

**Athabasca Area Seniors' Memory Project**  
**Transcription of Louis Baron recording 2015.mp3**  
[http://digiport.athabasca.ca/aasmp/people/l\\_baron.htm](http://digiport.athabasca.ca/aasmp/people/l_baron.htm)

Narrator: Louis Baron  
Interviewer: Elizabeth Munroe  
August 3 and November 16, 2015

[Start of Interview]

**Elizabeth** This interview is with Louis Baron, and it is August 3rd, 2015. Elizabeth Munroe is doing the interview and we're north of Athabasca in the area called Sawdy. When did you come to Athabasca, Louis?

**Louis** I came to Athabasca really in 1959. We were in Edmonton when I came north with my wife and our oldest daughter. We came to Athabasca to visit my uncle and we had coffee at the Union Hotel. We were talking away with uncle and he told us that George Weldon, who lived in Sawdy here, was farming, and he was also a county councillor so he needed help on the farm to feed the cattle, the pigs, everything they had in farming. And uncle introduced us to him because he was looking for a couple to stay there and farm, and he came and talked to us and I accepted the deal. And we moved here to Sawdy in the 1960 and that house is there still, in the field.

**Louis** Then we moved to Daniel Goodwin's nearby farm and we farmed for George for about a year. Then I bought these two quarters here, the homestead. I am on the home place and the other one is north. After a year we had built the first house, opened land for the horses and broke the land. And that's the way we started here in Sawdy. In 1963 I bought three milking cows and a bred sow at a sale at Frank Dulaska's and that's the way we started here. We cleared 20 acres that year. We opened the land by hand too, and everything. And then we got chickens and kept on opening land and working.

**Louis** In the fall, I went to logging camp for Rypiens first, north of Calling Lake, and we saw the people get mixed up about 'red rot' lumber they called it, it was red inside the pine, but it was good lumber. So in the spring, I got 5,000 board feet from them for nothing; they used to give it away back then. And I paid Bernard Allen who was hauling lumber for them. I asked him how much he would charge me to bring that home in the spring. He said you just pay me for the gas and that's what I did. And then when it came there were lots of people I know who help unload that truck by hand, one by one piece, 5,000 board feet. They brought it here, unload it.

**Louis** I use that for the floor in the house and putting up building for the animals and everything. And Swanberg's store in Sawdy used to buy recycling windows, doors, when they demolish houses in town. And back then, I got pictures of that first house, and the window and the door cost me, I think, \$10 back then. That was four nice big windows with the frame in the door. And then, we cleared a patch here for the garden, which is still working for 54 years; still the same place, producing good.

**Louis** And life kept on going like that. And then I made good deal in logging, was in 1970, with Louis Newberry. I asked him how much it cost to clear 80 acres with a cat back then. He had a D7. He came and looked at it, he said \$2,000. Now that was easy. He came and opened all the land here on the home place and right behind I broke it all, too, with the horses and the breaking plow. I still have the plow, and that's the way we improve the land, and everything, in the place, in all the 54 years. And everything here, the house, all the buildings; I built all that myself, and Alice used to do canning and everything like most women did. We raised five children. We raised six, really. And everything today, it's pretty good. I think it was a dream too, leaving home. I left home, I was young and working for other people before that and it was a dream, you know, to get a place and build a house and get married and everything.

**Elizabeth** Where did you grow up?

**Louis** I was born in Montreal and my parents moved west from there. I remember the second home in Ontario, St. Rose they call that place; was a pretty modern place already. And when the second World War came, there was police from Alberta used to go down east and gather lots of people to leave there; sell their place and everything and move to Peace River district to open the country. And well, pioneers they call them in English, they had a different name in French. And already the war was almost starting. And then my parents sold everything and moved to Donnelly, that's Peace River district. They took a homestead there for \$10 back then for the whole quarter. I don't remember going to school there; I had only a few years of schooling I think. But anyway, in me was a mechanic too, by trade and everything.

**Louis** And then they got the homestead. They had to open ten acres I think and build a cabin and all of that. They did that. And after a couple of years, you know, leaving a nice place and coming in the bush, it was pretty hard on lots of them pioneers. So they went back, but they went back to Fassett because the place was close to Ottawa, Ontario.

