



Interview

# Amelia Spanach

Spanach Lumber Company

Interviewed by  
Peter J. Murphy and Robert E. Stevenson



Part of the Forest History Program Interview Series

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Informing Land & Resource Management



## About the Forest History Program at fRI Research

fRI Research, originally the Foothills Model Forest, has been conducting research in sustainable land and forest management in Alberta since 1992. The positive impacts from the application of this research (e.g. Grizzly bears, watershed, forest history) to improving forest management and resource sustainability can be seen across Western Canada and beyond. The Forest History Program began in 1996 when Pete Murphy, Bob Stevenson and Bob Udell began a project to record the natural and management history of its Hinton Forest. This project soon expanded to add more reports and to encompass the entire model-forest land base. The program has produced a series of seven books and e-books including an Ecotour, an Ecotour App for west central Alberta, one DVD project and a series of reports about the evolution of adaptive forest management in the West Central region of Alberta.

Learn more at [fhp.friresearch.ca](http://fhp.friresearch.ca)

## The Forest History Program Interview Series

Between 1997 and 2000, the Forest History Program conducted 33 interviews with various people who played important roles in, or were connected otherwise with the development of the remarkable forest management operation at the Hinton Forest of Weldwood of Canada. These were background information that would be used in a series of books and reports that would follow, all initiated by one book project linked to Weldwood's 40th anniversary celebrations in Hinton in 1997. Some of these interviews are posted to the fRI Research website for general reading, others are available only with permission for research purposes. All interviews were professionally edited to retain content but improve clarity but preserve content.

## Dr. Peter Murphy—Interviewer

Interviewer Dr. Peter Murphy is Professor Emeritus in Forestry at the University of Alberta, where he taught and conducted research in forest policy and forest fire management from 1973 to 1995, during which time he also held positions of Chair of Forest Science and Associate Dean for Forestry in the Faculty of Agriculture & Forestry. During his time at the University he was active in promoting the study of forest history and its importance as guidance for the advancement of forest science today. As part of this he initiated and conducted a number of important interviews with key players in Alberta's forest history, most notably Des Crossley—Hinton's first Chief Forester—and his counterpart in the Alberta Forest Service, Reg Loomis who together established the foundation of Alberta's forest management agreement system. Dr. Murphy is the Chair of the Forest History Association of Alberta, and has been a member of the Forest History Program team at fRI Research since the program began in 1996, where he has authored and co-authored a number of books and reports.

## Bob Stevenson—Interviewer

Bob Stevenson, another forester who retired after 33 years with federal and provincial governments, has observed forestry operations and research at Hinton since the 1960s and is an avid historian. In particular, he rescued several collections of historic photographs and developed the major library of forestry photographs in Alberta. With his horses and friends, he has travelled many of the trails that Judd talked about.

**Interview Date: January 25, 1999**



*Amelia Spanach, 1999. Photo credit: R. E. Stevenson.*



# INTERVIEW

January 25, 1999

**Murphy** This is an interview with Amelia Spanach at her home in Edmonton on January 25, 1999. The interviewers are Peter Murphy and Bob Stevenson. Amelia, thank you very much for agreeing to do this.

**Spanach** It is very nice meeting you gentlemen and, of course, it is always very heart-warming for me to talk about the Coal Branch, especially Mercoal where I spent many years of my life.

**Murphy** Would you please begin by talking about your dad coming to Mercoal—I understand he was the one who moved there.

**Spanach** My dad actually came to Mercoal from Edmonton. He emigrated from Yugoslavia to Edmonton. He worked on the Rat Hole<sup>1</sup> as a matter of fact, and, when the work was done there, he got laid off and tried farming in a few places. It didn't work. He tried a couple logging places, and it didn't work. It was just very temporary work, so he ended up in the coal mine, namely Mercoal, in 1927. He was there until the mine closed down in 1959.

**Murphy** Was he married when he went out?

**Spanach** He was married. Yes, he left my mother and myself in Yugoslavia. I was only a year old when he left looking for a better way of life, I guess, and with the intention of sending for us as soon as he could. Well, it took him five years to earn enough money for a ticket to bring us over, and, when we did get here, it was in October and the weather was like it is right now. I can remember it as clear as day—cold, miserable. And he bought my mother and I a coat each and a pair of winter boots, and he was broke. We took the train from a friend's place in Edmonton and arrived at Mercoal—cold and lots of snow. My father didn't tell this to my mother for a few years (well, a couple years anyway), but the housing was so tight because there was a boom just before we got there, but, unfortunately, we hit the Depression and he couldn't find a place for us to live. So there was an old chicken coop that he remodelled and cleaned up and made two rooms out of it, and called it home. It was made out of logs. We lived in there for quite a while, but the Depression was hard. It was very hard. He worked

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note. Built in 1927, the Rat Hole was a two-lane tunnel that ran under 104 Avenue and the CNR tracks on 109 Street in Edmonton. In 2000, it was demolished and 109<sup>th</sup> street was re-paved, running on top.



maybe two or three hours now and then during the winter months. In the summer months, there was absolutely no talk of any kind of work. There was absolutely none whatsoever.

**Murphy** Was it that the demand for coal was higher in the cold season?

**Spanach** Yes, because our coal was domestic coal in Mercoal, and they used it mainly for homes, privately, and people just couldn't afford it, so they didn't buy it. Cadomin, Mountain Park, and Luscar were totally different. They had a different type of coal that they used for the steamships, the trains, and that sort of thing. So they worked around the clock, and they were called the cream of the crop, and we were the poor people. Mercoal, Coalspur, and Robb we were all very poor. Coal Valley too, by the way, was poor.

**Murphy** It was just different quality coal, then?

**Spanach** There were different qualities of coal. So then in 1941 when the war broke out, that is when we got lucky. The fellow that owned the mine there by the name of Fernie McLeod -- he sold to Canadian Collieries (a firm from England), and, of course, they expanded and worked around the clock almost to the day we closed down.

