

HERSTORY PROJECT

Mrs. Maki interviewed by Georgina Garrett

Q. In what year were you born Mrs. Maki?

A. I was born in 1911.

Q. How long did you live in South Gilles?

A. I lived in S. Gilles for 59 years.

Q. Why did your family go to S. Gilles - how did they get there?

A. My mother and dad came from Finland but my dad came about two years before. He worked in the States for two years then he came to Port Arthur and he sent for my mother. My mother came with three children, two boys and a girl, and the little girl died about two weeks after with the whooping cough. So, my father looked for a farm for the best territory for the family. They settled in South Gilles which was a farm with a 160 acres and a little shack. Then, he started clearing land, there was about two acres clear and they got a call on credit from somewhere so that is where they started. My father sometimes worked out ten hours a day and he'd get up early in the summertimes, about four or five o'clock and he'd clear land and go for work about seven. He'd come home in the evening and he'd again clear land until it was dark.

Q. How many acres did he finally manage to clear?

A. Well, they had four farms and they managed to clear about 150 acres total. Then my brothers grew up and the family grew too - there was eight of us children living because two had died - and when the boys grew up they had to help out with the farm work, the cows had to be milked and the herd of cattle grew, they had about ten or twelve milking cows, pigs and mixed farming.

Q. Would you say that the farming was pretty prosperous out there?

A. No, not in the first years. My father had a team of oxen and he used to go to work for the other farmers, and he got about a dollar a day, enough to buy groceries. It was pretty hard at first. My mother worked on the farm when my dad worked out and she worked in the hay fields and she raised the family, made her own soap - everything from scratch. Picked wild berries, grew a garden and knitted all the stockings and sweaters for the children, she'd sew when the children were put to bed, she'd sew to twelve or one o'clock in the morning. She just bought the material because it was cheaper

to buy, the clothes were more expensive, so she did all the work herself. I really can't see how she did it all, she did the work of three women. I think maybe it would take half a dozen nowadays. So the boys grew up and some of us got married, two of my brothers stayed on the farm - they were bachelors. So finally they had two barns and a big house and all the working equipment - haybailers if they went to bail hay for the farmers in the fall for about three months. This is the way my parents and we lived until we got married.

Q. Do you think it was a very satisfying life for your mother or do you think it was filled with drudgery?

A. A lot of drudgery and no time for play. Of course women were satisfied in a way because most women had to do the same thing. Maybe some were better off - maybe they didn't have to manage the barn, maybe their husbands did it. When my dad worked out, the boys did most of the farming.

Q. Who looked after the children in the early years when your mother had to do the farmwork?

A. The older children. When we got the farm my older brother was about eight at the time and he was left with the younger children and when I was six or seven, I was left at home all day to look after the kids. I changed their diapers, I washed dishes - I had to stand on a little stool, and there was a mountain of dishes and I still hate washing dishes. On the farm, if you had a big family you couldn't afford to send the children to high school, I know I wanted to go in the worst way. I went five and a half years to public school and I passed and they told me I was good in school so I tried everything but my dad couldn't afford it. And so very few children went to high school even though there was a lot of smart kids but there was no money to be had.

Q. Was your family close to other Finnish settlers?

A. No, this was mostly an English community, they were the only Finns there. Dad had to learn some English when he worked out and he got along all right with the English but well, it wasn't easy. About twelve or thirteen years before the other settlers there came two or three families from Finland, to locate in South Gilles. Mother would visit people along with father at Nolalu - all the way they'd drive with the horses or oxen. And then we had a nice little lady \_\_\_\_\_, she was an assistant coach - well she could understand, my mother wouldn't know a word here or there, and she'd put it all together. She used to visit our place often and I remember her

when I was little, sometimes some of the things she told us..... And they would walk a long way - some of them used to be ten mile walks. Then of course there was the Women's Institute but my mother didn't belong because she wasn't fluent enough in English. The Women's Institute was a wonderful thing though because they would go once a month and they'd all gather there. They would go with the horses and the men would go too - it was in the afternoon. The men would have a meeting by themselves and talk about farming and the women would have their meeting and talk about different ways of doing things - making soap, preserving eggs and preserving other things. They learnt a lot of things in the Women's Institute. I think it was sort of a university for a lot of women. They were a very good organization.