**Louis** In the wintertime my oldest brother, me, and neighbors and that, we went to work on the railroad. We had to shovel snow on them sections and everything back then and shoveling coal for the steam engine. They used to pile that up in big piles. And, you know, that went on for about 18 months. And then my parents came back because they had to homestead. You had to follow the rules and everything. They did that. They came back and they stayed for quite a while. Then I left home like I was 14, growing up and then I work for farmers and sometimes building work. I work for that Catholic school because they had a big farm and I like that farm work. What I had there, the job, milking cows and feed pigs and chickens. I had to look after all of that. At 18, I was managing already the farm for them because I had quite a bit of experience already in those days.

**Louis** I worked at Grouard first, \$60 a month with room and board back then. But it was good. And then I worked there for a year and a half and got a letter from Sturgeon Lake. They started a new development, their school, asking me to go to work over there, but for more money; \$125 a month. Boy, that was good money for me and saving it every month, I had no expenses. And I stay there till 1949. Got a

letter from St. Albert Youville Home and I went there and worked just on the dairy cattle, milking cows and that, and stay there for a while.

**Louis** In 1951 my parents went back to Ontario, north of Sault Ste. Marie. Thunder Bay I think they used to call. That's where I went to work in the blacksmith shop in the wintertime. I got a job there, and that's where I learned trimming and shoeing the horses. And after that winter, in the spring, I came back here. When I bought the place here and that's where I made my living. And I was still working out while I was here, then I run the grader for the County and different jobs back then for almost 18 years. And then I stayed home and farmed after that.

**Elizabeth** When did you meet your wife?

**Louis** I met my wife when I worked at Wabasca at the school. She was working there. When she finished grade eight, they learned home ec [economics]. They learned cooking, making bread, sewing, knitting, everything. And then when she was 20, I remember there, she used to teach all of them. There was eight of them working. And then they used to teach the young kids the same thing. Sewing, crocheting, knitting and the cooking, and everything. And that was good experience, when we moved here because she knew already canning and cooking and everything.

**Louis** And myself, what I learned working out, for me, because education was never my life, I mean, but the learning like that, even today, it's better for me to live with other people and everything. Even today, now, from the young one to the oldest it's good, because everything changes and different ideas and all of that. And then people come in today and ask how did you used to make butter years ago? Well, of course, we used to drive to town with horses years before with a wagon. I said, mom made sure we had four or five quarts of cream full. And the kids, they're sitting in the wagon. The road was so rough, sixteen miles to go to town one way and back, I said, they're shaking the cream and that. By the time we come back, seven hours after, the butter was made and then they didn't have a butter churn like that today.

**Elizabeth** So how long did it take to get to town?

**Louis** That's only about ten years ago, my last trip to town. I did it quite a few times with the bigger horses. It took me three and a half hours, walking. That's about four miles an hour. And then in the wintertime, the town used to ask me; they had winter carnival, and lots of time I used to load up the sleigh on the wagon and drive to town on the hoof, and people helped to put the rack on the sleigh. And we used to give rides on the river and everything for the people. . And then parades, I did for 47 years, rides, parades. And then myself, I used to go to lots to horse shows and plowing matches, walking, plowing, everything. Yes, still, I like to do that yet.

**Elizabeth** So how many horses did you have?

**Louis** I raised up to 16 horses for quite a few years and then trained them, and sell them, and everything. In the '70s I bought a neighbor's ten milking cows. I built on the barn a lean-to and we milked ten cows in the calf. We had twenty head of cattle.

**Elizabeth** So, were they all draft horses?

**Louis** Yeah. They were pretty well draft horses that I kept, but the kids used to ride the smaller ones. But I trained lots of horses for other people too, riding horses. And even the riding horses; they want training in harness too for buggies and everything and that. In 1978, that's when I started to make a harness, too, because nobody around here was doing it. And for me to buy was expensive by then, too. And that's where I learned to do a harness and everything and today still.

**Elizabeth** So, how did you learn to do a harness then?

**Louis** What I did, I took a harness I had already. I bought a team of horses, my first horses. They came from Baptiste Lake. I rode them from there to here. Twenty-five miles. And I bought a set of harness from my neighbor that time for \$50, and then the horse, they have a colt every year. Start raising them colts and shortening the harness to fit them. Then I took that harness, measured it, but later in Edmonton, I found a place to get the leather and everything and that's when I started doing my harnesses. I sewed them by hand first. And then I did buy a machine from Denmark, 1980, a small one. And then at Ellscott, from Allan Wigo his name is, that big machine I got there, a Pearson they call it, I bought it from him. He wanted quite a bit money back then, but it didn't work very good. It used to miss stitching and everything. I went back to him a few months after, and I told him I had give him \$2,000 and I said it's not working good and everything. He agreed about the money and I brought it home again and I worked on it. It took me three or four days and somehow I managed to find out how to make it work right. And that machine still working. That machine here; his dad was a shoemaker. He had it. That's 50 years plus 20, 35, 40 years almost, I got the machine here. His dad had it. That machine is close to 100 years old, and it's still working. Then I bought one, two years ago. I repaired it. I made parts for them. Some parts I could make it, and then I sold it to some people, they came and look at it and I sold it and made a few dollars out of it.