**Murphy** So, it was 1941 with the war effort generating a demand—where was that coal going to?

**Spanach** I really don't know. I couldn't say. I don't know, but, wherever it was going, they sure needed a lot of it because they worked day and night. Like I say, around the clock—they had three shifts working on it.

**Murphy** What was your dad doing in the mine?

**Spanach** They called him a machine operator. He would carry this machine on his shoulder and take away the coal to loosen it up, so that the miners could pick it away—because some of that coal was very, very solid. And this is where my husband came in with his timber. It had to be fire-killed timber. They used to prop the coal up, so that when they did take it away, it wouldn't all cave in because they used to have an awful lot of cave-ins. Mercoal, I think, was one of the safest mines in the Coal Branch. Cadomin was bad. Mountain Park was bad. Luscar was quite bad, too. They lost a lot miners with cave-ins.

**Murphy** So your dad was in the mine during that time?

**Spanach** Yes. And he did that until 1942. Incidentally, I got married in 1941. There is a little story to that, too. My dad was also a woodsman. And the few ties that the mine needed, and the few mine props that they needed, they let my dad cut that during the summer. He did all of



maybe 200 pieces of fire-killed timber and maybe 50 or 60 little mine ties for the little tracks that they had underground. So my dad supplied all that for them. All of it. But when my husband came to town (now the mine was already starting to work a little more), he took my dad's job away from him. They used to say, "This fellow by the name Bob Spanach, it looks like I am going to lose all my contracts. He is coming in big time. He is going to take all the work over." Little did he know he was going to take his daughter, too.

**Murphy** I should get your dad's name.

**Spanach** George Pankovich.

**Murphy** And your mother?

**Spanach** My mother was Mary.

**Murphy** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**Spanach** Yes. I have one brother and one sister.

**Murphy** When your dad was cutting ties, did he do that by hand?

**Spanach** Yes. Broad axe. He did a real good job. Fernie McLeod was always very happy. Actually, Dad was the only one in Mercoal—the little town however many were there—that knew how to do this, so that is why he got the work.

**Murphy** Did you ever watch him do it?

**Spanach** Oh, yes lots of times I did because we used to go picking berries. So Dad would go out cutting these fire-killed logs, and, wherever the fire was, there used to be a lot of raspberries. So then dad would go cutting the logs, and we would go picking the raspberries.

**Murphy** Did you watch him? Can you describe how he made a tie?

**Spanach** Well, first of all the tree was cut.

**Murphy** Did he have a saw for that?

**Spanach** Yes, he sawed it. It was by hand. He would saw it, and he would start cutting it with the broad axe. Why this broad axe had to be ... I don't know. It was actually what they called a broad axe.



*Two Views of a Broadaxe: The beveled side (left) is shaped like a normal axe, and used for chopping and roughing out the tie. The hewing Side (right) has no bevel and is used to chop out a perfectly flat side such as was needed for square timbers or railroad ties. Photo: Bob Udell*

**Murphy** It has a wide blade.

**Spanach** So he would cut, little by little, all the way and get it four squared. And then he would lay it aside and cut it exactly the length they needed, and that was it. As far as the timber were concerned, they had to be (I am not sure of the lengths now) eight-feet and ten-feet. They had to be fire-killed for this propping up the coal in the mine.

**Murphy** Why was that? Did they always use fire-killed?

**Spanach** Yes. Always. Actually, that is what brought my husband, Bob, to Mercoal because his original camp was at Luscar and Kaydee, and then he ran out of fire-killed timber and they had lots at Mercoal. So this is why he came down there looking for timber. So he found his timber, and he found his wife in Mercoal.



*Bob Spanach and friends at first sawmill, Kaydee AB, 1939. Amelia Spanach Collection*

- Murphy** There are stories, unconfirmed of course, that miners would set the woods on fire to make sure there was enough fire-killed timber. Did you ever hear any of those stories?<sup>2</sup>
- Spanach** Well, I didn't hear about the miners, but I did hear about the berry pickers. So as the berry crop went down, there happened to be a fire somewhere. How true this was, I don't know.
- Murphy** And your husband, Bob, did you meet him in Mercoal?
- Spanach** Yes, he came looking for timber there, and he found it, and he was on his way back to Luscar because he lived at Luscar at the time. He was a miner also originally. He started working in the mines at Mountain Park and Luscar. When he came to Canada, it was also in the height of the Depression. And, of course, in those days, people didn't go into the train. They rode on boxcars. If you wanted to go from A to B, you climbed a box car or got into the box car and hoped that one of the train men wouldn't be looking for you because that was

<sup>2 2</sup> The McCardell Creek Burn of the mid-1930s was close to Mercoal. After the fire, the area was extensively logged for fire-killed timber to be used as pit props. An unsubstantiated rumour claimed that the fire was deliberately set for this purpose.





forbidden. This was because some of them lost arms and legs from falling off and stuff like that. But he was fortunate. He never got caught, but he made his way across the prairies looking for work, and the only work he could find was a day or so here and there for farmers. But then that was good because if you worked on the farm, then you got to have a free meal also. And if the farmer was a little better to do, then you got a few pennies, too, so then you could move on. So this is what he did.

He moved on until he got to Luscar. And, when, he got to Luscar, he got a job in the mine. So there he worked underground as a miner, and Mr. Scott who was the mine manager at the time was looking for someone to cut this fire-killed wood for the props for the mines. They approached a fellow from the same part of Yugoslavia where he was from, and he said, "I can't do that." But when he came back, he was telling my husband about it, and he said, "What actually is involved?" He told him, "I might be interested." So he did. He looked the boss up, and they were interested, so he started with Luscar supplying fire-killed timber and then afterwards lumber. He had a little mill up there. Then Luscar was working every day, so he was quite busy. He didn't have any money to buy any wood. So he would work in the mine in the daytime, and, after his shift was finished, he would go and cut props to be able to buy himself a horse, so that he could skid these logs and get them piled up so they could be hauled away.

