



Interview Transcription

Alfred Williamson: Caretaker of the Alex McNeill Estate

A2012.035.009

Interviewed on audio tape on November 14, 1994 by Bill Collins, Bob Courtney, Don McSparran for the Bruce County Historical Society

Transcribed from audio tape by BCM&CC volunteers in September 2012

Williamson: "And this here is all grew up, right in here and right across to you is, this is all grew up. This was all open and oh, about 25, 30 apple trees in here across to you."

Interviewer: "Right across where the parking lot is now"

Williamson: "Yeah, yes you can see where the remainder of the old apple tree, there is one column there, another in there, and another one in there, and another that shoots off right there, and this was all apple trees, and those archways where here to the house. Latticework, like so."

Interviewer: "Oh yeah?"

Williamson: "All climbing rose, English climbing rose."

Interviewer: "What year would that be?"

Williamson: "Oh, going back before my time."

Interviewer: "back in the 90s?"

Williamson: "I was 71. If I make it to December 3, I will be 72."

Interviewer: "Oh well"

Williamson: "So I was in here when I was five, six years old."

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Interviewer: "Oh well, that's getting back, in the 20s"

Interviewer: "Now maybe for the sake of this tape, we should introduce ourselves."

Another Interviewer: "Uh, there is a little thing here that should be started, but we have already started haven't we."

Interviewer: "Well that's alright. Now we are asking Alfred Williamson what he can remember about the place and uh, okay Bill, what were you about to say there?"

Interviewer: *"Well the following oral history, recorded by Mr. Alfred Williamson, is sponsored by the Bruce County Historical Society and made possible by a New Horizon Grant from Health and Welfare Canada. The interviewers are Mr. Don McSparran, Mr. Albert Courtney, and William Collins. The date is November 15th, 1994, municipal election day in Ontario, and the weather is overcast with rain, and we are on the grounds of the Corran and we are standing right at the moment in the parking lot. This is, you gave the date didn't you, 1994 anyway? Somebody listening to this tape in the future might even wonder where the parking lot was, but anyway. Which way are we facing here Alfred, which is North here would you say? Straight up toward the house more or less, there, remains of the house and the apple trees are pointing out on the opposite side of the parking lot."*

Williamson: "On the south side of the house, there was an apple orchard, and on the north side there was an apple orchard."

Interviewer: "Oh yes"

Williamson: "On both sides"

Interviewer: "Oh, you had lots of apples."

Williamson: "Well back at that time, every farmer and everybody had their own apple trees."

Interviewer: "A lot went to England and Scotland at that time too."

Williamson: "Well they did too, well I suppose apple pies came from here, and you know people would come and get them and stuff like that. Alexander McNeill and uh, he was the first one to have hydro and telephone. He would come up from the shore down where the fish house is there, where the three flags moraine, he would come up right along there and right up the shore. In here before it was the north of Wiarton at all."

Interviewer: "Did they have the telephone in Wiarton at the time?"

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Williamson: "Yep, they had telephone and hydro in Wiarton and he brought it up the shore and put it in here, in the house, before it was ever the north of Wiarton."

Interviewer: "Would there been all pine trees in here at one time?"

Williamson: "No, this was more or less maple bush, like you see across in this area."

Interviewer: "This is all grown up in Ash since."

Williamson: "Yeah, yeah the shoots just grew up since. There was none of this here at all, none of these ash trees here at all. That was all garden."

Interviewer: "How many acres would be here? 100?"

Williamson: "No, I think, I'm not positive if it is 68 acres or something like that. At one time he owned this and he owned right down the left hand side of the hill, right down to the barley bin, which is the grist mill. From there up he owned this lot, right through. After he died, Malcolm let it slide for taxes, just let it go. He lost all his estates and he just let it go, and the town bought that up down there, where the county building is. That, McNeill owned that right down through where that machine...is, a big place for machines in there, McNeill owned that, right down through. It all went back to the town. He also owned Glen Miller's lot over there, where the motel is, 65 acres, and he owned a hundred acres up above the big ash bend, up about half way to (Mario)?..., and another hundred acres up there.

Interviewer: "He had quite a lot of land, but he was not essentially a farmer, was he?"

Williamson: "No, uh, no this goes out as far as Glen Miller's there. Where you know the market gardens started up there?"

Interviewer: "Ohh, oh I think I know the spot yeah."

Williamson: "Where they sold vegetables. Yeah, well he owned south of that and this lot, up to there."

Interviewer: "Was he a man of wealth before he became a member of parliament?"

Williamson: "Yes, he had means, uh because he was kicked out of Ireland. He was kicked out by one of these guys like Lord (North)? in town there, he was kicked out too and one of them was Ken (Stanbur)?, Elmwood. He was kicked out. They paid so much a month and never to go back again. They couldn't go back."

Interviewer: "Had they disgraced themselves or was this because they were the last son of the family or something?"

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Williamson: "Well they did, uh the family, (...)?, I haven't got the paper, I wished I had. He got a complete life story on Alexander McNeill."

Interviewer: "Who was that?"

Williamson: "Skinny Launch, he used to have the Wiarion newspaper."

Interviewer: "Skinny Launch?"