**Elizabeth** So how did you find out about these machines, like something in Ellscott. How would you find out about that?

**Louis** Yeah, I was in town and you know, go to town, meet people, have coffee and ask them if they know somebody that had machine, everything. They said, yeah, this Allan at Ellscott. His dad, he had shoe shop and everything; went to see him; word of mouth like they call it. And then, like for the harnesses, I went to big horse shows and there's people, some at Millet used to make harnesses because they had to pay for their horses. And then, you know, back then still people didn't like to give you the address where they're buying the hardware, the leather, because it was like a competition. But for me it was not that, because I already had 14 horses. And to work in the field, I needed four sets of harnesses for eight horses because I used to put four horses for breaking land or some hard work to pull equipment and everything.

**Louis** The funniest part for me, when I start with the Amish harness place in Ontario [Aaron Martin Harness], 28 years ago. I phoned. I wanted a catalog. He said, where you live? I give him my place, everything and box number and code. And he said to me, you got a business name? Well, I didn't know what to say. I'm on the farm. But

he said, could you wait a minute? He said, I got another phone call. And he had to take it, it was from Europe. Yeah, my mind came alive. Yes. Baron Harness. And then I gave him the name then I got the catalog because them, they sell wholesale. Because you've got to buy so much. And that's the way I started with them and I've been with them all the time. And I buy the top leather and hardware and everything. And they're really good to deal with; they're honest and you never have a problem with them.

**Elizabeth** So the horses, how long could they work in the day?

**Louis** This spring I lost my last horse, he was 26. I had a tractor but the tractor I had I use it for threshing, crushing grain and that because it had a pulley. But all the work in the field, there was days here, especially at the end before Alice passed away there. Some days they worked 14, 15 hours a day too, because you know it was a way of life. But I had lots of horses. If I was cutting hay for example, I would change every four hours and take fresh ones. Myself, I work up to 25 acres a day because I had enough horsepower, keep changing. And you get more speed when they are always fresh. And like baling hay, I did bale. I rig a baler, pull it with the horses. I don't need the tractor really if it comes down to it. But after I bale hay and finish, like if I start at 11 in the morning, finish at six or seven. I used to come in for lunch, horses having a lunch, hook them back on the big trailer I had and go and pick up square bales till 10 o'clock. And then there, when the dew come, then I used to quit, and it was 16 hours a day.

**Louis** And then, today, people have to realize there's young people. I'm helping them now with the big team in the harness. We plow here and we plow garden this spring. But if you're going to work in the field, you're looking, in a day, you're walking 30 miles a day and you don't realize it because you go half a mile long, all day long, you know. And today, that's why the tractor came and a lot easier for the people because of the walking, But for me, even today now, these plowing matches, like the team now that I go and help, it's a funny thing, you know, I still could walk behind all day long. And it's so nice to see. It's part of life.

**Louis** And then I went there in May, and the first time teach them to skid trees out of the wood, eh? And there, they had big trees but it's down the bank. There was a main road but it's down the bank and I remember, they phoned me. Yeah. Take this five-year-old. But they were big. They weigh 1,900 pounds. The horse stops on top, kind of wary to go down but coax it, it's going down the road, slow. We skid there that day and we'll be going back again I think around September and get some more. And coming up the hill, now the horses, they're pretty smart. You get in the bush and I'll take picture of that. They could do whatever you want.

**Elizabeth** Well, do you think they like the challenge of it?

**Louis** Oh, man. Yes. Like, you know, cowboy horse, they call roping and everything. You like to do it; the horse like to do it. You could do whatever you want with your horse. There's no such a thing that he's not going to do it. He knows you, you know him and you both work together. There's nothing you could not do, everything that you want with a horse. And that's why you're loading logs on them big skid. Well, I learned when I was young in logging camp because I did work lots. And like I said,

for me, that was big learning. And even today my daughters got horses. I hope next year they going to be here because there's a young team, the colts. They were here. I'll train them. Work them in the field and everything. Yeah.

