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ALBERT E. BROOME:

Ed Broome was employed in northern Saskatchewan by the NDP government during the 1950s. He worked in the government trading posts as a manager. He knew both Brady and Norris.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- NDP programs in northern Saskatchewan, particularly government trading posts.
- Conversion of trading posts into cooperatives.
- Brief impressions of Norris and Brady.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Ed Broome was a government employee at the time the CCF government took power. He was involved in the government trading posts that were established as part of the government's initiative in bringing stability to native incomes.

INTERVIEW:

Murray: I'm speaking to Ed Broome of La Ronge and Prince Albert who was working for the government back in the days when Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris were in Saskatchewan. Ed, could you tell me when you first started with the northern part of the government and what you were doing then?

Ed: I came north in the fall of 1949 to work for the then government trading section of the crown corporations to operate a trading post. First, I started in La Ronge and then moved to the Pinehouse country that was then referred to as

Snake Lake. And moved back into La Ronge in the spring of 1953.

Murray: Was 1949 the year that they started all those outfits or had they started it earlier than that?

Ed: I believe they had started... previously, it was under the Fish Board, set up as a service to the fishermen and then expanded to various settlements to give them some service where the Hudson's Bay or the traders weren't in existence.

Murray: How did you find out about that job? Did they advertise it or did you hear of it by word of mouth or...?

Ed: It was advertised and at the time I was referred to by my brother-in-law, the late Cec Hanson, who contacted me and Mr. P.R. Golla was the general manager at that time of the trading section of the corporation. And from there on, we moved around into various locations.

Murray: The store in La Ronge that you were working in, were you the first manager? Did you open it up?

Ed: No, the old trading post at that time in connection with the fish operation was over on the point. And they built a new store at the present site in 1952.

Murray: That's where the co-op is now?

Ed: Where the co-op is now. The stores were eventually all, in 1959, all turned into co-ops.

Murray: Was that the original intention as well? They had always planned to do that?

Ed: I believe this was the intention originally from the government trading section of it, that it would go back to the people as a service and be set up as a co-op.

Murray: Right. Do you remember if there was any opposition to the government trading posts at all from, oh you know, the obvious institutions like the Bay and that? Was there any...?

Ed: In some cases where there was a trader or a Bay in an area where they went in, there seemed to be a little discontent from some of the people, but generally speaking, they were invited. For instance, I recall Stanley Mission inviting our division to come in and set up a store. At the time, I believe Johnny Thompson was working with us and there was a trading post in the old Birch Rapids section. And at the request of the community of Stanley, they moved down. I think in 1950 or 1951, they moved in.

Murray: Would this have been a band council decision to ask the group to come in? Do you recall?

Ed: I believe it was a community at the time... Stanley would be primary, mostly treaty Indians, but there was a few of the non-treaty status people there. So I would assume it was the whole community.

Murray: Did they have a Hudson's Bay at Stanley at that time?

Ed: At that time, yeah, at Stanley there was a Hudson's Bay. I think we went into two areas where the Bay were already established, Cumberland House and Stanley. Or three, pardon me, and La Ronge.

Murray: Those were the only three places where the Hudson's Bay had stores, was it?

Ed: Yes.

Murray: What about the west side? They hadn't established then?

Ed: We hadn't. At that time we weren't connected with the west side at all. Pinehouse or the Snake Lake store was the furthest west we had. The rest of them were in the eastern section.

Murray: Why do you think that was? Why was there no need for the stores in Ile-a-la-Cross and Buffalo, La Loche, those places?

Ed: Possibly the fact that some of the areas on the west side had been developed more than the east side. And with the trading section going up the west side whereas Wollaston, Reindeer Lake, places like that hadn't had the publicity or the trading area and population maybe.

(break in tape)

Murray: When you were first working in the store, what kinds of goods were you selling when you started working there?

Ed: Well, I would think in some areas it varied depending on the population or the type of trading you were doing. For instance, there was a difference in the La Ronge - not quantity or quality - variation of goods in La Ronge because of the road. For instance, going back to the trading post that I operated first, there would be just the staple goods that was necessary, that the people needed and that.

Murray: Like flour and lard and sugar.

Ed: Like flour, lard, sugar, tobacco, these things. All these necessities.

