse: Is there anything you would like to say that we haven't talked about.

Margaret: I can't think of anything.

Janisse: Covered a lot of ground. Well, I think maybe for now, I would like to say thank you for taking this time to talk.

Margaret: You're welcome. You brought back memories that I hadn't thought of for years.

Janisse: [Laughing] Well, I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did.

Wreford: That was wonderful!

Margaret: Good. Good. Good.

Janisse: Yeah. Really enjoyed that.