

TAPE GUIDE (Mrs. Geen)

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ORAL HISTORY

Subject: Mrs. Jessie Geen (G)
Case Number: 50
Code: VII/1/B
Date: July 30, 1975
Interviewer: Nancy Foster (F)

- F: Where was your father's store located?
- G: You know where the card and gift shop is now, down on Front Street right near Victoria Avenue.
- F: The Reading and Greeting shop?
- G: Yes, that was my father's store.
- F: And what type of business did he have?
- G: Hardware and took contracts for plumbing and heating. He had a staff of nineteen men.
- F: Would this be in the construction of new houses?
- G: No, no he wasn't an architect. Hardware and plumbing and heating, he took contracts for that but he didn't do any of the work, he had a staff that did that. Dad just owned the business but he made out all the contracts, he was the technician.
- F: What was the name of your father's store?
- G: Just McGie's Hardware, M, C, G, I, E.
- F: What do you remember about going in the store when you were young? What did it look like and that sort of thing?
- G: Well I don't know how to explain it. He sold flat silver and other equipment for, kitchen equipment and he sold heating stoves too, sold stoves and hardware and flat silver and that sort of thing and then he had a staff of nineteen men. He took the contracts for plumbing and heating you see when they built houses they had to have that put in like the radiators. But dad was the contractor, he made out the contract. He wasn't the worker, he didn't do, he never screwed a bolt himself but he made, he owned

the business.

F: Was he in the store running that?

G: Yes he was in the office and he and an office man Charlie Hyde, do you remember Diamond and Hyde store?

F: No I don't.

G: Well that was in where the card and gift shop is at least where, now, and that was their store.

F: How long did he (her father) have the business?

G: Well now let me see, I'm trying to think now, he was in the business when I was born I think, and when did dad die, I'm trying to think of that, oh I ~~xxx~~ know he died in 1920, so he was in business I suppose, let's say for about thirty years.

F: You went to school in Belleville?

G: I went to the St. Agnes private school here and matriculated and then, well you can write down what you like. I didn't go to the high school nor the, there wasn't a collegiate then you know, it was called the High School. And I went to St. Agnes and got my matriculation from, St. Agnes was a private ~~sh~~hool, do you know where it was?

F: Yes.

G: That was a beautiful off home, the Keith's home.

F: Who were some of your teachers at St. Agnes?

G: Oh, I can't, there was a Miss Morly, nobody knows them, they weren't Belleville people, and Miss Gouch, Miss Carole was the principal of the school and that's all.

F: Do you know approximately how many students there would have been?

- G: No, I don't remember anything about that. It was quite a good sized school. They had, they started with the kindergarten and they had classed right up through to matriculation, right through the collegiate and I got my matriculation from St. Agnes and then I went to Guelph.
- F: How far away would people have come to go to St. Agnes?
- G: Oh, they came from all over, I couldn't tell you how many miles but they came from all around the district to the, that was the ones in residence then they had the, I was a day student. This was an Anglican Church school, St. Agnes School.
- F: Was it associated with St. Thomas Church.
- G: Well they were associated but they weren't affiliated I don't think. No it was, it would be the whole, it would be the head church, it wouldn't be the local church. It was an Anglican Church school. I wasn't an Anglican.
- F: What church did you belong to?
- G: I was a Presbyterian, my grandparents came from Scotland in 1857 so I was Scottish, both sides of the house so I've nothing but Scottish blood in my veins.
- F: How did you manage to get into an Anglican school.
- G: It was no trouble getting in, I passed into the High School and then I went to St. Agnes and got my matriculation from St. Agnes, I was there for five years.
- F: So your religion was not a deciding factor when you applied for the school.
- G: No, no, nothing to do with it at all. The principal was a dear, she was a lovely woman, Miss Carole, I always thought the world of her. She was, she brought the best out of me.