Murray: Would there be canned goods as well like canned vegetables and beans?

Ed: Canned milk, some canned goods. We always had to have those.

Murray: Bread maybe, would you have that?

Ed: Very little bread shipped in.

Murray: You wouldn't have any fresh vegetables or anything like that?

Ed: Not very often. You would have them from time to time but it wasn't a regular stock.

Murray: Right.

Ed: You would have fruit, apples and oranges in season, and potatoes and onions.

Murray: Did you sell the necessities for trapping and fishing as well? Was that the main thrust?

Ed: Yes, our main concern of stock was for, say, the trapper/fisherman. This is who we were suppliers for.

Murray: That was the whole idea of establishing them?

Ed: Yes.

Murray: Did you give credit? Was that part of the operation?

Ed: At that time, yeah. We had a trading policy that involved credit in connection. We would stake them in the fall trapping and the fishing operation, generally through the fishing operation. There was some control of their fishing cheques that would go through the store. And at the time I believe some of the government did have some control on their trapping fur, especially beaver and muskrat.

Murray: Right.

Ed: It was all controlled by the government at that particular time.

Murray: So it was basically a credit operation to replace the credit operation of the Bay which ended when the government started buying fur and fish. Is that the sort of the idea?

Ed: Well, it didn't necessarily end there. The Bay still operated where they were in our posts and it was just a natural trading with the opposition. You vied for honors in buying fur. And usually the fish was controlled through the stores but the fur, once it was on the open market, then became a trading, not a trading war but competition.

Murray: Competition. At first, was there a monopoly? The government bought all the fur?

Ed: At one time as a conservation program when the fur, the beaver, especially the beaver, the population dropped. It was overharvested and as a conservation program they had quotas on beaver and rats up until - I would think in the 1950s sometime, in the early 1950s when it was lifted.

Murray: Right.

Ed: When they felt that the population had increased and the beaver had come back.

Murray: Right. Was there any change in government policy over the years that you worked in those stores that you can remember? Any significant change in government policy?

Ed: Not really. The credit trading policy is a dangerous one and we were always enforcing our collections at every stage of the game. There was very little welfare at the time. So you couldn't rely on welfare. You had to judge each individual trapper by his merits. His fishing ability and his trapping ability.

Murray: Right. How did you judge when a person's credit would be cut off? Was it a pretty haphazard sort of thing or did you have a standard policy for that?

Ed: Well, in some cases you had to use your own judgement with the store operation. In some cases you would get direction from head office when your accounts receivable were getting out of order. At the same time you were judging the trapper by his ability to produce and in some cases they would have some tough luck and accounts would soar a little. Or bad price structure. In some cases you are playing with the market in fish and fur and it reverts back to the economy of the particular settlement. But no big policy, no big changes. The trading policy remained the same but with restrictions on credit where it was necessary in some cases.

Murray: Did the credit ever become looser or tighter over the years or was it very much steady as you recall it?

Ed: Well, at certain times when the return for their product was down. This had some bearing on the accounts and in several areas our accounts got out of hand.

Murray: Because they weren't getting enough money for their goods?

Ed: In most cases, this was the thing.

Murray: How was it explained to them, that because their fur prices were down that they couldn't charge as much? Was that how it was explained to the native people when they were asking for credit?

Ed: Well, we tried to - at the time we were trying to

encourage them that at the time, oh, before the co-ops. Once they became co-ops then I believe that the natives maybe had a better picture of things. But in some cases, as a government

store, it was hard to explain that it had to be run as a viable operation. And it was entirely up to the manager at his own discretion and with advice from head office to control credit which I believe the native people realized. And this had been their policy for years and years, on a trading basis with the Bay. They would go out in the fall and be grubstaked and come back in the spring and clear their accounts and...

Murray: Pay it up.

Ed: Yeah.

Murray: This is the same pattern with the co-ops.

Ed: Pretty well. I think this followed through under the co-op system that as a member they used this facility and possibly they knew better than that if they didn't pay their accounts that the stock could be depleted and they could lose that service. At the time of the change, or before the change, I believe they realized that the government had put in this service to benefit by price structure.

Murray: Your prices were lower do you think than the...?

Ed: Well, they tried to put them in at a cost that would be suitable...