So he did this for quite some time, and, then when he got his horse, he quit the mine all together and gave all his time and energy to his lumber operations. Then he got a little mill started with lumber, and then by this time things started expanding. He got a contract with Mountain Park. Then he got low on timber berths, so then he came to Mercoal and that is where he established most of his operations. We lived in Mercoal, but he had a few camps out Lovett way. And a lot of those roads in and around Mercoal that you might walk now, most of them were built by him. He would go and cut a timber berth, and then clean it up and move on to another one. Then when he expanded, he needed one for props which was fire-killed. Then he needed some for ties, which was a different size. By this time, he was contracting CNR (Canadian National Railway) ties also, as well as the ties for the mine cars that were underground. And then, of course, the green timber for the lumber.



*Business Section with Hotel and Poolhall - Mercoal, 1939—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Murphy** So he had those in different locations?

**Spanach** He had them all in different locations, yes.

**Murphy** Were those winter roads?

**Spanach** They were definitely all winter roads. He used to have a lot of prop cutters in the summer, but they all walked in and out. He had some green cutting, too, but not that much in the summer. But everybody had to walk in and out and the groceries were taken in by pack horse.

**Murphy** Would they walk in and out for a day's work, or did they walk in and there were camps in there in the summertime?

**Spanach** No, they had camps out there, but they would start out early in the morning, and, depending on how frisky they felt, they would come in and pick up their groceries and go back the same day. Sometimes, they would spend the day in town, and then go back the next day. So this was usually done once a week because in those days there was no



refrigeration. Your water well was your fridge for your meat and that sort of thing. Although later on when he had the mills and the landing at Steeper, which was just a mile out of Mercoal, he used to build out of sawdust. They would dig a hole in the ground, pack sawdust around it with ice, and it would keep almost all summer. And that is where they used to keep the meat and things that were perishable.



*Spanach's "Spruce Camp" Near Mercoal, 1940s*

**Murphy** Would they bring in domestic meat?

**Spanach** Very seldom did they use wild meat.

**Murphy** Was there game wardens there that would enforce it?



**Spanach** There were game wardens there, but I don't think they had to enforce it because nobody really went for it for some reason. They used to tease the people at Mercoal that moose and deer and elk were very hard to find because that was the only source of meat during the Depression, and some people truly did live on that. My folks, because they had a farming background, as soon as my mother arrived, they bought a cow and some chickens, so it was almost like a little farm. So we made do with that, and then my mother used to sell milk. It was five cents per pint and ten cents for a quart, and this money was saved for coal oil and flour and the kid's running shoes in the summertime. Those were what we called the good old days in the Depression.

**Murphy** Your future husband—when did you and Bob get married?

**Spanach** In 1941.

**Murphy** Was he just building his logging operation?

**Spanach** He just started in Mercoal. Actually, he was in the business about five years before that at Luscar and around Gregg River. And then, when he came looking for timber, he came to Mercoal because there was a lot of fire-kill there. He was at the camp, and he started back to Luscar. His truck broke down, so he went into the store (there was only one telephone in town, which was in the store). So he was waiting to put a call through to Edson to get some parts for his truck. My mother sent me to the store for something, and I walked in and there was this man standing. I can still see him standing there. There was a big pot belly stove in the middle of the store, and he was standing there waiting for this phone call to come through. I walked in and he kind of looked at me, and I looked at him, and, of course, I went about my business. I was brought up the very old-fashioned way, you know, where you weren't supposed to look at anybody or anything. That was being bad if you did. So I kind of maybe gave a little glance but not too long.



*Bob and Amelia Spanach Wedding Picture 1941  
Courtesy Spanach Family*

But I guess he looked longer because he asked the lady that was in the store. You know, in those days, you didn't go and pick up what you wanted. Behind the counter on the shelves was where everything was. So this lady that was waiting on me—of course she knew me—and she gave me what I needed. I guess once I left, he questioned her as to who I was, where I lived, and that sort of thing. So I guess she gave him the background history, but then he didn't know how he was going to come and knock on the door and say, "Hey, I know you got a daughter." So he got one of his men to come and ask if we had any milk for sale.



So this guy came, and he asked if we had milk for sale—"yes". Then the next thing was he came to pick up this milk, and that is where we met.

**Murphy** Oh, he came for the milk?

**Spanach** Yes. He sent somebody else a couple times first, and then he came. I was very young. I was only fifteen and a half, and, of course in those days, you didn't take girls out or anything. God forbid. There was no dating or courting. Especially coming from a family of European descent. So when he started talking to my mother and dad about marriage—like, he used to come in often for this milk. I am sure as he walked out, he spilled it. He couldn't have drunk all that milk although he said he gave it to his men. Whether he did or not, to this day, I do not know. But anyway my mother said, "What are you talking about? We haven't got any marriageable girls." "Well," he said, "sure you have. She is right there." Mother said, "That is a child." And, of course, this went on for about a year. Well, when I reached 16, I told my parents that I was going to go and work for him. Well, that did it. They would not be humiliated for their daughter to go and work out in the bush somewhere, so they relented and that was it.

**Murphy** So you were married at 16?

**Spanach** I was married at 16.

**Murphy** Then you went with him to work in the bush?

**Spanach** Well, this is when he really started to expand. He started his expansion in Mercoal. He started a sawmill a mile from Mercoal, called Steeper.