- F: Do you know whow St. Agnes might have differed from the public school?
- G: Well it was a church school, that's all I know about it, but the course, we had to try the examination, the matriculation, we had to try it from the collegiate, we didn't have the exam at the school. But we took, they taught, they had the teaching, they had the collegiate, we were taught in the Collegiate's, you know.
- F: So the curriculum would have been the same as for the..
- G: the same as St. Agnes. But then St. Agnes had students from kindergarten right straight up through.
- F: Was there any extra courses you would be given as a private girls school.
- G: I don't think so, they took, there was music but there wasn't any thing else. Oh well they taught, and they had teachers that taught art, we had an art teacher you know but it was just.
- F: So that by going to St. Agnes you really didn't get anything extra over the other school except maybe the prestige of going to a private school.
- G: No, we took the same, we took the collegiate course.
- F: Did you go to St. Agnes right from kindergarten?
- G: No I didn't, I went from the, out of the, I went to the public school until I passed into the collegiate and then I went to St. Agnes.
- F: Where was the public school located?
- G: Right over here where the collegiate is now. When I passed into what they called the High School, it wasn't a collegiat then, and when I passed into the High School my mother sent me to St. Agnes. We didn't like the principal, he wasn't as nice a man as he should

have been for a principal of a school but that man has nothing to do with my history.

F: And then you went on to Guelph?

G: I went to MacDonald Institute in Guelph and it's affiliated with Guelph University.

F: Did you get any sort of degree there?

G: Well I passed as a dietician and I had a position in Toronto as a dietician.

F: Where did you work as a dietician.

G: Isolation Hospital, Toronto, I was the dietician in the Isolation Hospital. Toronto Isolation, it wasn't a, it was the big city hospital. Oh my the head nurse in that place or at least the principal in that school, she was just wonderful, I thought the world of her, Miss Mathewson, she came from Scotland.

F: Where was the Isolation Hospital located?

G: Gerard Street East, it was right on the banks of the river right behind the jail in Toronto right near Broadview.

F: With a title like Isolation Hospital was it for specific cases that had to be isolated?

G: Oh, yes, oh, typhoid fever or at least scarlet fever and diphtheria and all those things, they had to go to the Isolation Hospital.

F: Was it a large building?

G: Oh yes, it was city hospital, it was big. Toronto Isolation Hospital, that was the name of it.

F: What kind of precautions did you have to take working with all these very contagious diseases?

G: Well I didn't have to work with the patients, it was just the nurses

that I had to teach, I had to teach them cooking, we had a cooking class and they took that and then I had to plan, I had to buy all the food for the hospital and plan all the meals and I governed the staff in the kitchen, that was all my position.

F: You said you taught the nurses cooking, was that part of their duty to do the cooking as well?

G: No they didn't do any of the cooking for the institution but it was a cooking class, that was part of their nurses training. You see they got cooking for sick, different sicknesses and diets and all that sort of thing.

F: So this would be more for cooking in a home say then, they wouldn't have to do that as part of their work in the hospital.

G: Oh well the hospital, they had to take dietetics as part of their in the hospital now you know because patients that have to be on diets like now for diabetes. Now my husband contracted diabetes and he said to me one day if it hadn't been for me he would have been dead and I said, "well you know I'm a Presbyterian Perc, and they believe the Lord takes you when he wants you"so I said "I don't think he wants you." But he means I could make his meals much more interesting than if I hadn't had that. You see you can't push carbohydrates, diabetics can't have carbohydrates, they can't have sugar nor starch nor that sort of thing so we used Syceryl to sweeten. I used to make him jellied fruits and baked custards and all those things sweetened with Syceryl. So it was fortunate I had the course.

F: How long were you in Toronto?

G: Two and a half years.

F: Then did you return to Belleville?