Murray: Cost plus basic.

Ed: Yeah, not an excessive profit, let's say. Where a trader could go in and take what was, you know...

Murray: Was the operation basically one that attempted to finance itself? Was that the limit of the profit, that it should just cover the cost of the building and the manager's salary and that sort of thing?

Ed: Over a long term plan, this was the idea - that all the facilities that the government would put in would be payed back through the margin of profit like an ordinary business. Hopefully this would rotate. And all the managers were all employees of the government and the staff, where there was staff, were employees of the crown corporations. But all the expenses, primary, were to come out of the store so that we wouldn't be unfair opposition to a trader or to another company.

Murray: When was the last year you worked for the trading companies?

Ed: Well, in 1959 is when they changed from the old government trading and the government sold the assets in those particular

settlements to the local co-op at a price and they took it over then in 1959. I continued working under the co-op then in La Ronge until 1962.

Murray: Right. How did the government transfer? Did they lend the communities the money to buy the store and then they would be paid back? Is that how it worked, or do you recall?

Ed: No, I think it was just more or less turned over and each member or each member of the community became a member of the co-op and paid his dollar and assumed at that time, a part of the assets.

Murray: So, they weren't actually sold. It was given over was it?

Ed: Well, no. There was various meetings right through. All through the country, there was meetings at each one of the points where the government trading establishments were, where these services were. And then prior to 1959, I think these were all - they had various meetings and at the same time, the fish co-op or the Fish Marketing Board, at the same year, turned into the Marketing Service.

Murray: Right. I'm just wondering how the government got its money out of those stores, if they didn't actually sell them to the communities?

Ed: Oh, they were sold at a reduced or at a say a, oh the word I'm thinking of...

Murray: Token price?

Ed: Well, they assessed them at so much. It wasn't really a token. I believe, and I'm just trying to think of a price here now of all the assets of the various... There were six stores and the government reduced or set a price of approximate value on the six of them. And each settlement was responsible for that reduced price and that was charged against them and that went on.

Murray: They paid it all off over a period of time?

Ed: They paid that off. I believe they are all paid off now, as far as I know. Stanley Mission was having some trouble with their payments. They had a couple of fires. Cumberland House was another one that was slow. But I'm not too sure now. It could be paid off, back to the government.

Murray: Right. You mentioned there were six stores. Could you list the places where those six were?

Ed: Did I list them?

Murray: Could you?

Ed: Well, La Ronge, Pinehouse, Deschambault, Wollaston, Cumberland, lost one somewhere.

Murray: Stanley?

Ed: And Stanley, yeah. That would be the sixth, yes. There was another co-op, another store service at Reindeer Lake, at Co-op Point but that was a separate entity. That was an autonomous co-op that they set up, the fishermen, they set up themselves.

Murray: Oh, they set up themselves. That was the only one that was established by...?

Ed: Yeah, that was through a loan from the government under the co-op marketing where they got their initial finances.

Murray: In the other communities, I know we talked about this earlier a bit, the other communities where there was no trading store set up, was it felt by the government that there was enough competition there, that there were enough stores that they didn't have to set it up? Was that part of the reason?

Ed: Well, some of the reasons I think was, for instance, where they set up in Snake Lake, there was no services there at all.

Murray: Right.

Ed: The only services they would get at that time... the Bay did have a post in Surrey River and possibly an outpost at Stony Narrows at one time. But at that particular time when the government went in, there was no services. They had to go to Beauval or over on the west side, and that was 65 or 70 miles to get the mail or any supplies, except when the fish dealers came in. They would bring in supplies and trade. And Waite Fisheries or Clarks or other individuals. And there was

no schools at the time so all of these services were going in in the late 1940s. Mostly started up in the late 1940s, in 1947, 1948, 1949 period. Wollaston Lake, for instance, I believe was another post that there could have been a trader there off and on but I don't think there was any established post at Wollaston until the government trading went in.

Murray: How many stores might there have been at Buffalo say, when those stores were established? Would there have been more than one?

Ed: In Buffalo Narrows?

Murray: Yeah. I'm trying to get an idea of why those, of why...

Ed: Of why they established them on the east side.

Murray: Yeah.

