



College of New Caledonia Oral History Series

David Holm

College of New Caledonia

Department of History

Fall 2002



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Printed in Canada

ISBN 0-921087-23-3

Cover and layout: Jordan Bacon, College of New Caledonia Media Services

Tape transcription: Joan Maguire, College of New Caledonia Library

Index: Kathy Plett, College of New Caledonia Library

Additional copies available from:

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If there are any errors or omissions, these are wholly unintentional and the author would be grateful to learn of them.

In the Fall of 2002, David Holm interviewed Jim and Margaret McConaghy. They own the nine-hole "Links o'Maggie Mae" golf course, plus adjoining farmland and forest along the Shelley Road, about halfway between Highway 16 and Shelley. In David's words, "I decided to ask them for an interview because they exemplified an early generation of settlers who were short on formal education but long on native intelligence and hard work. The physical and economic imprint they have left on the Prince George area indicates something of their contribution to our history." The interviews were taped, and later transcribed by the College of New Caledonia Library.

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JIM MCCONAGHY: I was born in Onaway, Alberta in 1933 and we lived there on a farm until I was four. My father passed away and we moved into a little town of Onaway. My mother remarried in 1939 and my Dad had passed away in 1937. I have three brothers and sisters (two sisters and one brother), four of us in our immediate family and two half brothers in our second family. We moved here in 1942.

DAVID HOLM: / 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: Work conditions for my stepfather. He went to work on the airport. It was war time and they were building a big airport so he got a job and worked there and he worked at that until the job was finished. [Then] he went cutting cord wood for the likes of the Columbus and the Europe Hotel and places that was all wood or coal in it. And they had a small truck and two or three teams of horses and hired a crew of men and they cut cord wood by hand and hauled it in and dumped it off in alley ways where they chopped it up. Even the jail and the old government building was heated by partial wood and coal.

I went to school until I was 14, then I went to work on a dairy farm. I worked there and I was out of school in grade 7 and I carried on in different farms. When I was 16, I went to a little sawmill which was a big mill at that time called Northern Spruce. I worked in the mill, various jobs and I learned to ride carriage as a dogger and I learned to move up and set. In the spring of the year, I left that and I went, I believe it was 1949, I went to Rupert and I worked in the fish [packing plants].

DAVID HOLM: / 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes. That is why I don't eat fish today.

DAVID HOLM: / 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100 ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, I worked in the packing where you stood eight hours, nine hours, some days ten hours. I was at a job where I stood at a tank of water, two people on each side of it. In my case I was a young fella, so I stood with three women. It was a very exciting job, I will tell you that. Today I washed the backs of halibuts, tomorrow I got to wash the stomachs, [then] the back side. This went on, I worked there I believe

until July. We went through the salmon run and a lot of that, then I went up to Terrace. I went back into a sawmill there. I worked that summer and I came back and went back to Northern Spruce, working in the mill. I worked in a sawmill until it was '53, I guess, I worked in the sawmill. We worked out of Aleza Lake. We moved mother out to Aleza Lake as my stepfather died in 1945, leaving seven of us in the family.

DAVID HOLM: D

JIM MCCONAGHY: Six days some days, and then we got down to five and a half days a week. We didn't go to work in the mill after it was 25 to 30 below.

DAVID HOLM: Six days scEW99.0324 Tw[(:3Six ays)T]0 77875 730.646324 k iTw[(: Six dayse mill aRight,elow)ould7.8 pretty W

JIM MCCONAGHY: You watched. You watched and you learned and you tried to figure it out on your own because if you were a good worker, they would work with you. If you were a poor worker you would just... Now, through after the war in the 50's and 60's, men were very scarce in this country. There was always work because we had sawmills all over the place and they were little. We didn't have to go out and look for work like you have to now. If you left a job you could go into town [and get another one] before you walked the length from the Princess Theatre which was at the corner of Vancouver Street and Third and that was out of town. End of town.

DAVID HOLM

DAVID HOLM: ... ? \ ... ? B ... ?

JIM MCCONAGHY

JIM MCCONAGHY: I would say in 1981 or 1982.

I have no hankering to go anywhere. Why would I want to go somewhere when I can go out, did you notice the beauty of the country when you drove out?

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear]*

JIM MCCONAGHY: In the winter time we have beautiful days, when the sun is shining and the frost is hanging on the trees. It's beautiful.

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear]*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I like to go out and I like to see something happen, I like to see at the end of the day something done.

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear]*

JIM MCCONAGHY: We have now about six or seven hundred acres cleared, that is rough cleared and finished, and we will clear more land next summer.

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear]*?