**Elizabeth** So do your kids live nearby or have they moved different places?

**Louis** Nope, always here.

**Elizabeth** That's good. Then they've got family close.

**Louis** Yeah. And even another thing here. Now, the grandchildren, really, I had another house in town, that was in 1980. The Catholic Church built a new rectory for the priest then. They call and they have the old house on top, built in 1900, I think. Three story high and it was built strong. Anyway. Tom Gulman and other people, they were kind of councillor there for the church and they approach me, and they asked me if I wanted to tear the building down. Because back in those days they would have to pay somebody to tear it down, bring the lumber to the scrap place, whatever, and burn it and everything. Well, I said I'll take the challenge, but I said, you got to give me time. They said, okay, go there, take the roof. And it was built, man, pretty strong.

**Louis** Anyway, I was helping farmers around here. Earl Nelson, and he had a big trailer already and a tractor with a loader on it. T'was handy. What I did, I took out the partition. Take the power saw to all the walls by the floor, everything collapses down to the ground. At night, after work from his place, the town was half an hour drive with the tractor. He said, yeah, he gives me the tractor. I load up and all the material here and then take everything apart and build another house. And then we had four bedrooms and everything more modern than the first one. And the grandchildren, when the mother, my daughter, or the son, got married, they live here and the kids, they were two-, three-year-old. And then they did a good job, find a place to live in. And the kids, they were raised here.

**Louis** But today, everybody gathers two, three times. A big family gathering. But we do sporting; my grandchildren learn. They know, people say hard work, but I don't see it like that. But we're still cutting wood with a cross-cut saw and everything. And that's what they like. They call it lumberjack contest, strong man competition. And in July here, there was 22 of them came, even friends and everything from the city. And they like it. They come and take a challenge. Even splitting wood you know, and we do all of that. Do it three times a year. Yeah.

**Elizabeth** So, what did you do when you weren't working? Or did you work all the time?

**Louis** I work all the time. Yet even today. Now, I'm doing this. [Model farms and towns and miniatures] I've just finished that furniture store. Not quite finished yet.

**Elizabeth** So when did you start making these miniature buildings?

**Louis** Oh okay. That little stagecoach over there. Before I got married at Wabasca there, that's where I start that. First when I was young, my dad used to cut toys for

the boys. And my relations; they are all farmers on dad's side, even mom really. And anyway, my dad when I was young, he used to make me wooden horses on a board and wheel; pull toys, I used to pull it in the house. Got older, even 10-year-old, 12, got with the neighbor, he had some too. We made our own harnesses with string. Wolfgang made a little wagon; cut a tree and little wheels out of it and oh, we did everything—pulling grass, load 'er up. I guess everybody is born with talent whatever they got and that's something that came up, too. It keeps building up. I finish one, I got something else going.

**Elizabeth** So do you do that mostly in the winter? Or just year-round now?

**Louis** Nope, even now I'm doing that. I called between showers and doing a harness. I want to finish now and then in the fall I got three sets of harnesses to do for people beside all the crafts and different things. I got to keep busy and then I want to build a big, another big sleigh for the horses. I got the material for it.

**Elizabeth** Well you know how to do lots of things so then you get variety in what you're doing. It's not the same thing all the time. So what kind of special events would there be? Would there be events in the fall like at harvest season?

**Louis** Oh yes. Réal Boisvert, you know, would meet people. Like they say, it's a small world, even years ago, used to go to horse shows. Well, I started in town; have some two and three-year olds, you know, and people come and see the horses. I like to decorate them. I said it was like Alice, you know, I want everything to look good. The horses, man, it was the second thing to look pretty; you go to show, everybody comes and talking. Anyway, Réal Boisvert met some people who told him about me, and he looked me up. When I met him and my life was still like it was before, but he never run a binder. And he phoned me, was in August. He said, when are you going to cut grain right here? Well, I said in a couple weeks. Well, he said, phone me, I like to come and learn how to run the binder. And then he came, and I had a young horse I trained already two, three months before, and put him on the binder with the other one. Boy, when we turned the corner, the wheel horse, he wanted to go like we called, but I know him, Gagnon, and we got grain with them horses and that was a big event. And then we gave them a break. We stopped and we go stooking. But them horses learn to stand there. They would never move until you tell them to go. And we did this 25-acre field in 18 hours. Like, not all day but we did it, and stook it, and then threshing. That's a big event. And everybody used to like to come and watch and help and learn.