- G: Yes I did. My father contracted, he had the valvular heart. He had to give, sell his business and I came home so I could be with my mother because dad was a semi-invalid and he died shortly after. And Jimmy Diamond was the clerk and Charlie Hyde was the book keeper who bought the business and it was Diamond and Hyde until just a short while ago.
- F: When did you meet Mr. Geen?
- G: Oh I've known him since we were in our, why just children. We were in the same dancing class. I've known Perc ever since we were, well, since we were just in our teens. His father had that Geen's Drugstore when he was just a little boy, you see. And the Gillims, Bea Gillim and Ethel were sisters and they had dancing school and you took dancing and that's where I got..
- F: What kind of dances would you learn?
- G: Oh well you see they were the social dances, the waltzes and two steps and all that kind of thing, it wasn't like it is now, those were the oldfashioned. When I was a baby that building was a residence and Mr. Keith built that and he had a, oh it was a beautiful house and all that lovely grounds around it and everything and when I went to there to school the grounds were still there, I guess they're there yet aren't they. The trees and that are in St. Agnes grounds aren't they Mrs. Jones
- J: I don't know, I think there's some trees there but I don't know anything about the ones that...
- G: Well that's where I went to school and it used to be the Keith home and they sold it. And when I first went there the great big wing that's on the back of it now wasn't on the school it was just the..

- J: Well that's all down now.
- G: Oh yes, it's all different now, an appartment house now.
- F: When was the addition added?
- G: Oh I don't know.
- F: Was it after you left the school?
- G: Oh yes.
- F: Was the wing added to make more room for the school or when it was converted to apartments?
- F: Well when it was converted into a school they added quite alot to it. Oh they had a long new part, they put a chapel on it and then they put a long new shhool wing on it. In the main building, the old main building there was a reception room and that sort of thing but it wasn't school, they didn't teach in the old part. Up over the bedrooms they used for residential rooms and then they had residence at the back over the school rooms and now its an apartment house.
- F: I guess we were speaking about your dancing classes, what kind of dances did they have in Belleville where you could put all this training into practice?
- G: Well they always had, when people entertained they'd have a dance in their home and they'd have a pianist to play the music and you danced waltzes and two steps and that sort of thing. That's the kind of dancing that was done in those days, they didn't kick up their heels the way they do today.
- F: Were there any pianists that were most popular at these dances in people's homes?
- G: Not that I know of.
- F: There was nobody that showed up again and again at different parties?

- G: No I don't think so, they had just private pianists that just played for the dance you know in private homes at that time. They had great big dances in the dance halls down town but they had an orchestra for that.
- F: Where were the dance halls down town?
- G: Well I can't tell you now, I can tell you where they were but I can't tell you the name. Now you know where that, what's the name of that place they sell tickets, oh you know.
- F: Yea, one of the cigar stores down town.
- G: Well it's a cigar store and then at the back they had a desk where you can get cheques cashed and that sort of thing. I forget the name but that's one of the places. (Bill Cooke's, now McKnight's)
- F: How often would these dances be held in the dance halls.
- G: Well I couldn't tell you that because there was no definite dates. You see private people that wanted to give a dance, perhaps now for instance people with smaller homes couldn't have a dance in their house so they would rent this hall and have an orchestra and invite you to go and that's where they'd, but they had the dance hall.
- F: So it wasn't a public thing where you paid an admission.
- G: Oh no, no, no, they may have had those but that isn't what I'm speaking of.
- F: Can you tell us anything about your husband's operation of Geen's drug store?
- G: No, I know nothing about the store whatever. His father owned it and then Perc, my husband, the son, took it over and now Alvin, Perc's son runs it, that's all there is to it.
- F: Did you ever visit the store when he was working there?