*Sawmill at Steeper—Amelia Spanach Collection*

That is where he used to load all his stuff and bring it in from the bush during the winter when it was frozen. Then in the spring and summer, he would saw all his CNR ties there, and then after that haul his lumber. And he had a lot of space there where he could store things. But he not only was in the lumber business now. He started expanding because Mercoal was growing by leaps and bounds because it was just a small community with about 100 houses. And then, all of a sudden, they are working around the clock, so they need houses. They need everything. Everybody is coming to him for lumber now. The demand was just up like he was going around the clock. Like the only time I saw him was when he came to eat and have a bath once in a while and check out the mail and stuff. I used to do all his mail because I happened to be better in the English language than he was. He would dictate, and I would do all the writinG So we spent a lot of evenings together catching up on mail. Come morning, he would be off to one of the camps, and I would be at home. We had a gas tank in front of the house, and now the truck drivers would be coming in and filling up—whether they were contracting on their own or working for us, I had to keep track of all this. Or if they needed a meal, I was there to cook it for them and so on. I had my hands full in the home while he had his hands full outside of the home.



*Mercoal 1950s. The Coal mine is at the top of the picture—Amelia Spanach Collection*

And he built a cookhouse. The mine company approached him and asked him if he would build a boarding house for the men. So he said, "OK." So he built a big boarding house, and they had rooms upstairs, a kitchen downstairs, and then a little coffee shop. The miners had their meals there. They would have their lunches packed there, go to work, come back, and their supper would be waiting for them. And then for the afternoon shift it was the same thing. They would eat, have their lunches packed, and away they would go. And then if anybody wanted to drop in for a coffee, they had a little side café there to buy coffee and stuff at your own leisure. Then after that, he built the theatre (hall). There was a little community hall there. It was all dilapidated and falling apart and caving in, so it was condemned. So then they asked him if he would build this hall, and yes he would. He went ahead and built the hall.

In the meantime, he had a little garage by the house where he fixed his own tractors and his own trucks. And a fellow from Cadomin built a small garage alongside the highway, but





somehow he couldn't make a go of it, so he sold it to my husband. So he bought it and he expanded it. Now this was going to be a service station for the townspeople, as well as him. But then one of those foolish things that strikes all of us once in our life happened. He started expanding it and rebuilding it but didn't put insurance on it. So he got somebody from Cadomin also to build a chimney and this poor man wasn't even half way up with this chimney, and he decided to build a fire to see how it would work. Instead of putting the fire out, he went to the theatre and, of course, the thing caught fire. There were all kinds of equipment in it and no insurance. That threw him back lots, but he recovered and he kept going. And then by this time, he had a surplus of lumber and donated lumber to build the curling rink. He sold some to Edson—not just the mining towns. He sold some to Edmonton, and it was a big time operation.

**Murphy**

You said that he would ship it out by rail, then?



*Mercoal Train Station 1940s—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Spanach**

Some of it he trucked in. So this went on from 1941 until 1949, and that is when tragedy struck. It was in the fall (October 1949) that he got up to go to one of these camps. It had been kind of snowing and drying up, but he thought he could make it and he got stuck halfway. He thought he better not keep going, so he decided to turn around and come back. He stopped at the mill at Steeper, and something went wrong with the belt on the mill. He



always used to wear his shirtsleeves rolled up. He had his shirt sleeve rolled up, and he got too close to the belt. He was going to push the belt back on the pulley, and I guess the friction of this pulled in the part of his sleeve, and that was it. It pulled him in, and I guess the men saw, but it was too late. He was very badly crushed.

They brought him to Mercoal, or some man came to the house and said to me, "There has been an accident." And I said, "Who?" And he said, "Bob got scratched." I said, "Scratched?" I could tell on him it was more than a scratch. I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "He is in the doctor's office." We didn't have a hospital. So I just took off like that. I yelled at my mother. She was close by to take care of the kids. I ran barefoot and all. I didn't have time to put my shoes on. And I got there and the doctor was doing all he could do, but he couldn't do much. Instead of waiting for the ambulance, I got a neighbour and we took him in the car and phoned the ambulance to meet us. We got to Edson, and, of course the word spread, and everybody knew. Not that he was my husband, but he was a man that everybody loved—man, woman and child.

Now, I am going to go back in my story. When he was jumping these boxcars when he first came to Canada, he said if he would have had the money to go back home, he would have. And his family was quite well-to-do. They could have sent him the ticket, but he had too much pride to do it because nobody wanted him to come out. They didn't want him to come so far away from home, but he insisted he just wanted to see what the other part of the world held out. And, of course, there were stories. You know, people going to Canada and United States and coming back with money. You know, having a good life by building big homes and buying all kinds of cattle and that sort of thing. But why he chose to do this, I don't know because they were fairly well-to-do in those days. But he came and it was so tough he decided that, if ever he got on his feet, no matter who came to him for what, he would help them because he knew what it was like to suffer. And, of course, he was fortunate he made it good in business. He helped everybody everywhere. Some of it was loaned but "forget about it", and some of it was loaned and was a "pay me back when you can" sort of thing. And a lot of it was paid back. Some of it wasn't, and, it is sad to say, but times like that you really found out who the true genuine people are and who aren't. Some came and said to me, "Look, I owe Bob XX number of dollars, but I just can't pay it. I will pay you back when I get." And it made me feel good, you know. But some of them came and said, "Look, I paid that back a long time ago."

But getting back to this garage story, he had to borrow some money from a friend. He actually borrowed \$3,000 to build his garage back up after it burned down. Within a year,



he paid him back. By this time, he had already hired a bookkeeper because the volume was getting so that neither one of us could handle it anymore. It was just too much for both of us. So he hired a bookkeeper, and this bookkeeper happened to pay this fellow off. And after the accident—you know how in the paper they say that if the estate owes anybody to come forward—this man came forward for his money. I didn't know because I wasn't the one that paid him. So, anyway, he (the bookkeeper) said to me, "You know this man is complaining about his \$3,000. I paid him off. I specifically made the cheque." Well, to make sure that my husband didn't owe anybody anything, I said, "OK, do we have the cancelled cheque?" And sure enough, there it was. You know, things like that stick with you. And this man was well-treated because, when my husband started working in Kaydee, this fellow helped him buy one of his horses. He loaned him \$25, and my husband never forgot that. He was an older man, and he treated him like an older brother. And when he got sick, he sent him to the hot springs. As a matter of fact, one year he was so sick he sent me to cook for him at Miette Hot Springs. That is how much he appreciated that \$25 he loaned him, and then the appreciation came back that way.