**Elizabeth** Where did you sell the grain? Or did you use it here?

**Louis** No, use it here. And then I used to go out and help people too, how to get everything going. Yeah. We used to do it all here. And then one fall in the late '90s, university here, Athabasca, they work with some students from grade 12 and university. They had a bus tour. They call, there was 27, the crew and the people, 20 students, I think. Harvey Scott phoned me. They wanted to see all Alberta, the life. And those students, they came here anyway. And I got grain down the hill there, there's a 20-acre field. It was not stooked, I just got it in the day before he phoned me. Yeah. And they came here, we went down there and teach the kids how to stook. And they really loved it. We stooked everything that day and we did different

things. And the next day I said we're threshing. Well that was something they wanted to see. And then we set up the threshing machine, took the horses, the wagon, we went loading and we threshed some grain here.

**Louis** And then after we had quite a straw pile, about 30 feet high. And years ago, well, we used to thresh at home and then go and help the other farmers. In the fall, lots of farmers, when they finished straw pile, was 40 feet high; that's what they say. They had a ladder and they go up and they put a \$50 bill on top the straw pile. Now, if anybody could climb to get the money, that's yours. Well, here, the students came after we finished threshing. I got a video on that and it's pretty hard to get on top. You climb and everything slide down. Yeah. We had lots of fun. But there's still people doing it like in fairs and even around here, you know. The people like to go and pitch bundles and everything. Something of the past.

**Louis** But Saskatchewan, Manitoba, lots of areas there; it's still pretty big. Yeah. They get the biggest threshing now, was 40 some machines all at once, but they thresh, and the grain go for the food bank. Yeah, farmers, they give it away. But then, you know, there's thousands of people going there because even the little kids like to go out in the field, pitch in. Here and there and stooking something. And then same like in the bush in the wintertime here, people like to remember their parents, especially. There was a couple at Colinton; their dad was a logger and he died of cancer and the son had smaller horses. And somehow he approached me because here we still using wood. And then we used to cut wood. And he came here with two teams and mine, and there was lots of snow, a couple feet. But they wanted to go in the bush and log some trees out like their parents did.

**Louis** We organize everything and Alice, my wife, came and they cooked and everything. We went down in the bush. Big bonfire. All the kids, my kids and others. And we had even ponies then in the bush, skidding the smaller trees. And the kids riding them in and out. And oh, that was going on for four days. So many things like that we used to do, and everybody was involved. I worked with Tom and Mary Black; they were the managers of the Agriplex. And we had the fair in the spring, but the fair back then included the little kids, six- and seven-year-olds. They could drive their ponies and also saddle them up. And there was the heavy-horse pulling, and the log-skidding contest. We always had something to do to get everybody involved. Another thing about those shows, I won lots, driving, them plaques there, trophies and ribbons. But it's ah, to go to show, my mind was never to win. It was to go show my horses what I could do with them. And the enjoyment, the people, the children, to come and pet them, sit on their back, they take picture and everything. Money can't buy that.

**Elizabeth** So, where were the big horse shows that you went to?

**Louis** Well, like myself, I used to go like, all the small places first, right down to Edmonton, you know. Because in Edmonton, back in those days, Klondike Days. That was a big show there because like you say, we start even the '70s. Every July, there was horses from the States and Calgary; all over beside Alberta and everything. Yeah. And you used to go there and compete, you know, just drive it. There was so many obstacles they called it. And that's where you learn the horses mind and everything. Every horse is different; just like two people different. You



know, horses, not one is just the same. Some obstacles they had cages with a pig in it, or a sheep, and you have to go close. Some horses, man, they'll see that pig and the sheep, and they get scared and they wouldn't move the other way. And then when you are driving you lose point because your horse has got to be calm. There was lots of learning with all of that. Even Westlock was a pretty big show there, too. People used to come from all over; USA, eight or six to a team. Corb Brouillette, I was against them one time, from Calgary. And I went team driving and I had a farm wagon. I didn't have a show wagon.

**Louis** But it was interesting. Because show horses, they're well trained, eh? In the crowd, parade and everything. But, to buy one and you bring it home, some people, well, they come and said oh they're nice, but they steam and they're like this and like that. They have to be trained to work on the farm because what they know it's parade and everything. Sure, we do use them at home and everything, but see, life on a farm, training your horse, you're going to break land and everything that horse gets used to everything, the noise and everything. It's a little different than a show horse, you see. That's something that people ought to understand and realize it's a different thing, there.