- G: Oh, I was in it, I used to go down town and I'd go in but I wasn't, I had nothing to do with it.
- F: What do you remember just from visiting it, what did it look like, what sort of things would they sell?
- G: Well, it was a smaller store than it is now, they extended it. They bought, Perc bought the store next door and took the partition down and made it all the way it is today.
- F: What kind of products would they sell?
- G: Oh drugs.
- F: Did they have the pharmacy.
- G: Yes, yes that was, it was more of a pharmacy then than it is today. Well not more of a Pharmacy but it was, the pharmacy was the main project and then the, well the goods that they sold, the different, the shelf goods, they sold different things cold creams and peroxide and all that kind of stuff, drugs, they sold drugs and then they would fill prescriptions.
- F: Was you husband a pharmacist?
- G: Yes, oh yes he was, a graduated pharmacist.
- F: Do you know how many employees he might have had working for him?
- G: Now wait a minute till I see, one two three four, I think he had four. Anna Foley's still there and the head pharmacist is still there and Walter Simmins is still there and he's head of the, he's the one that looks after the stock, he's the stock clerk, he's not a pharmacist. But when Mr. Geen, when my husband's father had the store it was just a little bit of a store, a little bit of a drug store and Perc of course developed it and extended it and bought the store next and tore the partition down and made it all one big

store.

F: Do you happen to know what store he bought out next door?

G: It was a jewelry store.

F: Do you know what other drug stores there were in town that would have been competition?

F: Walters and, what's the name of that store, I should know the names of those drug stores but I can't think. There was Walter's and, oh I can't remember the names of them and you know I should because there were several drug stores at that time. Doyle's, Lattimer's now what's the name of that, McKeown's, there were, that's it.

F: So there would have been about five or six on Front Street.

G: Yes, that's right.

F: What about other stores on Front Street, what stores bordered Geen's on either side?

G: Well there was Ritchie's. That was what is now Walkers.

F: Was it always as large as Walkers is now?

G: It was always a big store but not quite I think.

J: There was Eaton's in there before Walkers.

G: Well it used to be Ritchie's before it was Eatons.

J: Yes.

F: What about on the other side of the store?

G: Well I'm trying to think what was on the other side. Well there was a drug store but I'll be darned if...there was a drug store on the other side of the...but I can't think of the name of it can you?

F: Right beside Geen's.

G: No. Right next to Geen's. Farther up.

F: And were there stores near the footbridge?

G: Well there was Richie's on the one side. That was the dry goods

and then Geens on the other side.

F: Going down towards ~~Geens~~ the bridge, the footbridge. They have little shops in there now.

G: Yes, but there weren't shops in therethen. Not like there are now.

F: We were talking about the businesses in Belleville. Are there any that you remember in particular. Any that you might have used the most often or that were your favourites to shop in?

G: Well the Clarke and Miles Butcher shop. That's an old store, and Latimer's Drug Store still there.

F: No it isn't.

G: I don't think it is no. I don't think there are many of the old stores left. McIntosh's and Leslie shoe stores and Smith Hardware, are all old stores. And Walker's store used to be a lovely.

End of First Side

F: You mentioned you were Presbyterian. Which church in Belleville did you attend?

G: I attended St. Andrews. I was born and brought up in St. Andrews church but when I got married of course I went to St. Thomas but I never was confirmed. I never did take my membership out of St. Andrews. But at the time of Church union I went to John Street and we had no intention of leaving our old church but they were so unkind to Mr. Kerr, the clergyman who was in favour of union. The members that weren't in favour weren't nice to him so Mother and Andy decided to stand by him and help pay his salary until he got in charge. So that's how we happened to go to John Street and it was a Presbyterian

Church but it went union (United Church of Canada) and St. Andrews Church didn't you see. But my Grandparents came from Scotland in 1857 and went to St. Andrew's Church when it was a little when it was a little wood frame church.

F: Do you know when they built the new structure?

G: I don't know just exactly when they built the...I think it was around 1870. I'm not sure though about that. The first brick church was burnt in 1895 and then they built the one that's there now. That was built in 1895, this St. Andrew's Church.

F: So then you went from St. Andrew's Church to John Street Church?

G: Yes, I went to John Street until I got married you see.

F: What difference did you notice between the Presbyterian and the Anglican Church?

G: Well we didn't have any ritual when I went to St. Andrews. There's a little now. They repeat the Apostles' Creed and we didn't do that.

J: They do that in all churches now.

