

Timed Summary

Interview with Henry Frank “Harry” Portlock

OH 829/5

Interviewer: Dr Sally Stephenson

Date: 28.5.2008

Note: Key words shown in bold.

START TIME	SUMMARY
00.00	This interview was recorded for the Meadows Oral History Project . Henry Frank Portlock , known as Harry , born on 4.9.1930 at Seaton . His parents were Lillian (nee Wright) and Earnest . His siblings were Leslie, Edwin, Gertrude, Edna, Ruby, Lillian and Sydney . His parents came from Gloucester in England, and arrived in 1925. His father was a blacksmith and worked for the SA Government as a bridge builder before the Depression . He then worked for Richards Body Building which later became GMH . Work dried up in the Depression and he took any labouring work he could get.
3.04	Harry recalls that the family moved to Meadows in 1934 when the Unemployment Relief Scheme allowed people to take up farming plots which were balloted 10 acre holdings. The family was allocated a virgin scrub block with a primitive tin house and poultry sheds. Twenty two families were allocated blocks and most families had at least five children, some up to 10.
6.11	He speaks about the families and states that many did not stay very long. By 1939 half of them were gone. The houses were very primitive with three rooms, no running water or even a well, and an outside toilet. All families lived in abject poverty. He was only four at the time and it was a new adventure to him and he had many friends to play with. They ate rabbits, eggs, potatoes, and also quinces which were free.
9.55	Sir Douglas Mawson had a sawmill at Wickam’s Hill and gave people pine off-cuts. Harry’s father built a room at the end of the house and made floorboards from the off-cuts – this was used for the boys’ room. He shared a bed with his brother until he was 14 when his brother joined the services after World War II broke out.
12.40	Harry speaks about access to water. At first the family got water from a creek running through a neighbour’s property, (Mr Rowley). Later they got water from a rainwater tank but there was no running water in the house for many years. The family bathed in a little round tub on the back verandah. Later they had a washhouse with a copper in it for their bath and they all used the same bath water. There was no heating or cooling in the house – the family had a wood stove, kerosene lamps. Summer was extremely hot and they slept outside.
16.14	Harry was the youngest and got hand-me-down clothes from his brothers. He had shoes for school and does not remember ever getting new clothes. His mother made clothes for his sisters.
18.12	He describes his family arriving at Meadows on the back of an open truck with all their goods which included a milking goat. They later acquired a milking cow. His father eventually bought a horse from Adelaide . All the land clearing was done by hand – wattle and acacia were sold for leather tanning. None of the people on the settlement had any farming experience or knew anything about poultry as they had all lived in the city prior to arriving at Meadows.

START TIME	SUMMARY
22.57	Harry explains that the settlers were given no help or assistance. His father had a 99-year lease on his property. All the eggs they produced went to the company that owned the property which provided them with the chickens and the feed. They lived in poverty. His first luxury was at age seven when he went to the city with his mother and had an ice-cream. He got sweets at Christmas. There were ration tickets for food.
26.30	His father worked for the local council for two to three weeks a year to pay the council rates. Any money the children earned went to their mother.
28.33	Harry's parents expanded their block to 20 acres after several men gave up and walked off their properties after the war began. His father took over the lease of a neighbour, Mr Underdown , when he walked off the property. The Portlocks went into dairying and the whole family milked by hand and took the milk to the dairy and got a regular income. Harry fell off a horse and broke his arm but it was five days before he could get any treatment in Adelaide. When he broke his leg he was taken to Adelaide on the back of the buckboard. The roads were open gravel at the time.
32.56	He describes the different jobs in the poultry sheds: children cleaned them and his parents did the feeding. His mother collected the eggs which were packed weekly.
35.24	Their neighbour, Mr Rowley, was of a higher class. The Portlock children roamed across his property for rabbits and blackberries but he always tolerated them. Their favourite playground was Rowley's hill.
37.38	Harry explains that his mother had had a very tough life and kept the family together but she was very strict and quite religious. She worked very hard to feed them and to look after them. She also worked very hard for the war effort and was on several committees with her friend, Mrs Meissner .
40.23	He describes the social life in the Unemployment Relief Scheme community. The mothers used to get together once a week for an hour and sit around and talk. If someone got sick the women would rally around and look after the neighbours and children. The only other social life was gathering around when someone was having a big burn off, and at that time there was singing, talking and they ate baked potatoes. The settlers had trouble being accepted by the rest of the community at Meadows as they were considered a bit rough. When they could afford it they went to picture shows at the Town Hall . They were well accepted at the local dances. His sister won a dancing competition and went to Echunga for the final night; she walked there in bare feet and won the competition.
46.42	Harry speaks about his schooling and working life. He went to Meadows School for all his education. There were two classrooms and 62 children. The children from the settlement were not well accepted and there was fighting in the school-yard. He remembers the school was closed for a diphtheria outbreak and poliomyelitis was rife. When he left school he worked in the local shop and got paid 10/- for a 45 hour week. His father had a heart attack and he went back to the farm to run it. He worked at Wally Wilson's sawmill for many years – he got paid 20/- for a 40 hour. He cut firewood and worked in dangerous conditions. He was chief sawyer when he left. They cut trees all over the countryside including Willunga, Prospect Hill and Blackfellows Creek .
56.27	Harry left the sawmill to get a job with the Emergency Fire Service (now Country Fire Service) to raise, train and organise the fire-fighting group in Meadows. He worked for the Meadows Council . He remembers the bushfires in 1939; all the houses and fowl sheds were saved because the families and children helped to fight the fires.

START TIME

SUMMARY

End