Williamson: "Launch, Skinny, Launch" {laughs} He used to have the Wiarion Echo and he got a complete life story on him and he (McNeill) got in trouble with his maid when he was seventeen or something like that, seventeen, year no like he was older, seventeen year old maid or whatever. So he was disgraced the family or whatever and he was told to leave that he was paid a supplement for leaving. He came out here and settled in here, but when he was a member of parliament for quite a few number of years, like 15 or 20 or something, his son Alexander, Alex McNeill was just brought up as educated idiot, I called him.

Interviewer: "That would have been Malcolm."

Williamson: "Malcolm, Malcolm, he was the first lieutenant in the first world war because his father was a member of Parliament and he just went in training he never went to war I don't think. He just went to do his (sponsorship)? that's all, and he was off, his father had a lot of money and a good estate, but he depended on his lawyers and what have you in Toronto and that and they just took him. They just said well we will give him all these assets that's not worth too much or they are fallen and stuff like this and he never was a businessman to divvy it up he just lost everything he had, quite a guy to drink too. He walked the town and played a lot of bowling, he was a great guy from a bowling alley. At one time, they had fighting birds here, these fighting birds..."

Interviewer: "ohh cocks, yeah"

Williamson: "Yeah, yeah, Alexander had them. Well, he still had them, as I can find them. Big birds, like so, with big spurs on them like that and they were outlawed. I remember oh there back in '27, '28 or something, he had to get rid of them. You know the officials from the government and that they would come up here on the big weekend and see these fighting birds and bet on them and everything you know."

Interviewer: "You would remember that yourself."

Williamson: "Yeah, yeah, see I use to... They had the birds and pheasants. They are all over the place now, but at that time he had this place running with pheasants and they were very scarce in the day, but he had them in here and that higher ups could

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come up here and spend a weekend, you know, and government people could come up here on a weekend and see these fighting birds and stuff like that. It was a bit of a place."

Interviewer: "You would have a real weekend, now would ya?"

Williamson: "Yeah, you know they would come up...and stuff like that eh. That barn, there is only three of them in the Peninsula like it. The horse stable, all inside, the stalls and the walls, they were cement, but the stable was all done in notched hardwood flooring. So the stables were a notched type of flooring."

Interviewer: {Laughs}, "The stable itself, even if it had horses on it."

Williamson: "Yeah, where the horses was. The stalls was notched hard wood flooring and all around the walls, there was notched hardwood flooring."

Interviewer: {Laughs}, "Gee"

Williamson: "And the horses was bedded in a stall like that all the time and the teamster, it was his job to look after them. And then he (?) cleaned up the (?) and put in fresh straw. You could walk in there with your good clothes on."

Interviewer: "And that's the remainder of the barn over to the left. I'm sure that, apparently a gate there with a couple of concrete posts or something."

Williamson: "Yeah, yeah that barn, I just forget how big it was. The horse stable was on this side, where you see a stone wall entrance there. Over from that, there was another driving shed; Borg built it. It was a driving shed and he had, called it a Surrey I guess, a two-seated cutter, and also the buggy. He had that, a two-seated buggy."

Interviewer: "That shed there would be the train mill barn and the house now would it?"

Williamson: "Well more or less, it was north of the barn, a little closer you might still see the remains of it in there, I don't know, you might."

Interviewer: "Did you ever see the road or the highway, or was it always bush?"

Williamson: "No, It was always just bush. Just about the way it is."

Interviewer: "How about the view of the lake?"

Williamson: "Not anymore than what it is."

Interviewer: "Oh I see, I had an idea that he might have had that cleared out so you could sit at the house and see."

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Williamson: "He had a sailing boat that was a 32 foot sailboat, and he had a wooden staircase going down where the steel staircase is now. They put that in 6 or 7 years ago now. There was always a wooden one going down there and he had a sailboat down there. I remember that it was starting to decay when I first seen it. Malcolm never used it. I suppose once or twice after his father passed away."

Interviewer: "You see the stairs down there, or just a (?)"

Williamson: "There was a wooden stairs down there."

Interviewer: "How many stairs would that be, do you know?"

Williamson: "I, oh, I did count them at one time."

Interviewer: "oh, about 200?"

Williamson: "No, there could be 60, 65, something like that."

Interviewer: "It would depend on how far the stairwell went down. If you go down there now, you go down a straight spiral..."

Williamson: "It is still where it is. The stairway is where it was built."

Interviewer: "... and then you would walk down the slope from there, same as you do now."

Williamson: "Yeah"

Interviewer: "Yeah, well that's not so very high."

Williamson: "Well, I think it is about 60 feet or 65 feet, something like that."

Interviewer: "How long since somebody lived here?"

Williamson: "Uh, I was just trying to think now, that I had the personal (?) in '68 and it was a smaller (?) that destroyed this place. They come in here and have a few parties and then they had a fire going and all drunked up and set fire to it. They turned around and it was burnt the second time and finished off."

Interviewer: "Who owns the property now?"

Williamson: "Grey Bruce Conservation. Before that, it was left to Lewis and he had only two distant cousins. One in Australia and one someplace else and they didn't want anything to do with it. They had nothing to do with it and she took it after years of service."

Interviewer: "And now who was this?"

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Williamson: "Lewis, she was the main servant here for years."

Interviewer: Oh I see ya, and she lived in one of these cottages back here?"