**Murphy** He must have been disappointed.

**Spanach** He was very disappointed. We had a couple of cases like that, and yet there was a fellow in Edson that owed him \$3,000. He was sick, and he had a family, and he had just a turn of rough events. He came to me and I said, "Don't worry about it. Bob said you pay him back when you can. That is fine." Another fellow from Luscar, too, owed quite a bit, and Bob told him, "Forget about it." But he came to me and I said, "If that is what Bob said, that is the way it is going to be," and it was. Yes, he was truly a remarkable man. He didn't know the language very well, and, to go into business and to expand the way he did in that length of time, I often wondered. But I was there helping him hand in hand and working with him after we got married. He was truly a remarkable man. Yes, he was one of a kind.

**Murphy** You talked about how he developed his businesses, and that was very impressive, but you were there, too. When you were there, what were you doing? It must have been a team effort.

**Spanach** Well, it was a team, yes. Being from a European background, I was trained to work hard and women were expected to work hard. But, yes, whatever he needed at home, he just told me what had to be done and he knew it was going to be done. Whether a truck came to pick up groceries, I had to help them load up what they needed, or whether somebody



needed a meal or whether somebody had to sleep over because we didn't have much hotel facilities there. The first year we got married, I was really initiated good.

I have to tell you this one. He had an older gentleman as a cook, and he brought him in to help cook for the wedding. So after the wedding, he sent him off with a nice lunch and a bottle, and I guess the old man maybe took a nip one too many and took the wrong road. Well, a couple days later somebody came in from camp and wondered where John was (John the cook). Bob said, "Well, didn't he arrive?" He said, "No." Well, then we realised he was lost, and we were just getting ready to go on a honeymoon, as a matter of fact at Niagara Falls to visit his sister whom I had never met. But now things had to be on hold. The cook was lost. So, naturally, he reported it to the police and picked up his own men and the whole town, and they started blowing the mine whistle because if anything happened the mine was supposed to blow the whistle, whether you were celebrating or crying. At 8:00 in the morning, at lunch, and at 4:00, or every time there was a shift change, the mine whistle blew. But also if there was a fire or a tragedy in the mine, then the whistle would blow. But you knew by the long and the short of it. If it was long whistles, it was happy, but if they were short, "toot toot" then you knew there was tragedy.

So, anyway, they started blowing these mine whistles thinking that he would find his way home, but he didn't. So then it was a big time operation. All these people going out to look for this cook, and, of course, they had nowhere to eat, so they came to our place. Here was me a young bride, so shy and so scared. I did a lot of cooking at home for the family, but that is cooking for your mother and your father, as opposed to cooking for the RCMP and the mine officials. I was scared silly. Thank goodness the neighbour lady was a wife of one of the bulldozer operators that worked for my husband, so she came in. She said, "Don't worry. I will help you out." I will never forget that lady for that because she saved me.

I worked hard, yes. He would be out at the camp, and we would be expecting groceries or camp supplies or whatever. Well, someone had to be there to meet the train and wait until one of the trucks came to pick it up because, if you didn't, it would be gone. Before the town got big, you could leave anything you wanted outside, and it would stay there forever until you picked it up yourself. But once the town got to expand and got bigger, you had to be there to pick it up or somebody picked it up, you know. So then when the train would come in, I would have to go and sit there until one of the truck drivers would come and pick it all up to make sure that nobody ran off with it. This is where my extended family came in—my parents. Because now my mother would be babysitting while I was tending to the business end of it. Another thing that used to take me out of the house so much was telephones. We



only had one telephone in the town, and whether it was parts or the employment office for men or even the forestry for something or other, I had to wait sometimes three or four hours before we could get a connection. Then, finally, we got two telephones in the town, and, little by little, we got a telephone in the house. But that was quite a while coming and waiting.

Then, like I say, you had the gas pumps at home. I had to make sure that everybody took the amount they said they took. And there was the house hospitality. It didn't matter who came and who went, the workmen were all treated like somebody you knew all your life. Like the office was attached to the house, so, if they came, it was always my job to ask them if they would like a cup of coffee or if they were hungry. And then some of them would like a bath in the tub because we had running water in the new house. In the old house, we didn't. But then I had to tend to that, and then upstairs we had a place for them to sleep, so, yes, I did work very hard but that was all a piece of cake.

**Murphy**

It must have felt good being a team.

**Spanach**

Yes, it was. You know, we had a big basement under the house, and we had a sliding door. In the spring, the ice would melt and would freeze over, so we would have to pack all the groceries through the house upstairs and onto the truck. Well, every time he loaded that truck, I was always there to help. I was young. I was physically fit, and I liked work and I wanted to work. And, of course, that was expected of a wife in those days, especially if you were European background. So, yes we did. When he went somewhere and he left his orders, he knew that they were going to be carried out. And the house, the kids, and that sort of thing that was 99% mine.

**Murphy**

How did you cope with the kids and diapers?

**Spanach**

Well, there you go now. You see that is where the extended family came in. After we built our big house and things started really booming, he moved my mother and father next door to us. Then I had a sister and a brother, and they helped out. But before, when we lived further away, it was a big help because I used to have to bring my water from the creek. So my brother and my sister on their way to school would load up their toboggan with pails of water and bring it to me, and, then after school, again another trip. That is what kept me in water because we used an enormous amount of water for all this stuff. Then of course the babysitting. And then when they moved, we had running water in the house, but it was piped in from the creek, and the creek took in a lot of runoff from the mine, so it wasn't fit for cooking or anything. But certainly it was good for washing floors and washing clothes if



it wasn't too dirty. Sometimes, it was even too dirty to wash clothes, but we had running water. Then afterwards, they cleaned up the act. I don't remember exactly how they did it. But, like I say, all this was a piece of cake, and I didn't consider it work.