G: Yes but they didn't do that when I was young now but now they do. I don't like the form of church government matters. It's the faith that counts and we all have to have faith so the church doesn't interest me too much.

F: Were you involved in any of the church organizations. The women's groups and that sort of thing.

G: Oh yes I used to work in the Ladies...what they call it...the Women's Association.

J: Well you'd call it Ladies' Aid, wouldn't you?

G: Well this was in the Presbyterian church. The Ladies' Guild was in St. Thomas, the Anglican Church. Yes, I forget, but anyway I was never confirmed in the Anglican Church. I was still Presbyterian.

I don't believe in the different denominations.

J: Well I think if I'm going to go I'd better go, you can look after yourself?

G: Yes I will.

F: Was your work with the Ladies Aid with the Presbyterian church?

G: Yes, in the Presbyterian church I worked for them. My mother was a great church worker and father was an elder in St. Andrew's. We were Presbyterians from the ground up, you see my grandparents both sides of the house came from Scotland. They were Scottish Presbyterian.

F: What kind of work would you do in your ladies aid group?

G: Oh they had all kinds of, they used to have bazaars and tea meetings and all that kind of thing.

F: What would you produce for the bazaars?

G: What did I?

F: Yes

G: Well I didn't do very much, I wasn't very old you know but I used to help in the, when they had teas and that I served and I always made cakes for them.

F: Were you ever in the Ladies Auxilliary at St. Thomas Church?

G: I never did any work, I wasn't, well I was old you know to start doing any church work.

F: One last question, what kind of changes have you noticed in Belleville, how has it changed since you've lived here.

G: Oh, my dear I couldn't, it would take a page to write all the changes. I can remember when there used to be a streetcar running down Front Street from the station to the dock. That's many a long year ago.

F: How was the street car powered?

G: I forget, I couldn't tell you but I think it must have been, I don't know, must have been electric though.

F: And were there tracks down Front Street?

G: Yes, right down the centre of the street, they ran from the station to the dock, and that's all the, there wasn't any other tracks in any other part of the city.

F: Is there anything else you remember that's changed?

G: No, I don't think so, I can't think of anything special. The hospital's still where it always was.

F: Did you work in the hospital at all as a dietician?

G: Not here. I think I did for just a short time, but I wouldn't put that on, it wasn't worth it, I just relieved a girl but I did have a position in Toronto at the Isolation Hospital, I guess you got that.

F: Yes.

*** End of Tape ***

JESSIE K. MCGIE GEEN
Belleville

Funeral was conducted Dec. 24 from Thompson Chapel in Belleville by Archdeacon Peter Tett for Jessie K. McGie Geen of 223 John Street in Belleville who died at her home Dec. 22 in her 87th year. Interment was at Belleville Cemetery.

Bearers were John Geen Sr., David Geen, Shawn Geen, Charles Geen, David Kane and Bill Gilbert.

Daughter of the late William McGie, Mrs. McGie Geen was predeceased by her husband Percival W. Geen. Mrs. McGie Geen is survived by her stepson, Alwyn F. Geen of Belleville and two nieces, Mrs. D.A. Campbell (Kathryn) of Ottawa and Mrs. G.R. Miller (Margaret) of Montreal.

Mrs. McGie Geen was born and educated in Belleville.

DEATHS

GEEN, Jessie K. — Of 123 North John Street, Belleville at her home on Wednesday, Dec. 22nd, 1976, born in Belleville. Dear daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. William McGie. Beloved wife of the late Percival W. Geen. Dear mother of Alwyn F. Geen, Belleville. Loved by nieces Kathryn (Mrs. D. A. Campbell), Ottawa, Marjorie (Mrs. G. R. Miller) of Toronto. Friends are invited to call at the Thompson Funeral Chapel, 34 Everett Street, Belleville. Services will be held on Friday, Dec. 24th at 2:30 p.m. Archdeacon Peter Tait officiating. Interment Belleville Cemetery. Memorials of your choice would be appreciated. D73-27

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