Williamson: "They would have had their own cottage, the Lewis cottage and they did all the main catering, work in the house."

Interviewer: "So the servant, lived, as you were saying before, in the cottage over here to the south. There would be no servant living in the house?"

Williamson: "I don't think so. No, I think they lived in their own cottage. They had two cottages for the help. McNeill, they would be there from. Now the other is long gone, is named (?). She was a nurse and when she started nursing, she put in two years out here at this estate before she left and went to Toronto for nursing. She was a wonderful nurse; she lived in town all her life.

Williamson: "But I still got the Eyer right. That's the right word, Eyer . A fella fell and hurt himself here on Friday. They're about my age, Clare and Ed. Alec is older. But their father, Jim Eyer, worked out in his garden for years. He looked after the rose beds and flowers and such.

Interviewer: He would have been around when old Alex McNeil was here?

Williamson: Yes, when old Alexander was living.

Interviewer: When did Alexander die?

Williamson: Oh, I'm not perfectly sure. I got this cutting out of the paper. It's a good history of it what they put in the paper. Now she died in childbirth. And Malcolm was the only son.

Interviewer: And there's the house as it used to be.

Williamson: You see right there in between ? that's where the greenhouse was. Back here there are 2 windows & this was a wooden shed. That was a hydro pole. This was a wooden shed at the back of the house which was tore off there now.

Interviewer: This clipping by the way is from the Owen Sound Sun Times Saturday, Sept 24, 1994.

Williamson: Yes, this was a good story. This was Alexander's son, Malcolm. And that was a pretty place inside. I remember seeing it when it looked like this.

Interviewer: I've seen pictures of the house but not this one. That's very good.

Williamson: They have some very good pictures, at the Sun Times.

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Interviewer: That's the great post.

Williamson: And there's old Alexander with the dog. Now he had 3 of these. They're Irish Setters. One big one got so cross he had to destroy it. And he had it like a bear rug on the floor, head and everything, like a bear rug on the far side. And right about where he is sitting and that's on the far side on the living room floor of the house. This room right here, on this side of the house. Now I said that guy there, they said name unknown, but I think he was the one that the people before Grey Salvage had it was paid to come in here and start to restore it. Now she sold it to one individual and he sold it to 3 lawyers and then the lawyers sold it to the Conservation area. This guy was in here late in the fall or spring and then he got kicked out because he started doing wrong, cutting trees that he wasn't supposed to. He wasn't doing the work he was supposed to in the house. He was supposed to take the old barn[...?] shop and fix it. But it was still a beautiful house then if it had of been looked after proper. This was the bigger fireplace that sat in that corner.

Interviewer: You can still see remnants of the chimney for the fireplace was.

Williamson: There used to be a plaque on the wall next to the chimney, kind of a wooden thing like [...] about this long and a couple of swords.

Interviewer: You're going to get your paper rained on there. We could go around in the lee of that fence.

Interviewer: We'll go to the side of this building. (Dog barking)

Interviewer: There's a noticeable path from the house.

Williamson: It leads to the trail over there and down to the water's edge.

Interviewer: To where the spiral staircase is.

Williamson: Yes.

Interviewer: We're now at the remains of the house.

Williamson: There's a lot of rubble but this was the kitchen.

Interviewer: So this was the wing that appears be to the west as we come in.

Interviewer: They put all that wood in after to hold it?

Williamson: No, that's the original.

Interviewer: It might have been plaster or something on the inside walls that affected the burning.

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Williamson: Yes.

Interviewer: There's a treated beam. There must have been some work done to help restore it.

Williamson; Well it could have been. I suppose they might have.

Interviewer: And this must have been the floor level here where you can see where the joists were in the wall there.

Williamson: The cellar[...?] went in there. You can see for about 3 feet where it is filled in, in the old building. Because he had a [fire?] here and I'm pretty positive it was steam heat, with a furnace.

Interviewer: There's a little bit of chimney there.

Williamson: And then a doorway there and a doorway here. And this out back here was a wood shed.

Interviewer: The wood shed was back there to the west?

Williamson: Yes, you came back through here to the wood shed and you could go to the wood shed that way. And in that there was the old green house.

Interviewer: Apparently built in 2-foot layers.

Williamson: Yeah, the corners were where the lath burnt out.

Interviewer: There would be an air space out there.

Interviewer: Yeah, that would be strapping to nail the lath to.

Interviewer: I think they put that in since they burnt it.

Interviewer: The cement porch was out there towards the lake. That would be more or less the east side. Would that be his main entrance?

Williamson: Yes it would be the front entrance. This here right here was the main living room

Interviewer: This is the part that is the NE part of the main house.

Williamson: Now this is where he had ..

[.... volume so low, cannot hear what is being said ...]

Interviewer: So there were people in national dress.

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Williamson: Yes that would be in the NE corner of this room.

Interviewer: The fireplace would be in the north part of the living room, in the corner towards the kitchen.

Interviewer: that's where you can see remnants of 2 fireplaces, one above the other.

Williamson: There was a fireplace in each room.

Interviewer: So we're talking about 2 floors.

Williamson: There were 7 rooms.

Interviewer: The parlour is to the south end of the house and the spot where we have 3 walls still standing up to the 2nd floor.