Q. Did you ever join?

A. Yes, I'm a life member of the Women's Institute for almost forty years. I joined the institute ten years after I got married, and I found it very rewarding. I was at the time very shy, couldn't get up to speak or say anything but finally it was hard for me to say "I second the motion". Eventually I got up and gradually I was named for many offices in the institute. I was in the Council for three years; on the School Board, etc.

Q. All this in South Gilles?

A. Yes.

Q. That sounds like political involvement - how did you develop that way - to want to participate in the community?

A. I'm an avid reader, I read a lot and I think that then, the Women's Institute and everything helped. I had learned much more after I left public school than I ever learned in public school. Bit by bit, reading and all that - I became quite a politician. I know all the Conservatives and Liberals and CCF and Social Credit. I make it my business to know their platforms and what they want to do and what their ideas are. Of course you can't really know politicians, you have to take it with a grain of salt.

Q. When you were young did you and your husband talk about politics?

A. We did, right from the start. My husband did not go to school very long in Finland because where he lived they didn't have public schools until he was fourteen. He went to school for about one year but he's very good in arithmetic and he reads and writes and knowledgeable in world affairs. He's like me he reads a lot of books and magazines - too many in fact. If I had had more education I would have been a politician. But, I haven't

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got the gift of gab, if I'd have got more education perhaps I would have got the ability to phrase the words differently.

Q. Can you describe your life when you were a young woman in Gilles? What was it like for you? What kind of expectations did you have?

A. We didn't have too many expectations because the times weren't very good and the Depression years struck us, mostly because we didn't have a chance to go to school - the majority of women, only two that I know of, went to high school, and they only went about two years. One started teaching and the other was a clerk. What we thought about was - you get married, and you settle on a farm. This was our big objective, we couldn't think of anything else. Married women didn't go to work and in the Depression years if you were married and if you were a teacher, you couldn't get a job. The single people were hired, you could not get a job if you were married. It was thought that you would settle on a farm and somehow get enough to get clothes for yourself. Had wood stoves and box stoves and you would use them in the winter time for heat. You got goods like milk and butter from your cows, the eggs and meat from chickens and we'd grow a garden and grow potatoes, you could pick wild berries. There was good food, no doubt about that. We had no meat freezers then but we put the carrots in the sand; with the other vegetables and things we would use the root cellar. The cellar was dug into a little hill and you'd line it with seed and \_\_\_\_\_ and put double doors on it and all the vegetables would be kept there. I know sometimes in July we had carrots that were just like they'd been taken out of the garden, they'd keep so well. And the potatoes and turnips and we make pickles of all kinds. There was no problem in getting food on the farm, but it was trying to get anything else that was bad, because money was so hard to come by.

Q. Where did you learn your skills to preserve food and meat?

A. My mother mostly and from other women talking about how they did it and I'd get tips from others. I remember my mother - moose meat was always available, there was so many moose and deer running around the fields that I know a lot of people shot them out of season because there were too many. My mother would clean, wash and drain the meat and she'd pack the meat in jars, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  quarter or 2 quarter jars and she would add about a tbsps. of salt and put alspice on top. That would boil for about six or seven hours in a big wash boiler and you'd put little sticks on the bottom so

that the jars wouldn't hit the bottom and then you'd boil them outside and you kept them boiling for about six to nine hours. That meat was so delicious, I can't describe it to you, it had a flavour all it's own. It was better than any other canned meat I've tasted. Some people salted it down but it had to soak for quite a while and then it was boiled or roasted with pork if you had pork you would put it on top because moose meat is very fat and deer meat is very fat. And my mother always made real soap from the fat and the bones were put in as well.....this was good for washing clothes.

Q. Do you think there was a lot of co-operation between the women?

A. Yes there was, but there had to be. My mother was having problems with the language and I would know the language from going to public school, so I would interpret for her. And then they had quilting bees and things like that.

Q. Do you think there was any ostracization of certain families if they were very poor?

A. Yes, in a way there was. I know one family that was very poor and they had quite a few children and the other children would comment about their poor clothes....And there was no social services, they couldn't get any help, but the children turned out very well, much better than anyone ever would have expected.