But after he died, that was hard. He was into so much business. He had the theatre. He had the restaurant. He started strip mining at Wabamun. He did some strip mining at Robb. He did this for the mining company. At Wabamun, there was three or four of them that formed their own company. Then of course all the lumber operations. The theatre. And a lot of it was carried in his head. While I was doing most of the writing and the bookkeeping, I knew very much about it, but, when we got a bookkeeper, he sort of said, "Here now. We have had our part. Now you go ahead and look after it and do it." And he was. He was a very good man. He was knowledgeable. He was trustworthy, so he handed a lot of responsibility to him, and we were supposed to now relax. But it wasn't to be. Then when he died, it was the complication of things. He didn't have a will, and the children being infants the government stepped in. And, then, if that wasn't enough, now there is operators all around us that the contracts they knew. And having a contract from the mining company was the cream of the crop because it was right there. A lot of people wanted that. We had the General Motors agency and sold cars. They wouldn't let me have that. Why? Because I was a woman. But one of their men was kind enough that came to give me the news. He said, "You can do it, but take somebody who is a man and go to a lawyer and draw up an agreement, and it is still yours but simply because we don't want to deal with you." So that is what I had to do.



*Truck with Lumber—Spruce Mill 1950—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Murphy** That is astonishing. It is in retrospect. Was there any question in your mind then that you thought you were going to carry on?

**Spanach** I was doubting it. You know, here the kids are small. George was five then. Diana was three. They had to be raised. What do you do? Then the thing that really sparked me the most was these people. Like one fellow who was in the lumber business came to the house, into my own home, into the office, and talked to this very bookkeeper and asked him if he wouldn't go into work for him and that he would give him bigger wage and a bonus just so that he could get the Canadian Collieries contract.

**Murphy** That is pretty brazen.

**Spanach** But Canadian Collieries, they had a couple very nice people there. Bob Dunn and Fred McGinnis, I will never forget them. They came to the house and told me that no matter who wanted those contracts, they was not going to get them and that I could carry on if I wanted to. What did I do? I discussed it with my father. We had a very dear friend by the name of Mr. Lucas. He was an accountant. He came. Mr. McDonald who was a bank manager in Edson, who was a dear friend, came. He was just close to retirement. They all felt that I



should go on for at least the winter because the expenditure was into it. The ties were cut. The logs were cut. Everything was cut. We have got to bring all this in, but everything in the bank was frozen. I didn't have one penny to myself. What do you do? So Mr. McDonald loaned me \$10,000 to go ahead with these expenditures, and I had the trouble of working with the Royal Trust Company for six years before the estate was wound up. From 1949 to almost the time that we moved to Edmonton. It was a large estate in those days, and, because of the children being under age and always that shaky bit that the mine will close down, I had to buy out my own children. That way, I was sunk right into debt again more than I had ever known. And while the mine company said they wouldn't give these contracts to anybody, they were good to me in that respect. But the other respect was that they held the prices down.

**Murphy** The prices were what they would pay for your lumber and props?

**Spanach** So anyway are we getting a little too personal on this?

**Murphy** No, it is a remarkable story.

**Spanach** It is kind of getting away from the logging end of it, and yet, it is all connected with the logging. Well, in that respect, what my husband did alone now took five or six people to do. There was the accountant involved. There was the bookkeeper involved. There was my father involved, and there were two men who were foremen in the bush. They were involved plus myself. But all this kind of got too overwhelming and overpowering for me, and I got sick. I was sick for quite some time. I had I guess what they call anxiety spells now, but, at that time, nobody knew what it was. They just said sorrow and grief. Well, yes, sorrow and grief is what brought it on. So it was a struggle. A big time struggle. I tried to put the children ahead. I tried to kind of be brave where everything was normal, and yet, how do you make things normal without their father? I just tried to fill that gap in, but I just couldn't. It was impossible. Even my father being there, and brother being there, and this bookkeeper was there, and still you couldn't do it. And every time they did something that should involve their dad, and they don't know this to this day, but I always had a cry. I put up such a brave front. I was always smiling and everything was so good, you know, but inside I was really quivering—why did this have to happen? Why do they have to grow up without their dad? And on and on—I tortured myself lots.

Then, of course, when they started growing up ... I will never forget when George started playing football. God that nearly killed me. Now would his dad allow that? Would his dad not allow that? So I would go on and on and on. How do I exclude him from all the other





kids? No. So you know life went on. It is funny. He was never here, but I always discussed things with him. You know, it is a crazy statement and I've discussed something with somebody, but I pictured him being there and thought now what would we do with this and what we do with that? How would we go about this? How would we go about that? And then I would think "what would he say" and knowing him I would act accordingly.

**Murphy** Did George play football?

**Spanach** Yes, he ended up playing football with the Huskies, and then he went on with the Eskimos. But he was always the poor guy. He always had to listen to a sermon when he left, "You be careful out there now. Don't you let anybody hit you now." He told me one day, "Mom, if I ever get stunned (like a couple of times I saw them when they would get stunned, you know, and they can't get up), don't you dare run out on the field." I thought to myself, "dear God don't let it happen" but you know it did happen one day. Some guy I guess blindsided him, and he went down and he wasn't getting up. Well, I was down there in a flash. And they took him into the dressing room, and, just as I walked into the dressing room, he came to and looked at me. I thought I better get out of here, so I took off just as fast as I went down there. So anyway it is not easy being a parent alone.