Williamson: The small staircase [...?]

Interviewer: The stairway came in on the SE corner to just past those windows.

Williamson: Yes.

Interviewer: What type of wood would that be made of?

Williamson: Solid wood.

Interviewer: When was the fire?

Williamson: About '68, '69.

Interviewer: In the winter time or the summer?

Williamson: Well in the winter. And the 2nd fire in the late fall. The Wiarnton fire department came out the 2nd time.

Interviewer: He was a member of Parliament. Did he build it like any other member of parliament or like Casa Loma?

Williamson: I think more or less it was built like the old houses over in Ireland.

Interviewer: I think the name was from someplace in Ireland isn't it, the Corran?.

Interviewer: Is he buried in Wiarnton?

Williamson: He would be, yes. Or he could be in Colpoys.

I'm not sure I would have to look it up.

Interviewer: This would be about 10,000 square feet wouldn't it?

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Williamson: Well 2 storeys with 4 bedrooms upstairs and 3 downstairs.

Interviewer: And he was here until he died was he?

Williamson: Oh, yes. My Grandfather and Grandmother on my dad's side came from the same corner of Ireland. And they used to come down, say twice a year, once in the winter and once in the summer. And they would come in here to visit. My father said he was about 7 years old when he rode with them into town in the double surrey buggy or the cutter in the winter time whichever it would be. And he said he would sit up front with [... ?] street. His mother and father would sit in the back.

Interviewer: Pretty stylish.

Williamson: Yeah and they would do that twice a year. It's too bad all the old fellows are gone. Like Bulls, Herb who lived straight out here at the Mile Inn.

[.... BLANK AIR TIME]

Interviewer: ... open here and just looking around. It was beautiful woodwork. And then I was talking to another guy one time and I don't know if he was pulling my leg or not but he said it was awfully hard to get that stuff out of there. I had to pry to get a lot of that hardwood panelling. I presume he was just helping himself to it.

Williamson: I lived in town at the time and working on trucks and hauling lumber off to Toronto. I was working on transport down there. And we came up here quite a bit and people were starting to vandalise this. I know some names but I'm not going to tell them. But they just come out here and Taft, the guy that was looking after it, left after the 2nd party owned it. He was paid \$40 a month and free wood and the house to live in. He lived here in the late fall 'till the spring. A guy came out and saw some trees cut down that he wasn't supposed to. I helped cut 25 old orchard trees from here.

Interviewer: To the north there.

Williamson: Yeah that's all he was supposed to cut. He was using what he cut while he was working and living here. It's too bad they hadn't caught it then when he was still cutting trees.

Interviewer: Yes, it would have made a nice museum.

Williamson: Yes, it would be worth millions today.

Interviewer: It probably will never be restored. Let's walk down to the spiral stairway just to see the view. Is this cement wall on the steps on the east side. This is what you say was a cement patio?

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Williamson: Yes there was a roof over this. It wasn't closed in, there were posts up on either side of it.

Interviewer: Now what were these big pieces of concrete here? Do you know?

Williamson: I'm not positive whether these were the posts or not. I think they were.

Interviewer: That was good stonework, well done.

Williamson: This here was the rose beds and this was all apple orchard. These little ash trees, they just grew in since. This was open with grass. There are some old apple trees over there.

Interviewer: It would have been very pretty in blossom time. Is that a hydro pole there?

Williamson: Yeah it came up. No, I don't think that's what it was. I don't know what it was. Grand Trunk Railroad came into Warton and right out to Colpoys. They stopped at the fish house which is 3 flags Marine. That's where it stopped. He bought the [marine allowance?] and he stopped the railroad from going through.

Interviewer: He's the one who is supposed to have stopped the railroad from going through?

Williamson: Yes, he stopped it because he's the one who bought the marine allowance.

Interviewer: I heard a different story about the railroad not going through mainly that the agreement said to go to Colpoys Bay and the people were talking about the village of Colpoys Bays but the railroad said no we hit the Bay there and that's as far as it would go.

Williamson: He was the cause of it.

Interviewer: He didn't want the railroad going across the front to his place. Well, that's an interesting point.

Williamson: That's more the right story than the other.

Interviewer: Williamson, this that looks like road bed here?

Williamson: This was the original road down through here and over to the other farm, right out to the [...?]

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Interviewer: This wasn't necessarily the access to their house though? They would have come in straight in like we did to the house. I sort of visualise people coming along here in their horse drawn carriages and sort of looping around to the front door.

Interviewer: That's an ironwood.

Interviewer: Yes, I think that would be. You get a nice view of the bay from here at the top of the spiral staircase. Williamson, are you employed by the Conservation Authority to look after this place?

Williamson: Yes.

Interviewer: That's good. Those trees are a pretty good size and we're looking right over the tops of them. And you say in the old days there was still woods along the top so you would really get a view from the top of the bay.

Williamson: No

Interviewer: So, he had his wooden stairway somewhere here.

Williamson: Yes, it was right in the same spot. Jim Barfoot put this in here about 8 years ago or something like that. The Authority had him put this in.

Interviewer: [??...] Was the wooden one there after the fire?

Williamson: There was a wooden one. It didn't go straight down. It was kind of zig zag. But it went right down in the same place as this one. It ended down there about 50 feet from the bottom of the stairs over south was where the boat house was. You can still see where the boat house was.