JIM MCCONAGHY: I started out with some dairy cows and we shipped cream; milked cows and shipped cream. We had chickens and we fed the skim milk to the pigs.

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear]*?

JIM MCCONAGHY: No. We took it downtown to First Avenue. There was a creamery just across from the railroad station, in the vicinity of Crazy Willy's place. When they quit doing that, when there was no more of that, you had to get rid of it. Dairy cows had no value as far as beef, so we eventually had to start switching over. And I could not get a milk quota, I won't go into why we couldn't.

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear]*?

JIM MCCONAGHY: Politics, yes. They were giving the quotas. If you were a landed immigrant you could get a quota. At that time there were a lot of German people in the 1950's [that] came in, Dutch, Danes, they could get grants from the government to start.

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear]*?

JIM MCCONAGHY: In one incident I went in with two coloured gentlemen to be interviewed this one day. We had one hundred sixty acres, about thirty acres cleared on it.

a different walk of life. I hadn't drove truck for to haul logs or anything since I been on the plank roads, so in 1971 I bought a logging truck.

DAVID HOLM: A ... G ... ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: No. CanFor wasn't here. I worked for an outfit by the name of McDermid and Lofting who were logging for Northwood.

DAVID HOLM: \ ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: Northwood came into place here, I think they started a mill in 1966 or opened in 1967.

DAVID HOLM: ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes. At that time I was working for a machine shop in town. I started when I left the experimental farm, got squared away, I got a big promotion, I got two dollars an hour working at the machine shop

DAVID HOLM: / ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: Yes, that was a big issue.

DAVID HOLM: A ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: That was good money.

I started to serve an apprenticeship as a machinist that was open. I went one season down to Burnaby for six weeks and I never felt so beat and humble in all my life as when I went down there.

DAVID HOLM: B ... ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: No. Oh no, that didn't bother me. The city did not bother me or anything. The fact that I did not have an education. I got top marks in the class for my practical, but I knew nothing about what they were talking about.

DAVID HOLM: / ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: I could not bear it out, I could not bear it. I always had a problem with spelling, reading, I understand nothing. I read for the last ten years, I guess dyslexia is what they say was told up in the family, with the offspring and that in the family, and I guess because I read things, I have a heck of a time to read and understand, though I get her to do my reading. To dictate a letter, to do up a contract, to cover what they want done, that part is easy. So I spent six weeks down there and felt beat up, really beat. And

DAVID HOLM: / - / .

DAVID HOLM: C C

JIM MCCONAGHY: PVC pipe. Yes, we wanted to do it proper so we bought loads of it.

DAVID HOLM:

JIM MCCONAGHY: This number one green, I think, has around seven hundred feet of drain tile.

DAVID HOLM:

JIM MCCONAGHY: It's all wish-boned and looped around, we tried to do it the best we could.

DAVID HOLM:

JIM MCCONAGHY: When we first started this, an outfit from Victoria phoned and they wanted to come out and go over the property and tell us if it was suitable or feasible to put it in. It was only going to cost me five thousand dollars and tickets up here, and a day spent here and go back and do their study and that was the cost. Prior to that, we had been a year or two, we had been to a golf course in Edmonton, a ranch. They had only been open three or four years and then they were going to have some big tournament, so we pulled in and asked if they had done all this work. We talked to them in the clubhouse and that, if you have done all this work after putting in three years, why are you digging up the greens? Well, they weren't done properly. Who done it? Well, we had an architect do it. I said they weren't done properly, who's paying for this? Well, he said, we have to pay for it. I said, he set it up and he is not responsible? No. And before we can have these, whatever playoffs they were running there, we have to change this, which did not make sense to me at the time. Now I understand a little more about it. So we talked about it and talked to different ones and I said, we cannot afford [it], five thousand dollars goes quite a ways, it is hard to come by! So we went on our own, we looked and [did some] reading. As I said, I don't understand everything but I was in attendance at a family reunion and they were putting in two greens and they were in two different stages and I saw what they meant. Got onto it and spent about ten minutes on each one and asked a couple of questions. We talked it over and I came home. Simple as falling off the table here, you are on top of it, it's no big deal taking it in. I understand we did not do ours right completely but I understand now more about it. And if I was to do it again I would have a better [idea] and I would know what to do.

DAVID HOLM:
?

JIM MCCONAGHY: I didn't learn nothing, it was there. We took a piece of land and we worked with what we had. We didn't have the money to change the lay of the land, we didn't have the money. We took the ponds that were swamps so we knew you can't have the swamp with peat moss in it. We took that and hauled it

out on the clay on the fairway. Now the length of the distance between the tee box and the green, this is how naive we were, or I was. A par three had to be three hundred yards plus, so needless to say some of our first par threes that we decided to put in turned out to be a par four . . . and our shortest par three is about one, about a hundred sixty five yards at the most. So we had some learning to do as we went along. This almost cost us a divorce.