**Louis** Yeah, I remember we never wash them before I'm going to parade and that, but we brush them, make sure they're clean and everything. But the first show in Edmonton; they got a washroom in there. Well, I go there with a big team of Belgians I had, and they weigh 2,000 pounds each. And what they said, here, you got to wash them. Man, you come there with the hose and the spray, they didn't like it! I said they did lots of two steps, one of them before they come down, you know. It was a learning experience. Oh yes, they were scared of it, you know. And I said, oh they going to learn, talking to them, loading them, yeah, but they learned it. Yeah, there was lots of it. And then, provincial horse shows in Edmonton in the fall. We used to go there and we had two stalls—one for the horses, the other one for the feed and the harness. And we used to sleep in the stall there too because at night you never know. Yeah. And we always had a little dog, and he used to be yapping all the time.

**Elizabeth** So, tell me about your neighbors.

**Louis** Here, even today, here now we have young neighbors north from here, there was never before. But, anyway, nowadays, new neighbors. They have two boys, young boys. They're got to be 10-year-old now. Even today, the neighbor we got here, it's like in the past. They'll stop and, like I said, come and check on me. I'm alone here. And neighbors and even these phoning, what people do today for me, it's like it was before. And then we used to go to town and we never did lock the door. Lots of times I go away and I forget to lock the door, but I don't have to worry. But right now here, the neighbour still 100 percent. And it doesn't matter what happens to me. My kids are not here, but if I get hurt or something, they'll come here right away. Bring me whatever I want.

**Louis** Lots of new people from McMurray move here, retired and everything, and they have horses and find out about me. They need help and advice about the way they're handling the horses, or with the machinery for the horses, sleighs and wagons. Not one is the same.

**Louis** But I have travelled lots. When I was young, like I said, lots of times I used to leave a place and they would kind of feel bad because I had become like one of the family. But I guess it was part of my life to move around, to learn everything that I learned. Work a year, 18 months in one place and then, well, I had to move and go and learn something else. From New Brunswick right across to B.C.

**Louis** And what I'm doing here now, like with the machinery, and especially with the horses' equipment and everything, I learned everything, and I remembered and I'm using all that learning and experience on both big and small scales. And there was lots to learn, the sleigh, how they were made, and brakes on it, for going downhill. Because I never saw horses getting killed but I heard. People told me, I saw pictures of horses rolling in the snow because the load was too big and yeah, pushed the horses down but I never saw it. But it was a pretty rough life.

**Louis** And then, when we went to B.C., about 80 miles west of Fort St. John, my dad, oldest brother, me, some neighbors; there was seven of us. We went there, stayed in a log shack. It was summertime, very dry, and a woodpecker pecked on the roof. There's a story there we heard. They had an airtight stove; you make a fire for heat and for cooking. You go to bed, when you get up in the morning the water was frozen in the wash basin. But, some months after, there's a young boy come in. Already, back in those days in '70, long hair. Wash his hair every night, used to melt snow for it. And anyway, he goes to bed and his head is right against the log of the wall, there, we didn't have headboard on the bed back then. And every morning at six o'clock the bell rang. We have to get up. Just wash our face and go. And then him, he come to get up, his hair froze on the wall. Well, we laugh so much. I said I'll use my pocketknife. I go there to cut his hair but you couldn't even touch him. He said my long hair! But I said, you stay there for a month. They have to feed him till he thaws out. [Laughter] Oh, there were a lot of jokes and that.

**Louis** Another thing, you know, in those days after New Year's, we used to go back in the camp. January until April breakup. Nobody ever, ever took a shower in the camp. Wash our face certain. And that's it. We come out in the spring. I said, when we take a bath, it used to work that the water was gray by the time we finished. We used to wear wool underwear back then. There was a man had a real hairy chest and the hair grew through his underwear for the three months. Well, in a spring he come out and he couldn't even take it off. He had to go to the barbershop first and they shave him to take it off. [Laughter.]