Interviewer: They lagged to the rock here, where you are stepping?

Williamson: Yeah, this was an original piece. I think it was Lewis. She started here. He didn't like the hard water out of the well for tea in the mornings. So she had to come every morning down to the lake to get the soft water for him to make his tea in the morning.

Interviewer: If he was like the Queen, I guess she would have to have a fresh pot every 15 minutes to be fresh for when he was ready for it.

Williamson: That there would be the original stake.

Interviewer: That steel post that is sticking up by the railing there.

Williamson: [.... ?]

Interviewer: Pounded in with a hammer.

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Interviewer: It's probably lucky the Conservation took it over. It will be preserved such as it is.

Williamson: Yes, otherwise it would get worse.

Interviewer: It's part of the Niagara escarpment now, is it?

Williamson: Yeah

Interviewer: Well, this is a nice picturesque spot with all this moss on the rock. I think that would be a good 200 feet down to the shore.

Williamson: Wright's cottage.

Interviewer: That's straight out in front?

Williamson: Guardrail along in front there on the highway. You'll notice it comes straight out of town to Mrs. Wright's. Then it took a little veer over to my place. They cut a few feet of the south corner of my lot to the north because of a new road survey. Robert McMann, when he bought an acreage, it came off the McNeil estate. He bought it off the McNeil estate. It come off of Glen Miller's lot, off that 65 acres. The government gave me a rough time when they put the highway through, that's going back 20 years or 16 years, they opened the highway through here and widened it. The highway survey was 150 feet. They sent me notice on my property that they confiscated and they would take 4 feet off the south end and 2 feet off the [.... tape stops mid-conversation]

Interviewer: And he said you should have a lawyer.

Williamson: And I said, " I can't afford a lawyer and I know I'm right. And I would just like to prove it."

Well it's off the record but come with me and see this man down here. So we went downstairs and there was a ? sitting there who looked like an old lawyer. What's this man doing down here? He said this is a fish?

" Here." I said, "Sir, just to prove a point, I bought the property and the highway is taking advantage of me." I told him.

He said, "Well look I haven't time to discuss this and you'll have to go along with whatever they say."

And I said, "No, I won't."

I said, "You think I'm a nut but you have the original map of that hwy and it's only 66 foot road allowance where I live.

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He said, "Impossible!"

I said, "If you take the time to look.

So then he pulled out a key and was into a filing cabinet, pulled out a scroll and spreads it on his desk. I pointed to part Lot 25 right there. There's the McNeil estate from there to there. That is 66 road allowance and it was never changed from the County Department to the Department of Highway.

He said, "You know what, you're absolutely right."

He admitted right there, he really looked that over. He said, "How did you know that?"

I said, "Well I've lived there all my life. And I knew the McNeils and I knew that that piece there that was squabbled over here and there was never deeded over at any time. They drilled me a well across the highway, \$500 to drill the well, and I bought and put up a fence across the front of my place: 16 foot gate \$40 to put it up. They were going to give me \$35 for the cost of the well in the first place. \$40 for the frontage and \$35 for the well.

Interviewer: What did McNeil get out of it?

Williamson: They didn't get anything. Lewis owned it then.

Interviewer: How long ago was that?

Williamson: Well it's

Interviewer: Back in the thirty's? I read something just the other day that was then.

Williamson: They rebuilt that about 16,17 years ago.

Interviewer: Oh, I see fairly recently.

Williamson: Yeah they started at Tobermory & they come down 6 mile and then they let it go for another 5-8 years, something like that, and then another 12 miles or so to Ferndale and then to Wiarton. In front of my place, there they used to go down; here we come in the gate there. There used to be a fork in the road and a big spring there & the highway was [...] and we used to come down up thru [...] on the rock there in front of my place south side of McNeil's [...] and in through the swamp.

Interviewer: There's a lot of things like that. Like this road I've heard different things about when it was build. We've come up and for our honeymoon in 1949 and we drove right up to Tobermory there and ...

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Williamson: It would have been the old highway then, down by Colonel Clark's Tavern?

Interviewer: I don't remember, but when we came along in later years, say in the last 20 years, I couldn't really remember any difference in the road. I don't really remember what it was like. I know I was able to drive straight through into Tobermory.

Williamson: Yup, you used to go in by Colonel Clark's Tavern and up around the road through Stokes Bay and then come out at the harbour.

Interviewer: Yes, well.

Williamson: Politics was Mr. McNeil.

Interviewer: He was a Conservative wasn't he? A member of McDonald's party?

Williamson: For about 5 years.

Interviewer: That was back long ago if it was the McDonald government. He did quite a lot for this part of the country didn't he?

Interviewer: I had a great uncle who was an MP for Huron County. He was a Liberal and was a great friend of McDonald's enough, so he turned over to a Conservative. He didn't get back in the second time and they didn't think much of that.

Interviewer: Theoretically, you would like the member rather than vote for the party, but the people usually vote for the party. They would put in a person as long as he's in the right party.

Interviewer: And the families carried on the tradition.