DAVID HOLM: \ . . . \ . . . \ . . . ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: We had some quite heated discussions over it and I say these are the worst ones we ever had. We worked with the lay of the land, what we had to work with, because we didn't have the money to go and do other things.

DAVID HOLM: . . . \ . . . \ . . . \ . . . \ . . .

JIM MCCONAGHY: It takes a long time and I can see, we only have old equipment and we patch it up, and we keep patching it up because the new lawn mower, the new greens mower, is around twenty-seven to thirty thousand dollars.

DAVID HOLM: / . . . !

JIM MCCONAGHY

was just a little over thirty thousand dollars. I took the truck to the sale, Ritchie's charged me four thousand dollars for selling it. They got forty thousand dollars for it, so I ended up with not even six thousand dollars. That's painful. This year the trucking industry was good but it just was getting to me trying to keep them going and it is a problem today, and the rates have dropped down so low that you can't make it.

DAVID HOLM: ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: Fuel, everything is going up, they're cutting the rates, they're setting the time you have to unload, they don't take into consideration [that] if you miss your time to unload you have to rebook the next day. You have to be there at a designated time. You leave Prince George and you're headed to Vancouver, you have an accident and you're held up on the road for some unknown reason, that don't count. And they wonder why they have these accidents on the road, and inexperience. For you to do your job, how many years of schooling did you have?

DAVID HOLM: 12.

JIM MCCONAGHY: How much can you make in a year approximately?

DAVID HOLM: 

JIM MCCONAGHY: Some truckers can make up to that money. Now, all they got to come to work with is a lunch kit. You supply them with a hard hat and gloves. They have to have steel toed boots, you give them a vest. And he has to have six weeks training in the school downtown here for a thousand bucks and he can make forty-five, fifty, sixty thousand dollars a year.

DAVID HOLM: ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: That's pretty nice.

DAVID HOLM: *...and the*

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DAVID HOLM: \h ?

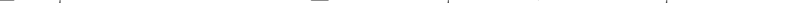
JIM MCCONAGHY: My son has it, my one son has it all over the place. I don't think the boys would ever be without a truck. The one boy, he's got his two trucks parked. Well, both of them have their trucks parked, the one is working for somebody else and the other fellow hasn't turned a wheel for over a year and a half. They are paid for, they are sitting there.

DAVID HOLM: *Yes, I think that's right. I think that's right.*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, yes, you couldn't have them if they weren't paid off.
I don't know what to tell you, that is pretty well my life.

DAVID HOLM: 

JIM MCCONAGHY: That is a very good question. This year it would take every acre that I've got to raise and winter all my cattle, that I have got and I have got a hundred cows between the boy and my wife.

DAVID HOLM:  ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: Not if you don't get the rain, and we never got the rain. It's going to be tough. Now I have seen years where we could feed them on eighty acres, it depends on the weather and what you're getting. Everything in this country, no matter what, depends on the weather. Except if you are a school teacher, the weather don't bother you. Whether you are going to make a living off the land or logging, weather is the biggest factor.

DAVID HOLM: ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: That's to raise enough feed.

DAVID HOLM: ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: We have a pile of it.

DAVID HOLM:  ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: No, they calved excellent, but they were too hard to handle and the market did not hold them. We swung back into straight Hereford pretty well and crossed some with Angus, which would be the best cattle in this country in my eyes.

DAVID HOLM: ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: The cross, the Hereford cow and the Black Angus. And get your Black Walldi Hereford calves and they are tough. They forage better and they winter better, no bag problems.

DAVID HOLM: Is that a round bale?

JIM MCCONAGHY: Big round bale, that's about an eleven hundred pound bale. This year they are getting seventy and eighty, you can't afford to buy hay and feed cows, and the cattle prices are down this year.

DAVID HOLM: How many cows do you have?

JIM MCCONAGHY: How educated are you?

DAVID HOLM: How many cows do you have?

JIM MCCONAGHY: Well, I will tell you what. You don't have to be very smart to figure out the taxes on this place, the cost of putting the hay up, the costs of your repairs, your vet bills, you add it all up, your insurance and license.

DAVID HOLM: Buying the cattle?