Q. Can you talk about some of the social activities that went on in South Gilles?

A. Yes, box and pie socials and the picnics and the school concert - they were something because we had very little other recreation. Pie socials - well it was a pie social, everybody would bring a pie and they would be auctioned off and you have the name and you'd have them all decorated, the handle and the pie plate and then the men would bid on these. Then they'd have another for younger people, from about 13,14 to 16 year olds and then the boys would bid on these. I remember one, we were at \_\_\_\_\_ School which was about five miles from Gilles School, we went mostly to Gilles School but sometimes we went out there. And then there was the teacher, she had told her boyfriend what the pie was like so all the other young men, well, they had eyes and ears. Sure enough, he started bidding because he knew it was the teacher's. Eventually he had to pay 13 dollars, for that pay, he had to work about a whole week.

Q. Where did the money go?

A. It went to the school and hall. It was sort of a community affair. In the winter time sometime we had a social where the women provided a lunch, there

was no dance, and we had all kinds of games. Then there were the school picnics, where a big truck would take the school children and go to the \_\_\_\_\_ and spend the day. There were platforms put on the bottom of the truck and they weren't very well fastened so whenever we took a turn, the whole truck would sway. And then the school concerts, we used to prepare for that two months ahead. I remember going once to S. Gilles for the concert and it lasted to midnight - the different costumes and the work of the mothers and teachers, was tremendous. The concert usually ended after about an hour and a half to two hours but this lasted to midnight. It was a Christmas concert and it was performed five or six days before Christmas, but now it has been discontinued which is a shame because this was a type of training for the children - they took children from the audience who would do their piece if they had courage - it was a living process. But they said the children spent too many hours of school time on it. I remember when I went to school, not one hour was spent of school time on it, was noon hour and recesses that we did all the work and practise for the concert. I think they should have been kept on in the country because the children don't have the same opportunity to perform before an audience.

Q. Who helped you when you had your children?

A. There were midwives. The majority of the women had their babies at home, and I know my mother had ten children and she was never in the hospital once, and everything turned out fine. The first time she went to the hospital was when she was seventy years old. I don't think there was a child that died in our community at birth. I think the women were stronger in those days, they worked until they were ready to have the baby, which helped I think because when you're on the go you're strong. I can remember one woman saying that this man had a horse and it was in foal, and he had a hired man so he says to him that the mare is in foal but be very careful of her, when you turn corners, turn them gently. But his wife was pregnant and she worked day and night and he never told her to take it easy. The young colt was worth money but the baby was just one too many.

Q. What about health care? Did women give each other hints on that?

A. We had old time cures for different things and if it didn't help well the person died.....Cures like this didn't always work....

Q. Is there any interesting story or anecdote about your life or another woman's life you would care to relate?

A. I can't think of anything. In what way? Just a story or concerning what?

Q. Something that shows your pioneer spirit, or maybe just a woman who stands

- out in your mind; what she did for the community etc. as an individual.
- A. Well, in the community I was in everything. Politically I had never held an office although I had been interested in it, but I had not had enough education. Of course I went to all the political meetings etc. and I helped when they had an election as a scrutineer. They gave me the papers and told me how to do it and I worked on that.
- Q. What about in S. Gilles, what kind of work did you do there?
- A. I worked as a farmer's wife but then I was on the Council for years, I was still on the Council before I left.
- Q. Were there a lot of women on the Council?
- A. Not very many and I was elected year after year, and then I was on the School Board for ten years, but I had to retire from the board.
- Q. What gave you this idea to run for office?
- A. Some people asked me. I think I would have been too timid to go for the position myself. I was a timid woman, I didn't put myself forward at all, I always had a low estimation of myself.
- Q. Do you think that is typical of farmwomen, I mean they were a pretty independent lot, why did they feel timid?
- A. Because I think most of them had very little education, I think most of them didn't even have grade school. The times were so, that if they got grade school educations they were lucky, most people thought that it wasn't worth educating a girl. Educate the boys if you can, but a girl - I remember my father saying to me - "Well you can change diapers without an education". The way he put it, I would be a wife and I'd have children and I'd have a home. This was the attitude of most of the community.
- Q. I've heard that most rural women had more education than their husbands because the boys had to be taken out of school to do farmwork.
- A. This is true, as far as the husbands go. I think most of the women had more education than their husbands. The new school was built and the old school was moved to the other side, and a new road was built. And we organized things. A new Ladies Aid of the United Church.....the small church faded out of the picture after. For years, the co-ops existed, and then I was a member of the board of directors because there were very many co-ops then. There were many meetings I had to go to and I was the first secretary of the Hall Board, and I don't know how I ever got the time.
- Q. Can you talk about your farmwork, what kind of working day you had on the farm?