Williamson: Well, I got stuck there at home where I thought [...] a lawyer in Owen Sound, I got in a fight with him. I got the wrong lawyer. I got advised by a guy who was in Miller Lake about the fight over the highway. He had a fight over the highway. He had a double cattle fence, the highway fence, and then he had a fence in on his property. It's fallen down now but you can still see the old wire there. He got paid for that about \$800 for the confiscation of property. They just come along and say they're taking it. But Robbins, he caught it. I was talking to him. He told me to go to a certain lawyer in Owen Sound and it was a mistake because, by this time, the lawyer had changed and he was for the highway and I went to him and he just kind of grinned. And I looked at him and he said he was too busy right now to take that. He remembered the name Robbins and he just sit there for a few minutes and thought it over and advised me to go to another lawyer. [...] who was just right up and said "Hey you've got a case here." I told him all this stuff about the highway and when he

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found out from the older lawyer to lay off and not bite it, he didn't do anything. And he was going to charge me a lot of money he never got. And he as much as called me a liar. He asked where did you get all these papers and information? You've been to a lawyer before. I said, "No, listen, I've got a pile of stuff over there that would cost a couple of thousand dollars of lawyer fees to go through them."

Ross Whicher was the MP at the time when he first went in [...??] I went across and asked him. He said I'll see and bring it up. He shot himself out here on the island.

Interviewer: What government?

Williamson: Robarts.

Interviewer: Was he on the island when he shot himself?

Williamson: Yeah, he was in when Whicher was in. I got the letter which Whicher wrote and Robarts sent it to me. He wouldn't do nothing, it was out of his jurisdiction and it was up to his members to see what they come up with. I showed this to the lawyers.

Interviewer: And that used to be a sugar beet factory? There was 3 factories. Whicher saw mill. Wiarton there at one time right was 3 Flags Marine, 7 saw mills right there.

Interviewer: There was a slip here too wasn't there?

Williamson: Yeah, cement works. There's the bed of the old railroad right in the ground there. [...??]

Interviewer: Can you go right around that shore there to Owen Sound?

Williamson: Yeah, beautiful drive.

Interviewer: How many miles would that be around?

Williamson: About 20 and then some. It's a beautiful drive in the fall or anytime. [...??] remembrance monument[...?]

Interviewer: Oh, is that the monument where there's lawn running up the hill?

Williamson: Yeah, Cheshire's [...?]

Interviewer: That'll be Keppel township. It's in Grey though.

Williamson: [...?] I don't know for sure. They've got about 17. I worked there. The guy I worked for had a bulldozer ??

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Interviewer: Did Mr. McNeil keep purebred horses or cattle or anything like that?

Williamson: [...?]

Interviewer: Did he go back to Ireland very often?

Williamson: Not that I know of, not very often. I think he was in that state that he couldn't go back. He was paid so much a month to come out, got kicked out and stay out. Like I say there was [...?] from town. He was from England. He lives where Ross Whicher lived right now, foot of the hill there, big red house that was his Whicher's. There was another one in town and I know this Ken Stanborough in Elmwood, he run the saw mill, a big husky guy and in his day no one would tackly him. You mention fighting and they would just back off. He was a wonderful guy but a wrestler and he was paid to never come back.

Interviewer: A lot of those were maintenance men who were mainly sent out here because there was no room for them on an estate back home but they lived on part of the family income.

Williamson: There's a lot of stuff down in that bay.

Interviewer: Shipwrecks you mean?

Williamson: At one time, at the top of Colpoy's hill right to the planning [[...?] mill which is rebuilt now. Whicher's saw mill there is still a big old cast wheel with a chunk out of it. There used to be a log dump about ½ way down the hill they would dump the logs and tied in booms would go right to the mill. The big white house just south of the Warton gate, that was Patterson's house. Patterson's built that house and when they built it they cut down trees like that about 3 feet, virgin timber like that, and they hauled it down to the shore and it was floated to Whicher's saw mill and brought back. And it's all built with barn timbers in the basement and it's all handmade hardwood flooring cut out of a maple bush. On the top of the hill on Gould street, was main street, where the Presbyterian church is - that was the main street. The Catholic Church on the south side of the street used to be Patterson's Drug Store, Jimmy white's house at one time. I don't know who lives in it now.

Interviewer: You get paid for looking after this property. How much?

Williamson: \$8.80 a day.

Interviewer: Well, by golly what are you going to do , invest all that?

Williamson: Invest it when I get older.

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2 summers there was a doe and she had a fawn over back of my house for 2 summers. I had a garden just south of the house which you only see once in a lifetime. Every week or so you would see them out. The doe would stay along the edge but the fawn would come right out on the lawn and eat the stuff out of my garden. One morning there I was just looking out the window and I saw a pair of fawns out there on the lawn by the garden and they were playing just like a pair of goats. They would push heads and stand back and the one turned on the grass so fast he fell right on his side and jumped up and came back over and they did that for about 10 minutes or so. I wished I had a movie camera.

Interviewer: How long ago was that?

Williamson: That was summer before last.

Interviewer: And this year you say you only saw one deer?

Williamson: Just the one. That doe and 2 fawns, the fawns would be a year old. The 1st summer when they played in the garden, the next fall ...?

Interviewer: Any bear through here now?