Ed: Well, I think there has been a trading post in the Hudson's Bay on that water route. See, that's Buffalo Narrows, Ile-a-la-Crosse would be on the old trading route going back to, on the way to Methy Portage for 200 years.

Murray: Right.

Ed: And so these places were established with free traders, dealers, and within the areas where these services weren't available. Deschambault, I believe, was another one at one time there could have been a trader in there but they left. See, they didn't go into Pelican Narrows, for instance, because the Bay was in there and there was a trader. And they eventually, there was a co-op in Pelican Narrows.

Murray: Was that eventually like a government established co-op as well?

Ed: In Pelican?

Murray: Yes.

Ed: No, it was their own, autonomous.

Murray: A local co-op?

Ed: Yeah, the government lent money to them to...

Murray: Help them get going.

Ed: Yeah, help them start. But that was a local set up, what we call an autonomous. It wasn't part of the old government trading.

Murray: The system of stores, right. Do you recall during these years when, like the one at Pelican and the one at South End Reindeer that established on their own, was there encouragement from the government to local people to start their own? Was that part of their policy?

Ed: I believe the whole theory, looking back, it could have been that this was a part of a training program or a learning process where people would be involved and have some idea of store operation - what gross margin would, a term like that, and your turn over, and what it takes to operate - and I believe maybe this might have been the whole theory behind the government trading. It was a part of a teaching program and again it would be area for employment for the locals and a learning process or a teaching. In most cases most of the settlements hired local men or girls to clerk.

Murray: Do you remember if there were any people who refused to shop at the co-op for any reason? Was there any confusion over why the government had started - not the co-ops - but the trading stores? Was there any confusion as to why the government had done this?

Ed: Well, I would suspect there would be areas where people didn't shop at the old government trading stores, where there was other services available, being anti-government and wonder why the government was getting into the retail. I imagine this question has gone in through several people's minds, why the government is getting into the retail field. And it was a pretty touchy area to explain sometimes, why the government was getting into the retail. That belonged to big companies or private individuals.

Murray: Right. Do you think there was any sort of local propaganda against it started by the free traders and the Hudson's Bay people?

Ed: Oh, I didn't run into too much of it but I suspect there would be this feeling. And there again, you know, the Hudson's Bay Company had done its bit in the north and possibly had pioneered in lots of areas. So in some people's eyes, maybe it wasn't a fair move for the government. You know, this was just, say, it could be your own opinion but you didn't study it out or look at it in the eyes that it was going to benefit the local natives by having some opposition.

Murray: Right. Did the stores gradually expand the stock that was available?

Ed: Oh yes. As the years went on and it became more viable and the demand for more goods, then the stock increased as the demand. In most cases, most of these stores grew from a small, you know, forty or fifty thousand dollar operation to... a quarter of a million dollar operation it's up to now. And the services and the type of goods were increased. As the dog team went, the snowmobiles had to come in and equipment for them, motor boats and the...

Murray: So it adjusted to the environment as it changed?

Ed: Yes, I think in most cases they had an obligation to do this.

Murray: Was there any policy from the top dictating that, that they give you a pretty free hand to respond to local demand or how was that arranged as far as the government was concerned?

Ed: Well, once it became into the co-op then they had their local boards and their local members.

Murray: But when it was still a government...?

Ed: Under government trading, this would be directed from head office which was in Prince Albert at that time. The manager in there, he would naturally see the demands of the settlement and go from there and stock it. There was no, really, enforced regulations on what kind of stock we carried. If it was within reason.

Murray: You just ordered it if...?

Ed: Yeah, and it was sanctioned through the head office.

Murray: Right. Was there any noticeable change in the store's operation once welfare became a regular feature of the north?

Ed: Well, I was out of the store operation by the time welfare became a big thing in the rations and the welfare. When I was still in the store operation, welfare was pretty skimpy and more or less handled by the local field officer. And rations were pretty slim. You couldn't get welfare just for the asking at that time.

Murray: Just by asking for it.

Ed: No.

Murray: It was tighter then?

Ed: Oh yes.

Murray: Do you recall meeting Jim Brady? The first time you met him?

Ed: Well, I recall meeting him and I wasn't too sure who he was and it was, I believe, in a meeting in Prince Albert. We used to meet with the government trading managers and the head office. We used to meet in Prince Albert once a year to survey our operations and come up with new plans and what not. And I recall Jim Brady coming in...

