

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: ELIJA SINCLAIR
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS:

INTERVIEW LOCATION:

TRIBE/NATION:
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH
DATE OF INTERVIEW:
INTERVIEWER: MARGARET STOBIE
INTERPRETER:
TRANSCRIBER: JOANNE GREENWOOD
SOURCE: MARGARET STOBIE TAPE COLLECTION
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TAPE NUMBER: IH-MS.027a/.023b
DISK: TRANSCRIPT DISC 42
PAGES: 5

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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Briefly describes his career as a teacher.

Margaret: We can just forget about that. Were you born in
Norway House?

Elija: Me, I was born here in Fisher River.

Margaret: In Fisher River? And what about your mother and father?

Elija: Born somewhere. My mother was born in Churchill River.

Margaret: Oh? And her name?

Elija: Mary Murdoch.

Margaret: What I would like you to do is just to tell me the sort of things you used to do when you were a young man, when you were growing up. What have you done?

Elija: Well, when I was a boy I went to school here, you see, and after my father died I went to Brandon school. My father died when I was about eight or nine years old, right here in Fisher River. I stayed at Brandon school for about three years, I guess. They didn't want me there any longer. Of course them days when you are eighteen they let you out of school. It was only an industrial school then. They don't educate you any further. That is why I was disappointed. Not like today. And then after I left that school in 1899 and came back here, I bought a set of tools from the school, carpenter tools. I had been working and when I come back I got work around here, lumber camp. And off and on, that is about what I done for five years, I guess. Worked in the lumber camp and after that I started to fish, fishing. And I started to fish then. Bought two, three head of cattle when I was a young fellow. And I bought a little pony, made hay, and I bought for my own outfit. I bought a mower and rake and an old wagon and work for myself here. And I got married in 1906. She kept at me, "You want to get married?" (laughs) I am telling the truth. I got married in 1906. I been working out in the saw-mill and fishing. And I built this church, I was carpenter here. I built this church when I was 19, when I come back from the school. When I got out I built this church and helped with the church. And later on here, when they renewed the foundation, they had to lift the church and put a cement foundation on it. I was still working on that when I was 79 years old.

Margaret: That is a long time on the same church.

Elija: I was born somewhere in 1881. And now this month I'll be... My birthday is someplace at the end of the month. I kept on fishing until I retired from fishing here. I got tired and too old to fish and I quit fishing since I got a pension. I been doing nothing much after I got a pension.

Margaret: Well, you did a fair amount earlier.

Elija: We took a lot of children, raised the children, different children, off and on. There was about eight or nine.

Margaret: Did you ever build any boats?

Elija: Boats? Yeah, I built a lot of skiffs. (Inaudible). I

built a lot of skiffs here. But ever since... I kind of lost my sight now. I can't see very good. I can't read. So I quit carpentering and I am just living and doing a little work and cutting wood. That is about all I'm doing now. Going to church, meetings.

Margaret: Did you build any York boats?

Elija: No, no, the York boats was out of date then. The last time, see the York boats... the time I went to Deer Lake... One time I went to Deer Lake teaching school, opened a school there. Me and my Mrs. went there for the summer, three months. We went up from Berens River and we had to paddle our own canoes them days -- 1915, the summer of 1915. We had to paddle our own canoe there. It took us about, pretty near two weeks to get there over heights of land, Deer Lake, see. When you go to Deer Lake you got to go over the heights of land. (Inaudible) Now today you can go in the airplane in forty minutes. Big difference, eh? And after there we stayed at Bloodvein for two summers teaching school.

Margaret: Oh, you were teaching school too? Both of you?

Elija: She was helping me. Sometimes I had to get out. Of course she played with the children more than she would teach them. (laughs)

Margaret: What were you teaching?

Elija: Teaching? Well, the first day, the children (inaudible). They sent me there, Reverend Stephens was here, and he sent me there and I would teach them the best I can as far as I can go. When I was in Brandon school I had no chance to go to the second grade. We only went to school half a day them days.

Margaret: Well, you must have had quite a time moving your home all around.

Elija: That is about all I done. I have to stay home now. I got two boys here going to school and had to look after them. The other girls are mine. That's one of them here, orphans, you know. A lot of work, you know, taking these orphan children. That is where you spend most of your work, hard work too. Now today I am just living, that's all.

Margaret: Well, you are doing a pretty good job of that. When you moved over to these other places, did you travel by dogteam in the wintertime?

Mrs. S: No, I was in school too.

Elija: She worked with me everywhere I went.

Margaret: Well, how did you get around? I mean, there weren't motors and so on then, or planes.

Elija: Partly on canoe and pull your skiff and pull on the oars, five whole days. Them days anyway. There were no planes and no motors them days. Just lately we have motors here to go around. I fish with motors all right, like today. But them days there are no motors. Going up Berens River there was hard work.

Margaret: Yes, I was there just recently. I know what it's like. Berens River, there are so many rapids on there.

Elija: I think there is 63 portages before they get to Little Grand Rapids. That's what they say, 63. Some of them big falls. All the way from two feet up to ten feet over the falls.

Margaret: I saw Sturgeon Falls, yes.

Elija: Sturgeon Falls, yes. We saw them. White Beaver Falls, Way Down Falls(?).

Margaret: You've moved pretty well all around the lake, haven't you?

Elija: Yes, pretty well all around the lake. Travelling, and sometimes you have pretty narrow escapes too.

Margaret: Do you remember those times?

Elija: Yeah.

Margaret: Do you remember any of the narrow escapes?

Elija: Oh yes. When I was a young fellow I upset a little sailboat, pretty near drowned, but I made it. Pulled ashore, me and another fellow. And the first day, the first thing, 1906, when we got married, we went from here to Matheson Island with dogteam in spring, in the month of April. Caught a lot of water. And from Matheson Island we went to (inaudible) there, around by Bullhead. We took the ice on them, the fish, it was bare ice and the point was open. In the spring, see. And when we got to Big Bullhead there... Of course I know that Big Bullhead was pretty dangerous point but I went in, pretty well in to near the dock. All the times we was travelling in the sun, fine day. We had some pretty nice old dogs and we were hanging on when we was travelling. And all at once I seen my leader going zig-zagging this way. Then when I looked down there was a lot of holes here. So I jump off and call on the dogs to go ahead. My dogs, when I told them that, they just went full speed. She was on the jumper singing away. But I jumped out. She had to find the lines to hang on. Every time I step like this the ice went down. It was about from here to the highway, I guess. Just a close call that spring. Yeah, that was a pretty narrow escape. And one time travelling I had a skiff and sailing except I was a little too daring, I guess. That was a pretty narrow escape. The last time I quit fishing,

I came from Moose Island, I pretty near swamped then. My boat and skiff was pulling a net. I took on a squall, I had two motors. One was on top and one was working. When I made it across, I had to cross about a mile. The wind started to blow. So I couldn't turn around, if I turned around I would swamp from behind, you see. But I kept going. She was zig-zagging this way. But I got near so it's kind of leaning on the point, so I went in around that way. I was soaking wet. When I got to the shore I made a big fire and set myself there and dry myself and all my clothes. I was all by myself. That was a pretty narrow escape too.

(End of Interview)

INDEX				
INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
EDUCATION				
-accounts of	IH-MS.023b	E. SINCLAIR	42	2
TRANSPORTATION				
-York boat	IH-MS.023b	E. SINCLAIR	42	3
TRANSPORTATION				
-canoe	IH-MS.023b	E. SINCLAIR	42	3,4