Williamson: Very seldom. Back in '37 there was lynx around here, wild cats. Up around the corner, where Ed Elliott Market Garden there used to be a pair of wild cats way back in the swamp. I heard them in the night. Quite the story, oldest boy we lived up where the tower is now, '37 winter. He would take a walk and come down to Jordy Matthews and trudge back to Elliott's garden place. He would come down there and he always carried a 22 rifle with a bolt inside. In the shack we lived in, it was just $\frac{3}{4}$ " lumber, there were shingles on the roof but none on the sides. In the winter time, the frost would come through the knot holes. You could see it. The door closed just a standard sized door about 6 foot high. It was built out of tongue and groove lumber and a straight bolt that closed it inside. My father was sitting there, no hydro or nothing at the table with the old coal oil lamp, reading the paper and I was sitting down doing a bit of homework. I went to the red schoolhouse out here, had to walk about 3 mile to school by myself. It was about 10 o'clock at night about the middle of March and the snowplow, it was the 1st year they snowplowed. About twice a week the snowplow went up. The banks were so high on the side of the road. My brother thought it was a big dog laying on the bank and the worst thing he could have done. He said he heard a snarl and he tried a shot at it with the 22 and it just clicked it didn't get the bullet out. When he done that he said it looked like it was going to jump. When he came in he flew through the door and landed against the farthest wall. The room was only about 10 foot wide. I said What the Sam Hill is the matter with you?

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Well he said there's a lynx out there. So I grabbed a flashlight and the shotgun and you could see where that thing jumped about 20 feet off that snowbank right into the middle of the road. You could see the slide marks of his tracks. We had a foot path and his (my brother's) strides were about that long to the door too. And that thing hit the road and just turned and walked off into the hardwood bush. The next day we followed the tracks for 4 mile right out to the Rankin River. Lynx will go about 65 pounds. A bob cat is a wild cat and will go about 45 pounds.

I used to come into town on a bicycle and go to pick strawberries and sell them & work in town at various places. I'd make \$.06 an hour. In those days \$.06 would buy you something like a chocolate bar, chewing gum, licorice, 2 penny pipes.

Interviewer: A hired man on a farm would make \$40 or \$50 a month?

Williamson: He'd be lucky.

Interviewer: I worked myself on a harvest for \$.50 day.

Williamson: I'd say it would be about \$7 a month. I worked for Harold Swale at the auto [...?] Grey Bruce owns it now, the MNR Owen Sound. I got \$17 a month and that was the 1st time I worked out.

Interviewer: That is right. I remember once when I was hitchhiking around the country & some fellow talking to me said, "Young fellow if you can get a dollar a day I'd take it." And I thought yeah if I could get a dollar a day I would take it.

Williamson: Down the line you would get 2 ½ an hour or i mean a day. When you got up to \$2.25 that was pretty good pay and your dinner because that dinner was worth \$.50 or \$.75.

But anyway, the wildcat. Saturday afternoon, I was heading to town. My dad and brother and I batched it and I was heading to town. My father was in town anyway. I jumped on the old bicycle and went down the Grieg Sideroad, down about ½ way from the S turn. There used to be a big pine tree beside the road. It was about 26 feet wide. The roadway was cut off. They used to haul out timber & stuff. I was biking away and the back fender was held on with a piece of baling rope and rattling. It was just a piece of junk is what I was riding. Right at the side of the road, about the 2nd post from me there was a yellow cat sitting there. It was just a big yellow cat. But when I got up to it, I thought it's a wild cat and did I ever start to pedal. And it was just a watching me. The bicycle drew its attention more than me. There's a stone quarry in there now on both sides of the road. That hill is a ¼ to what it used to be. I usually walked up it, but that day I wheeled up it. That was about the last of them, in '38. They got shot off. They were scarce. They were here 'til then.

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Interviewer: Would there be beavers around here too?

Williamson: No, not 'til the late 40's when they brought them in. The Ministry thought they should have some on the Peninsula, so they brought them in and spoiled 10,000 acres of land, drowned all the trees. It's just like McNeil estate. When I first got that place, about 35 years ago that was all green bush out there. You could walk through that swamp with no rubbers on. Now it's this deep and 3 acres are just rotten nothing. And they call that wetlands. It's good for nothing. Well it's good for mud turtles and snakes. That's about what it is.

I never had mud turtles around my place that size 'til after that flood.

Interviewer: Those are probably snappers.

Williamson: Yeah they are. They come out in the summer time and you see them when they start moving around. Just ordinary snakes through here, like Garter snakes and Green snakes. I've never seen too many Rattlesnakes. They're more Ferndale north: Cameron Lake, Miller Lake are about the worst places.

Interviewer: Even though there are lots of Rattlesnakes around you don't very often see them, do you?

Williamson: No they will crawl away unless you happen to step on them. I ran a bulldozer for years and I've seen all kinds of them. One thing you don't do around here, if you're going to pick something up like a rock you don't do it without looking at what you're doing and see what's there.

You know Clark's Tavern up there, in the swamp west of there right across the road. I skidded logs in there and pulled them out of the bush with the bulldozer because the horses couldn't do it because it was too soft. And in 2 ½ months I seen 7 because I was on the dozer skidding stuff. And there were 35 Rattlesnakes killed in there in July & August because in that time they don't go near the water but they would go in a swampy area where it's cool. All kinds of them up there.