**Murphy** Were you in business long enough that your kids became involved?

**Spanach** No, unfortunately. Mercoal closed down, and it is funny how things happened in ten years. We got married in August of 1941. Bob died in October of 1949. Then the mine company closed down in 1959, and that was the end of it (well, the logging part that is). The logging part was over. We probably might have hung in there, but, then again, Weldwood came into it and they leased all the timber there, and they made it quite impossible. I think what they wanted was all the operators out, and they succeeded because there was quite a few of us out there and nobody could stay on. There was only one there not far from Edson. I can't remember the name of the outfit now, but word had it that the action belonged to Weldwood. They just set it up there to prove to the rest of us that it could be done, whether this was true or not, I don't know but there was word about that. But then I rented some of my equipment to a fellow, and he tried. But the size of the logs didn't even coincide, so why they had it so much against small operators like myself being in there, I don't know. I really don't know.

**Murphy** That is an interesting question. What kind of timber leases did you have? Were they for five-year periods?



- Spanach** Timber they would give you a certain length of time depending on the size of the berth, and so you were given XX number of years if it was a big one to do it and clean it up. If you happened to run into trouble like bad weather or something, they were always very accommodating. But, after so much length, then we always had to give a deposit with the Lands and Forests. If we didn't clean it out, then they would come and clean it out with your deposit. But we most of the time managed.
- Murphy** Well, it was Northwestern Pulp and Power at that time—did you have a timber berth that ran for a few more years?
- Spanach** No. We were just at the end. Actually, we had tough luck again there. There was a big forest fire just before Mercoal closed. It was a bad one that burned a lot of timber. I was well set for lumber. I could have been there maybe three or four years. I had a nice patch of timber, but the fire came and killed it.
- Murphy** Was that 1956?
- Spanach** It could have been 1956. I am thinking maybe it was later. I know it wasn't too long before the town closed down, and I did have a nice patch of timber there. I know my dad was really pleased with it, and, in it, we had spruce for the lumber and also for the CNR ties (we still had a nice CNR contract going). You know, there was talk about the mine closing down three or four years before it did actually close down. We were contemplating **G** Should we take this timber berth or not, and then my dad thought, yes, we should because we can sell. Like we were selling **G** Some lumber at that point to Nelson Lumber in Edmonton, and they took all the surface lumber we had so that was kind of a stability for us. But when that timber went, then we had nothing. Everything was leased by Northwest Pulp and Timber.
- Murphy** So now you would have been able to complete your term on that one?
- Spanach** Yes.
- Murphy** But the agreement was that you couldn't get a new one.
- Spanach** Well, we could, but it was so difficult and so hard that I couldn't have managed. And then after that (not right in 1959 but after that), the CNR started cutting back on their ties (little track ties). So that would have been out. But still with the lumber, I think I would have been OK with Nelson Lumber because their demand was very high. At that time, Edmonton was booming, so that they could sell all the lumber they could get. So that would have been OK



for me for another few years. But, as luck would have it, with the fire there again I lost two camps and I lost a mill. Yes, it was a heavy loss.

**Murphy** And you didn't have insurance?

**Spanach** No heavens no because it was an arm and a leg to carry insurance in the woods. And it was really quite a scarcity, too. We didn't have too many fires at the time.

**Stevenson** The fire wouldn't have been the Gregg River fire to the west of you? That was a bad one that set back Northwestern.

**Spanach** It could have been, you know. I know it was a very bad fire, and it was the kind of fire that jumped. Like it was so hot just before the fire broke out, and they thought they had it licked, and then they turned around and here it was. The top of the tree would break off and start a new fire. My dad, my brother-in-law, and quite a few men actually got caught, and had they not been close to the river, I don't know what would have happened to them.

**Murphy** They had to go in the river to escape?

**Spanach** Yes. They were just lucky they were close to the river. And it was gettinG So close to the town, too, because I remember my sister had just had a child, and the policeman came to my house and asked me if I wouldn't look after the patient, which was her, and another older lady. It was up to me to take the patients and the drugs in case they had to evacuate. I guess he came maybe because my sister was there. So I had to pack my car up with all the drugs they had in the hospital, and I was on standby, but thank God the wind shifted. They didn't even have time to bring passenger cars to the people. They brought boxcars, and they were going to load the people into the boxcars, so they didn't have time to bring the passenger cars. And I was standing there just waiting, and people were putting their fridges into the ground and digging them over. Yes, so that was quite a life.

You know, when Mercoal closed down, what to do now? Where to go? Well, we had to go because the kids had to go to school. And the mine manager there came to me and said, "You know, they are doing a little bit of work at Coal Valley. Your Cats, the ones that you had road building for the lumber outfit, if you want to upgrade them, we will give you work at Coal Valley." Oh, God that was a big blessing. So I jumped for that. I traded in my two Cats. One was brand new, and one was a good second-hand one, and we went to work at Coal Valley. Then would you believe two weeks went by, and they lost the contract and I lost the job. What do you do?



So then BA (British American Oil Company) was up there exploring oil, so they gave us a few days' work here and there, and that is how we started the construction. That was another uphill battle. Not knowing anything about it and being a woman in the trade, I suffered so much. If you take when I came into Edmonton once to buy a truck. (Actually, I knew all about it because I learned with my husband.) You know, all the salesmen looked at me and laughed. They humiliated me. I left and came back with my dad. This would be about 1953 or 1954. I will never forget when I tried getting a loan to buy out the kids and a bond. Like, even the insurance man in Edson knew me really well, being the person that I was. He knew Bob really well. He highly recommended me. No, the company wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. "She is a woman." I marvel at all the things that women do nowadays. You know—but not in those days.

**(At this point, Amelia's son, George Spanach, joined the conversation. )**

**Murphy** So in 1953-54, the construction started?

**Spanach** No, it was after 1959. From up until 1959, it was all lumber and pertaining to lumber. You know after Bob died, there was a lot of people that refused to work there simply because I was a woman. They wouldn't work for a woman. As a matter of fact, we had one fellow there. I think it was towards the end of the month that Bob died, and so the cheques had to be issued. When I got this loan and I started paying the payroll, this man wouldn't take the cheque because it was signed by me. I had to get my dad to pay him.