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- A. Well, it was mixed farming. We had chickens and cows and of course in the Depression years we worked on the farm and I did a little bit of sewing. We cleared the land but we moved - we stayed on that farm for about three years. We moved to another farm and we built a new house and we had cows for a while but we decided to go into poultry and we built a poultry house. We found it very rewarding in the way of money as well. We got more raised than we bought actually because we bought them a day old and they always would give us three or four extras for each hundred, so we raised more poulets than we paid for. Very few of them died. During the summer we would take many hundreds of them to Safeway - so we got double the price.
- Q. Did you dress them and kill them?
- A. We killed them and dressed them but they were New York fashion - we didn't take the insides out - we kept them cool for the night and the butcher shop did the cleaning. We plucked them, my husband knew a way to kill them you know, to pierce the brain and then they were plucked and with a blow torch any hair that was left was singed, then they'd be cleaned and wrapped in wax paper. As for the eggs, we had a good market for our eggs. People say that chickens smell, well our didn't., we had a ventilation system that was really good. We never cleaned the litter it came up to about 10,12 inches high and it was dry. We had to clean what dropped out and the wire under the roost so that the chickens would never get under the dropping pens. In the daytime when they were scratching, all the droppings would fall into the litter and it would dry.
- Q. Did you like working with the animals? Did you do as much work with the chickens as your husband?
- A. Yes. Actually in the summertime he would look after the big house and feed all the chickens in the big house, while I looked after the young ones on the range. We had them fenced in and good grass so that they'd eat a lot of it. I liked the chickens, and I had the garden and about an acre of lawn with lots of flowers and trees, and we planted about a hundred trees. When we first moved there there was nothing but jack pine so we had to cut them all and replant. Cutting that lawn was a lot of work - three hours with that lawnmower, sometimes people would stop there and look. I remember someone telling my neighbor - "You know, I just had to stop my car and look at that place". We sold it and left it. We went out of the chicken business because it wasn't very good any more and chicken ranches were coming up where they'd have 30,000 chickens, they ran it much more efficiently. We bought this house two and a half years before we moved here. I don't miss the farm that much but I miss the neighbors. We had good friends and that

is what I miss the most.

Q. It seems that a lot of women in the country were really more involved in the community than those in the city were. Do you think that their opinion was always respected as equals to the men?

A. I'm not sure but I think they were. I know a lot of women used to take part in events, and they had a Ladies Aid of the United Church and then they had the Women's Institute but they didn't last very long. I don't know why. Put the Women's Institute together and no matter what - dinners etc. they always came to the Women's Institute, and they would do it. There was a lot of co-operative women, they helped in any way they could, if someone asked them to something to raise funds for the Cancer Society, they would and everyone knew that others benefitted.

Q. One person I talked to remarked that if it wasn't for the women, the communities would not have got settled because women worked with groups.

A. Yes, I think it was the women in the community who worked so hard. I remember when we were in the first hall, it was the Women's Institute Hall, it was only insured for two thousand dollars and it burnt - it was worth five thousand. All the equipment burnt and everything. With four thousand dollars, the Community Center was started and we put out tenders and it was the bare necessities that were put up first and later on it was renovated. It was the Women's Institute who started all this and it wouldn't have been there if not for the women.

Q. They were the organizers?

A. Yes they were the organizers of the Hall, of course we got the co-operation of the men too. The women planned these things and of course you had to get the men - you can't build anything without the men.

Q. Do you think it was more important to the women to have community organizations?

A. Yes, I think so. The women looked at things a little differently than men. They raised their children and I think the women looked ahead more than the men.

Q. How did the climate and physical environment of Northwestern Ontario affect your life?

A. It curtailed our social life to a great extent in the winter time because the roads weren't open and when we went to school we had to walk on the sleigh trail of the horses which had gone by previously. Later on they made a snow plow and they had about 17 horses and a dozen men behind which would go ahead of the horses and clear a little snow if there was an especially bad snowdrift. In the summertime it wasn't that bad but again

the roads were very poor, the ruts were six, seven inches deep, but the old Tin Lizzy would go over anything. The cars then were higher off the ground so they didn't scrape the bottom. It took us about two hours to get to the city and that's a long time. We used to walk - five miles was nothing to walk to a dance, so we'd walk there, dance all night, and walk back home again. I think that we wanted to go so bad that five miles was nothing.