Interviewer: How deep is that water there?

Williamson: I would say around 90 to 100. Different depths. I just forget now. It drops off quickly. You could be in 65 feet there.

Interviewer: Apparently, the deepest part of Georgian Bay is just off say Lion's Head area. Right near this side they say it drops off to an awful depth and shelves up and over near Parry Sound it's not nearly so deep.

Williamson: The cliffs continue down into the water. The biggest mystery in that bay was [...] they found his boat out there somewhere. He went out in a small

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outboard motor boat and they found his hat floating in the water off the shore and they found the boat but they never found him, don't know whether it was foul play or he drowned himself or what because they never did find him.

Interviewer: What year would that be?

Williamson: Going back in the 20's way back.

Interviewer: What birds have you got around here now? There's a couple flying out there.

Williamson: Chickadees. Well, I hope I've been some good.

Interviewer: Oh, I think so. You've been very interesting.

The barn back there, just looking through the woods, those are pretty big stones the walls are made of.

Williamson: I don't know who was the stone mason at the time.

Interviewer: That window is all filled in now.

Williamson: Yes there was a window there. The greenhouse would be there.

Interviewer: This is the side where the woodshed was.

Williamson; There was another wooden building in there.

Interviewer: This is sort of the west, north of the west end of the house.

Interviewer: Did they ever make maple syrup here?

Williamson: I'd imagine so, yes.

This was the horse stable.

Interviewer: You can see bits of rolled wire there. And then there's another wing of the building sticking out southwest. What do you suppose was out there?

Williamson: Wel,I they always built underneath the gangway. It was for calves or something , sheep pen or whatever. I don't think he has sheep anytime. He could have had that for his fighting birds.

Interviewer: We have nothing but goldenrods and weeds. This what you say was matched hardwood flooring at one time.

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Williamson: Well the walls in the stable. There were 2 stables built like this. There was this one, Harold Swale's and Stacy's, the original barn out there. It's still standing but the stable is all gone. They were all built about the same time.

Interviewer: The gangway was here? There's a bit of a slope. It was a long gangway wasn't it?

Williamson: Yeah. It was all planked in.

Interviewer: Do you remember when the barn was here?

Williamson: Yes, it was still standing, getting rough but still standing. Old Draper he would come out and look after the horses.

At the last, McNeil was pretty well forced to sell them. He had 1 cattle beast here, 7 years old, a Durham heifer that never raised a calf, never had it bred. It was 3 ½ft across. And its toes grew up like a [...?], never let them out.

Interviewer: Was it the way he the young one was raised?

Williamson: Well he paid a farmer \$350 a year to rent the place and teach him to farm.

Interviewer: Was this Malcolm?

Williamson: No, Harold Swale. No, this was Cecil Swale, Harold was the son. So when Cecil came out here he paid this guy to teach him to farm while he worked here. Then he built the beautiful house over there. It wasn't stone, but it was a beautiful big farmhouse. And the barn was 40 by 60. It's all fallen down and to pieces, just ruined. And it was left the same way, after the son. And there were 2 nieces which it would go to next, but Harold was stubborn enough and said they would never get it because there was a fault in the relationship and he just sit there and let it fall to pieces, just wasted millions of dollars, just sitting there, so the nieces would never get it.

Interviewer: This open space in front of the barn used to be a sort of lawn or pasture?

Williamson: Yes a hayfield. Now ½ way out where the pines are, that was all open field. They planted that in pines, the reforestation people.

Interviewer: Thanks ever so much, Williamson.

Williamson: Yeah time makes you forget, but different things when you get thinking about it you can get it to come to mind. When you live across the road, you forget about it but when you get walking around you remember again.

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Interviewer: How many tourists would he have in the summer?

Williamson: Oh, he would have a lot. You see he would be away in Parliament, Queens Park, and they would come up for a weekend.

Interviewer: I mean now though.

Williamson: Now there's a pile of people.

Interviewer's Comments:

Interviewer: During this interview, we were walking around the Corran and from time to time we would forget we were interviewing and Williamson would walk away so we couldn't hear him so well. And, at times, I would switch off when he didn't seem to be saying anything that was relevant and switch on again in the middle of a conversation. I took pictures of the remains. One of them shows Williamson standing in a window opening. The weather was rather dull and a little light rain.

The servant's quarters mentioned were on the opposite side of the parking lot from where the house is. The heirs mentioned were unable to come today as Ed had fallen and hurt himself. The tongue and groove matched flooring that he referred to in the stable was on the walls not on the floor. It was a concrete floor. There's a blank spot on this and I'm not sure we were even trying to record.

We mentioned going down the spiral stairway and made a few more comments about the house. And while we were down there he was telling us about the lynx. He was telling us also about the warp in the highway as he refers to it and the argument he had with the Ministry. The story was long and complicated and only part of it is recorded.

Williamson lives straight across Hwy 6 across from the property.

When I referred to the big tree, I meant 4 ft in diameter. And the second post was the fence post about 8-10 ft away from him. When he referred to those bushes and didn't know what the bushes were, we came back to the house and showed us where the barn and woodshed were located and joined to the house with a door to the kitchen and on to the stables. We mentioned something about a wire. He said that the stables were wired and so was the whole house was wired too.

That's about all I have to explain for now.