**Elizabeth** So, your wife, did she have family here?

**Louis** Yes. In Athabasca. Yes, there was quite a few. And Calling Lake and Wabasca. And then back in those days when I bought my first truck, was a '52 International truck. Anyway was in '62, '63, back in those days the road was not paved. Calling Lake, there, that 813, was no road to go to Wabasca. For both of us to go and visit the grandparents to Wabasca, it was an eight-hour drive through Slave Lake back then. Well, you know, used to go 30, 40 kilometer an hour because the road used to be dirt and gravel, but we made it. There was no rush like today. .

**Elizabeth** It's a beautiful country to be driving through.

**Louis** Yeah. Even here, from the house here it's three-quarter mile away from the river. I walked there a couple of weeks ago when some people came and pick saskatoon. On top, there's a point there, that's so nice. You sit there and the river flowing in the morning and everything. Yeah, it's a nice country.

**Louis** When we moved here, when I built the first house it was just a trail in. That's the Peace River Trail here. We borrow a wagon and a tractor from a neighbor and haul logs here, cut and haul them down here and build the first house.

**Elizabeth** What was Christmas like? Was it a big celebration?

**Louis** Oh yes. It's big here. Everybody comes and cooking and everything. And Mark, my son here, he got half a quarter of land from me. And there's a blind there. We clean all that up and everything. Yeah. We used to go for sleigh ride and sliding and a big wiener roast and everything. Up to 30 people would come for Christmas. Every year, we still celebrate everything outside. Everybody. And now, the grandchildren with sport, they got them snowboards and skis. Oh, the extreme they say, ooh, is he going to do this and that, now. We still do quite a bit sport and skating, too. That's pretty strong, yeah. The grandchildren they've got a skating rink there in that big pond and everything. And all the kids get together.

**Elizabeth** That's great. It makes the winter not seem so long.

**Louis** Yeah that's right. Every month here, there's always something to do, really. Everybody gets together and there's so many different games, too, that come up now, all outside games and everything. What my daughter-in-law's going to do, well like what I'm doing now, I'm passing it on. Like them people phone now about everything—leatherwork, horse work, miniatures, everything. They want to come with their cell phone and take pictures of the way I'm doing it, with the tools I have. I don't have any modern tools, nothing of it. And they going to make a whole DVD or something already. Because it's a dying art now. That's why I get lots of young people involved to teach them to do with what I got here. Not with modern things and everything, and yet you still could do it.

**Elizabeth** I keep thinking of you saying people used to just make do with what they had.

**Louis** Yeah. Well you see, like myself. Here, people come in. I made a miniature two-seater buggy here, and the wheels, they're from a baby carriage wheel. Me, I go to the Friendship Centre, the thrift store, buy stuff. Get the wheel, whatever. Now, the pole on it; it's curved two ways. I don't cut it out of the wood. I go in the bush. I find a crooked tree looks like what I want, and I square it like I need it. That's what I'm still doing yet. But that's what I'm teaching my grandchildren. You go in the bush; you're going to find that there. How to bend it and everything when it's green, you make the jig. Because like I say, I learn it. I remember when I was young, I learned it, then after a while, I didn't do as much. But still, I still remember. Now I got time to do it. And it's just like with the leather, myself, I don't need \$200,000 worth of machinery to do what I'm doing. And I do my own design. I cut it, cut it with a knife, and then sew it and everything.

**Louis** And like you say. To me, the philosophy is: to make a living, you still can make a living today if you want to live, have it good and everything. I had it good. Even the land I got and everything, I still can make a living today. Because anything happens and the power goes off for 10, 12 hours like in wintertime a year ago or so. I don't even know about it. I got the wood stove going and everything and still, you know, to make a living. I got everything. I got running water.

**Elizabeth** But you're also used to thinking about how would I do this?

**Louis** It don't matter if I got to go down the hill and get water on the big pond with a stone boat and a barrel. When I started, we used to go half a mile to the creek for the water here before I dig the first well by hand. I mean, my life today is no different than the past, but I'm still living good today. Even the modern living and everything. I got no problem with that. But the kids help me lots, too. Well, not only them.

**Louis** Well, go to Michael's the craft store there in St. Albert, got everything made. It's not the point. What I made, it's a different feeling than buying it ready made and put it in the building. I learned to make it years ago and I still could do it and I feel very bad for them, you know, who buy everything ready-made. Another thing for me, I would have to spend over \$20 thousand if I had to buy everything to do what I'm doing.

**Elizabeth** You're used to thinking about how can I do it? Not where can I buy it to do it, but how can I do it?

**Louis** But with recycling, I have no scale. Like I said, I'll take a little tree and I cut little chairs out of it. Like you said, the more I do it the better I get at it, and then people talk to me ...