Q. What was your earliest recollection of your mother or some other woman that was important in your life?

A. I think Aunt Cassy was another woman who was very important in my childhood. She was always meek and merry, she'd be always laughing and talking. She wasn't really my aunt her name was Mrs. Carson, everyone called her Aunt Cassy.

Q. What qualities about her did you admire?

A. Actually she was very jolly and I think this was what drew me to her more than anyone else. A child likes a jolly woman - she'd talk to the children and laugh - I can't remember anything else but her personality.

Q. You didn't get the impression that she found her life greulling etc.

A. No, she had a very simple life - a house with two rooms, one was used as the bedroom and the other as a dining room and kitchen. I remember as a child papering all the walls with newspaper and it wasn't really effective. I see some people now papering their dens with newspaper. Every year she would do that and everything was neat and clean. The study was inside and because of the rough boards it was really hard to paper and I don't know how many layers of paper she had to use on that.

Q. She never had any children?

A. No.

Q. How did she gain her midwifery skills?

A. I don't know, she came from the East and I don't know whether she just practised herself or if she found out from somebody else.

Q. What do you think was the hardest part of being a country woman in the old days was?

A. The hardest part was the work and I don't think there was much social life. ....Very few people could afford reading material. If someone got a book it was passed around the whole community.....

Q. Do you think there has been a positive change in the woman's role

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even as farmwomen?

- A. I think there has been a big change. I think after the Second World War when women went out to work, there has bit by bit been a change in the men's attitude towards women. Now the majority of women work and they are independant. Before I remember women had to beg for money from their husbands for groceries etc.
- Q. There doesn't seem to be the closeness among rural women as their used to be.
- A. No, one goes one way and the other one goes another way. We used to stick together in the old days, of course then we had no recreation and no transportation. They just get into the car and go now. Everything now is youth orientated and the older people seem to be left out. I don't think it is a matter of respect, but they don't seem to care for the old folks as much as they used to. The young women nowadays are much more freer. I think there has been a big change.
- Q. Do you think they lost something not being as close to other women?
- A. I think in a way they have.....
- Q. Can you talk about your work in the co-operatives? How did you get involved in the first place?
- A. We had just one store in the community and you would go to the store and you'd have to wait around for an hour or a half an hour for them to open the store, and when they went to dinner for an hour the store would be closed again. So the farmers were getting pretty disgusted so they said the best thing would be to open a co-op store. If they had a co-op it would be open all the time. So the people donated logs and lumber and they had one carpenter and the whole store was worth it. The men and women both worked and this is where I got involved in the store, and the store was built and people started living - it was a wonderful thing for the community. You would sell your work, and the milk was taken to the dairies - of course there was the co-op dairy for a while. People got so much more for their milk than they ever did. They did have a truck hauling cream but that wasn't very good. But the milk, the money really started coming in. Then if you needed anything from the city, you didn't have to go there yourself, the co-op truck would bring anything you needed. You could sell everything like your hay, at a much better price than you used to. So then I got into the committee work and then they joined with the co-operative in Port Arthur and everybody bought shares.

Q. When did it start to decline?

A.

Q. What was the role of women in the co-operative? What kind of work did they do?

A. Girls and young women in the community would work there.

Q. Did women do any organizing work for raising funds?

A. Yes. The co-op should not have given credit, it should have been strictly cash. This is when it declined because people wouldn't pay their bills. I think they just should have had it on a cash basis. We could have sold the goods much cheaper if only cash were used.

Q. Can you remember the P & D and what kind of effect it had on the community?

A. Yes, it was a wonderful thing at first. The farmers would haul the ties up to Hymers etc. but when the trucks came, I think this was the decline of the P & D. Because people didn't go to the city by train anymore, they got cars and when trucks came, the people started hauling wood via trucks.

Q. Did you know Mrs. Mitchell at all?

A. No, I didn't but I knew some people who knew her very well. She lived way down in the other end, she lived in Whitefish. She was quite a woman, and that book she wrote, I just read it.

Q. You said that your mother and father were from Finland, what kind of things did your mother do to preserve her Finnish culture? Do you think that was important to her?

A. I don't think at that time. She just worked and worked, she didn't do anything else, and there weren't too many Finns in the community. There were three other farms which were Finnish and that was in 1920 and mother had lived in an English community for years. So I don't think she did anything to restore it, except speak the language. I started learning and she would help me with the writing and spelling.

Q. How did you feel? Did you want to preserve your culture?

A. I don't know.....