JIM MCCONAGHY: Buying the cattle. You've got one hundred cows, you're gonna have, some people say, we use a rule of thumb, ten percent one year, you will have a one hundred calf crop. Last year we had one hundred one. This past summer, this past spring, we lost I think seven. Some years you can go lower, you can

to run off to work than you can make with all this and no anti. Right now, we are putting a tractor back together. We tore it in half. It's all these things that come unforeseen, the motor went on one, it's all these things that come up. No, you can't be self sufficient on a farm with that kind of money.

You can go to the Pulp Mill. My brother was a night watchman at Upper Fraser and he worked Saturdays, Sundays and all holidays. At] Christmas, he had an evening with the kids or when he got in, in the morning, but he was night shift, steady. He had a first aid ticket, he grossed more money than I grossed some years on a hundred acres. It is a way of life. The only time you are going to get anything out of the farm is when you sell, you might have some break. You have to buy your own medical, you don't have a pension plan, because there is no money left at the end of the year to buy a pension plan, and you're seven days a week. Oh, you can go to town at dinner time if you want, lots of times, or some days you don't have to do a heck of a lot of anything, but that is nothing to say you won't be out there at 4 o'clock in the morning calving cows and getting up every two hours to go down if you're having problems. But it is a good life.

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear] / s / ?*

JIM MCCONAGHY: I have enjoyed it. I have never had a job that I can say I disliked. I never [did] anything I didn't like to do.

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear]*

JIM MCCONAGHY: Why, when you get up in the morning, take the crap out of your eyes and wash your face, and you have a good meal in you, just go and look outside, if you can't see something that is beautiful out there, then you have a problem.

DAVID HOLM: *[unclear]*

JIM MCCONAGHY: *[unclear]* . Oh, yb I late thawp .sleepsh your f00 1

DAVID HOLM: 

JIM MCCONAGHY: If I drank ten cups of coffee I would have thirty teaspoons of sugar. I did and I don't miss the sugar and I think I can even feel better.

DAVID HOLM: 

JIM MCCONAGHY: It's what you put your mind to and what you do, but if you wander away from it, well then you might as well not start it, but it's been a long hard road, but I have enjoyed every minute of it.

DAVID HOLM:  ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: Oh, the environment has changed, yes. I mean, I don't know the word you would use for it, the proper word, we have logged it, we have seeded it. I think the biggest, saddest thing that we have done in this country is we haven't had reforestation done in the natural way because we are not going to have nothing on our great plantations of trees. Every one of our trees that we plant have forked top, we call it "school marm."

DAVID HOLM:  ?

JIM MCCONAGHY: I think that was the name given when it was in the bush and I don't know why. "Widow makers" was a dry snag and "school marm" was a tree with a fork in it and those were just names. And every one of the trees today that have been planted young have been chewed off at the tops. It isn't going to make prime wood because you can't plant and plant in the same place. I don't like to see the chemicals they're using. They're using Round-up. We just had a session with one of Northwood, not Northwood, a man whose dad was a big shot with Northwood, he's a forester. He came here and asked me about spraying the trees next to my property, because they have a woodlot license and I said, what are you spraying? And he told me and I said, do you know if you are spraying Round-up? Well, he said no it's [something else], I said that's Round-up, they usually give it a different name. I said we have no birds, we don't have any squirrels, we have no rabbits, they say "environment friendly," crap! Basically if you are big, you can do [it], if you are little, you can't do it. I don't use fertilizer on them. I use fertilizer on the greens. [On] the rest I use just water. The greens, yes, I use fertilizer. I have to use a fungicide for winter for snow, mould. Other than that we haven't used any, and the grass looks okay.

DAVID HOLM: 

JIM MCCONAGHY: So environmentally... I am not "environmentally friendly," I just don't like using that stuff.

I think that the saddest thing I have seen is the way they treat the young people today and when I say that I might be contradicting myself but this is a different category. When we were young we could buy a piece

of property and we could build what we could afford. Okay, today they dictate to them, it's kind of a communist situation. You have to build a certain size, so you start out, you have to have a one hundred thousand dollar home or whatever you can, you're broke before you're done.

DAVID HOLM: ...

JIM MCCONAGHY: You're dead in the water. Your marriage is going to go to hell because along comes a kid. Everybody loves their children, everybody's children are the best, you would be a poor parent if you didn't, [but] they don't stand a chance. This is my own opinion.

DAVID HOLM: 

JIM MCCONAGHY: You're dead in the water. We could build a small house, you could buy a piece of property you could put an outhouse out there, you could do a lot of things, that's all taken away from you, you don't have that freedom anymore.

DAVID HOLM: ... C ...

[End of tape]

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interview results this of _____ 2002, for archival, museum, and library
reference.

John M. McCongal, Jr.

Date: _____