➤ *The following are notes of an interview held with Louis Baron on November 16, 2015. The recording of the first interview didn't come through. So the interviewer Elizabeth Munroe made notes on the interview and recorded them for the project.*

**Elizabeth** Louis talked first of all about what they raised on the farm. They raise chickens, ducks and geese for eggs and meat. Louis still raises all of these birds. And in fact, when I spoke to him, he had just slaughtered them the week before and they would start to raise new ones again in the spring. They would also have at least one bred sow on the farm. They would keep a few sucklings to raise and slaughter in the fall and the rest they would sell for cash. They also had milk cows as time went on, on the farm and they sold the cream for cash. They needed very little cash, just for flour, sugar, tea, a few things like that. They grew all the vegetables that the family would need. They knew how many plants they needed to grow for each person to last the year; 400 onion plants per person would last for the year, for example. Some might go bad, and a person might not have an onion every day. But growing that number would work out for the year.

**Elizabeth** Alice Baron, Louis' wife did lots of canning. She canned meat and produce to last the winter. I asked if there were winters that were especially hard where they maybe went a little short at the end of winter. But Louis said that they were able to put away all the food they needed in the summer and they didn't get caught short.

They also did some hunting and fishing. They caught grayling in the creek that is six miles east of Louis' current place. In the summer they dug holes in the muskeg to store food and it would stay fresh all summer. There was a lot more game there than there is today. They hunted grouse, prairie chicken, quail. We also talked about the routines for their work. Alice had taught the girls at the residential school, where Louis and Alice met, about how to do different kinds of household work. There was a day for baking and a day for mending, for example.

**Elizabeth** So when they started out together, they kept those routines when they had their own place and did baking on the same day each week and mending on the same day as before. And all the other work followed the same routines that they had had when they worked at the school. There were small convenience stores not very far from their place. One was four miles south. In the winter, they just went right across the fields to it. And there was a store six miles east so that they could get a few things they needed.

**Elizabeth** People were honest. So you could pay for part of what you needed from the store and then pay the rest when the cheque for cream, for example, came in at the end of the month. If you did a job, you were often paid in kind. Louis told a story about helping a couple with framing and building a house near Colinton, and they wouldn't have had the money to pay him but gave him some bred sows for the work. And that was good for Louis and Alice. Louis built his house himself with neighbors helping. All the materials, the beams and logs were cut by hand from his own land. The only material that wasn't was the paneling inside. They built things up gradually on the homestead. He was able to buy his first place because he had worked at the residential school at Wabasca, he hadn't had any expenses there; they gave him his meals and a place to stay. So he saved all of his pay.

**Elizabeth** Later on, when someone nearby was selling, up near Louis and Alice's place, Louis was still in the early stages with his farm. The neighbor got in touch with Louis and said he wanted to give him the first chance to buy his cows and his cream separator for \$2,000. That was a really good price for what they were getting, but a lot of money for them. He and Alice talked it over and decided to go ahead. That made a big difference to them. When they got the cattle or other new livestock, he built onto the buildings that he already had or built another building to house the livestock.

**Elizabeth** He did the same thing for his children, helping them out when they were getting started. He and Alice had built a bigger place, but kept the first homestead and let each of the children live there when they were starting out until they could afford to have a place of their own. The house is heated using wood. It takes four cords of wood for the winter. With a chainsaw, it takes a day to cut. When they used handsaws, a few people would help and still cut the wood in a day. They would leave the wood in the bush through the winter and split it and leave it to dry. Later, they would move it to the house. Cutting wood was also something that people could do to raise some cash and they would get \$20 a cord.

**Elizabeth** Louis told a story of when he worked at the school of two men agreeing to the price for some wood. Someone was buying wood on behalf of the school. And the man buying the wood said that a cord was the amount of wood measured to a

man's armpit. The man who was buying the wood was a tall man, though; he was six foot six. And the man selling the wood was a much shorter man, maybe four foot six. So, when Louis went to pay the seller on behalf of the school, there wasn't nearly enough wood. So, the seller argued that this is what he had been told. But Louis convinced him that there needed to be a little more for things to be right.

**Elizabeth** These are the stories that Louis told me in this second interview, to fit in with what he told me in the first interview in the summer of 2015.

[End of Interview]

Machine transcribed by: trint.com  
Edited by: Margaret Anderson  
Proof-read by: Virginia Nilsson

December, 2020