(End of Side A)

(Side B)

Murray: ...according to the times he was in the store or did you get the feeling that he was employed most of the time or...?

Ed: Well, he seemed to be busy at something whether he was out in the field prospecting or whether it was staking at that particular time. There was a fair amount of staking going on and claims being staked and traded or sold in the early 1950s. There was quite a bit of activity in...

Murray: That was a busy time.

Ed: Yeah. And Jim was involved in this area. But if I recall rightly he was writing a book or something in his off-season, or doing some writing. I think he had some qualifications there if I recall. He was doing some study or writing.

Murray: What year would that have been?

Ed: I would say it was in the early 1950s, 1954, 1955, 1956, in that period.

Murray: So you were conscious of him doing a fair amount. He talked about writing, did he?

Ed: Not really but I gathered that he was doing some sort of writing. I don't think I ever recall reading any of his script or whatever he was doing but I gathered he was writing up something.

Murray: And you were conscious of it more in that period than earlier or later?

Ed: Yeah.

Murray: Would he have been working less do you think at that time? You might just be guessing at this but from...

Ed: I think maybe he was doing this in the off-season. In the mining field there is off-seasons where a prospector could be out trapping, possibly. I don't recall Jim trapping or doing any fishing in this area so he could have been doing this to fill in. Maybe he had other jobs with the government, too. He could have been doing odd jobs for the government, patrolling or whatever. But I'm not aware of it.

Murray: Did he ever help other people pay off their bills at the co-op? Do you recall that?

Ed: I can't just recall any particular incident right now that he has done but I would feel he was a chap that would do this.

Murray: Right.

(break in tape)

Ed: I just you know, as I say, I...

Murray: You didn't know him that well.

Ed: No, but being associated... I should have maybe known him better really because I was around with mining people at that time, you know, from Berry Richards to Tony, the guy who is coming in and out. And I think Jim was a, I would say, kind of reserved type. He could be a loner quite easy. I'm quite sure of this, that he either could be sociable or he could get back and settle over the tea pail and just watch the loons in the sky and....

Murray: And not talk at all.

Ed: Yeah. Oh, I believe this. But as I say, I never found him in any particular area where he was, you know, abusive or out of order. I imagine he had his days or times when he might have got a little boisterous with the boys but as I say, I never... He seemed to be quite a talker if he... the subject where he wanted to talk.

Murray: Do ever remember any topics that he would talk about?

Ed: No, I was just trying to recall the one that he came into P.A. when I first met him that time and I remember this chap coming in. He looked like quite - and I can't for the life of me recall what he was talking about.

Murray: But it caught your ear did it?

Ed: Yeah, and about shooting arrows... And now, whether this was in the labor field or whether it was to do with the Cumberland hunting or the... And for the life of me, I can't remember. But I recall this fellow talking because we were gathered, I suppose at the meeting. We used to gather with the resource people. It used be quite a wing-ding when they all got in there at the old Marble Hotel and the old Empress or something. The walls would be... But I remember this fellow and I can't remember for the life of me, remember what he was referring to.

Murray: Was he agitated about something?

Ed: Yeah. At the time he was upset over some little thing and I don't recall now what it was. And I can't go back to say who would be there. It wasn't long after that that he left the department as CO or a patrolman or whatever you want. When you asked me if he was ever connected with us in the stores I say no, but he could have been, as I told you, prior to that. And I would suspect here that Dave Corny or maybe even Pierre Golla would know whether Jim was connected with the old Pelican deal. Because the Pelican Narrows had set up a fish deal, set up a fish plant for handling, and they had some stock in there, supplies.

Murray: That was their own deal?

Ed: Yeah, the fisherman's, yeah, like a little, say a fisherman's co-op and this...

Murray: So it was a producer's co-op and then they got a store as well, eh?

Ed: Yeah. Well, they eventually went into this where they formed their own co-op store. But at the time, at the start of it, I think was when the Fish Marketing Service or possibly the old Fish Board. You see, there was lots of controversy about the old Fish Board. And yet today you could maybe say that that was exploration work really. It opened up several areas. Opened up schools, it opened up services. But being as how it was a government it looked pretty sad in the eyes of some people. And I can recall headlines going back to the first

election, I guess in, not the first, I guess the second one. "Fish Board Squanders \$699,000" or something dollars you see. Well, I would say the \$600,000 was maybe just building a road from here to Pinehouse or getting a cat train to go into Wollaston to put up a school. But nobody knows. It was all in

one little package so the politicians get ahold of this and geez; I can recall it.

Murray: Was that the 1952 election maybe?

Ed: Well, I think it was, when it first come out. Yeah, more than likely. "Fish Board squanders x number of dollars." Well, today...

Murray: Was the press generally against them, do you think?

Ed: Pardon?

Murray: Do you think the press was generally against them?

Ed: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Generally I would say, yeah. The press was against them and they would get ahold of this.

Murray: Wouldn't have much effect up here though I don't suppose anyway.

Ed: Well...

Murray: Among the native people anyway.

Ed: No, no, I don't think so. No. Maybe it was a form of a helping hand; maybe it was another form of relief. There was x number of people that learned to do things. They, you know, learned to work around a cat or a... and this sort of thing. They went in, they were into everything. Really, because there was nothing here really. So they went in. The old Fish Board built plants, built buildings, had cat trains. This is how the government airways maybe got started. Through that division. Well, it was all charged to one, eh. Well, today you spend a million dollars and charging this side of the ledger to...

Murray: Miscellaneous.

Ed: Oh miscellaneous expenditures, exploration, Christ! But at that particular time \$699,000 was... I think it was that. Today it would be peanuts considering the territory they were going. You know, one or two airplanes to Wollaston Lake was... (chuckles)

Murray: Do you recall any of the other native people or other people in town ever expressing an opinion about Jim? Was he a respected man in the community, do you think?

Ed: I would say, generally speaking, that the fact that he didn't belong to this type. He was of native origin, I believe.

Murray: But not Cree.

Ed: Not Cree and but still, was accepted in here by the Cree, as far as I know. I don't recall anybody having or saying anything detrimental about him. He went about his own business and I think he could be quite influential if he wanted to be in

stirring things up. I think he was fairly well-read as far as I know.

Murray: You say stirring things up. Do you recall any incident like that at all or any particular time that he might have been doing that?

Ed: No, I can't honestly say that I do.

Murray: That's the feeling you had though, about him?

Ed: A feeling, yeah. It might go back to where I first heard him speak whether it was in connection with the labor movement or connection with the native people, I just can't remember.

Murray: Was he involved in the CCF to your recollection? Did he ever campaign for them?

Ed: No, I can't honestly say that he did. The government at that time, didn't ask anybody their political affiliations. If you came into the north or if you worked for them, regardless of your nationality, your religion or your political views, you were never questioned. I was never questioned as to whether I might have been born and bred a strong Liberal. If I was to do a job, that was all they were concerned about.

Murray: Right. What can you tell me about Malcolm Norris? Did you know him at all?

Ed: Well, my dealings mostly with Malcolm were through the store operation when he was in charge of the Prospectors' Assistance Plan.

Murray: Right.

Ed: The P.A.P.

Murray: What were your impressions of him as an individual?

Ed: Well, I think we had words once in a while. He was quite a talker. He had the English language fairly well cornered. He could give you a piece of his tongue. I believe we had words through the store. He wanted things done sometimes in a hurry and didn't maybe stop to reason to see if there was a good cause why it wasn't done. And then he would cool off after a while and apologize (inaudible). Our associations were always...

Murray: Fairly friendly, eh?

Ed: Fairly friendly, yeah. In spite of the fact that going through the store where there was...

Murray: He might put pressure on you or something to hurry up.

Ed: Yeah. At the time fire orders have priority and the

prospectors waiting for a plane and he was anxious to keep his prospectors serviced and...

Murray: So he was pushing his project and wanted everybody else to push theirs.

Ed: Oh yes, oh yes, and he was pretty efficient at getting things done until it got too big a job and then I believe they did have an expediter that would carry that load later on.

Murray: So he got some assistance eventually?

Ed: I think so, yeah. I knew some of his family. When his wife and the girls were here. I don't think any of his family ever worked for me, or any of the girls but

(End of Side B)

(End of Interview)

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