**Murphy** That is astonishing.

**Spanach** Yes, very.

**Murphy** So you were really pioneering?

**Spanach** Kind of, yes. When Bob was living, all this stuff that I did I didn't think anything of it because he was at the head of everything. Whatever had to be done he did it. I was just there helping. But once I had to go on my own, then I realized, you know, that it wasn't.

**Murphy** Can you talk a little more about the lumber industry there? The sawmill industry? Let's go back to when your husband came to Mercoal. Did he bring his own mill down from Mountain Park, or did he build at Mercoal?

**Spanach** No, he had a little mill at Gregg River, and, when he started expanding, he brought it to Mercoal. He used it for the odd little bit that he needed. At first, he could not keep up with signing up ties, so he used to buy them at Corser, which was there. So he would get the ties



from Corser and go fill his contract until he got his bigger mill. Then he got his bigger mill, but he had this little one for two or three years in Mercoal, and then he had mills all over. He had the mill at Steeper, where he strictly sawed ties and some lumber. Then he had a camp, where he would cut the logs and cut the lumber. He had a huge camp. I am not sure whether it was called Mary, Gregg, or what, but you go towards Cadomin and then branch off the right, and it was just a huge camp. He had a mill there, and the lumber would be cut there and brought in already to load or be trucked wherever.

**Murphy** He sawed rough lumber, did he?

**Spanach** Yes, he had a planer actually at Steeper, too. The mine used mainly rough lumber, so the rough was for the mine companies, and the planed stuff was for housing or some of the stuff was shipped out.

**Murphy** Did the mine want fire-killed for their lumber, too?

**Spanach** No, green. The only fire-killed the mine used was for their props.

**Murphy** And his mills were powered. He didn't have steam mills? He used gasoline?

**Spanach** No, they were all powered by power units. He had a power unit there that was quite the thing in Alberta at the time. I had that picture, and I looked for it last night. I couldn't find it, but I will find it and I will get it to you. I think it was a Waterous, and they had the description of it. Like they advertised it, and, on the back of it, it said the capacity of the mill, who the mill belonged to, and where it was at. I am going to get that picture to you. It is very important.

**Murphy** Jerry Hespand always sawed his ties. He was hewing his.

**Spanach** No, he wasn't. It was my dad that did that. He lost his contract.

**Murphy** It would be tough to compete.

**Spanach** Yes, it was very tough to compete.

**Murphy** Then, when you are selling lumber to Nelson, what would you cut for them—dimension or cords?

**Spanach** Yes, they gave you the sizes. The mines used an awful lot of slabs, but I honest to God don't know what they used them for. But they used an awful lot. Probably any miner could tell you. I just don't know. And there again the ties. They used an awful lot of rough lumber. I don't know what for either. All I know is the props.



**Murphy** So you had pretty good utilisation of the logs, then?

**Spanach** Yes, like we said, nothing went to waste.

**Murphy** And you burned the sawdust or was there a market for it?

**Spanach** Not really. No, we didn't. Actually, the sawdust is still laying out there at Steeper. And, for all the others, we used to call them "green camps" (the lumber camps), if you ran into a sawdust pile anywhere, if you are on a fishing trip, then you will know it was Bob's sawmill there.

**Murphy** How was he naming your company?

**Spanach** He used to go by Robert Spanach, Timber Contractor. Then when he passed on, the bank or the law would not allow me to use it. I wanted to go under that name, and they let me go under the Robert Spanach Estate until it was settled. And then, once the estate was settled, they wouldn't let me. It had to be in my own name, so I wanted to keep his name in it, so then I called it Spanach Lumber Company.

**Murphy** What kind of meetings would you have with the forestry people?

**Spanach** They were all very nice. They were all very accommodating people, yes. Mr. Buck—his name is very familiar. He was in Edson for a long, long time.

**Murphy** I met him.

**Spanach** Did you? I met him, too. There was really no difficulty.

**Murphy** What sorts of things would he do? What was his job?

**Spanach** Like if somebody wanted a patch of timber, then they would give you the postings, and the posting would go to every lumber operator to tell you when the bid was. I honestly can't remember now how the bidding was done. There was bidding, but I can't remember how or what or why were we bidding. I did it all those years with my husband and later, but we had to de-post this timber. They would describe the timber, what was on it, exactly how many board feet you could get out of it, and all that sort of thing, and then whoever was in that business would get a notice. Then we would all march to Edson and give our bids.

**Murphy** Was it an auction or was it sealed tender?

**Spanach** It was sealed tenders. Most of the time sealed tenders. And, if I wanted a piece of timber and if there was nobody else wanting it, then there was nothing like that and they would



just say, "OK. Go ahead. Nobody else is interested." And then there is another gentleman. I wish I could think of his name. It may come to me. A couple years ago he was celebrating his wedding anniversary, and I recognized the picture and the name immediately. So I phoned him to congratulate them, and the poor man has Alzheimer's. But I can't think of his name.

**Murphy** Was he a forestry man?

**Spanach** Yes. We worked with him for years. He was so fair, it was really nice to deal with.

**Murphy** Was he at Edson?

**Spanach** Edson, and he may have been at Coalspur for a while. Coalspur acquired a forestry. At one time, they didn't have it. During my husband's time, I don't think they had it at Coalspur, but, then afterwards, they had one there. I think one of the people there was named Stanley. Ralph Stanley I believe was the forestry at the time there. But this gentleman that I mentioned was in Edson.

**Murphy** It would be interesting to know his name.

**Spanach** There I just said it to you I think—Mr. Buck. He was there for years. My husband was dealing with him when we got married, so he was there before and after. No, they were very easy people to get along with. They made sure that you cleaned your lease and took out everything that was on it. They always checked it out to make sure that you did. They would specify what was on it. Fire-killed—they knew exactly how much you should be getting out of it and that sort of thing, and then that was connected somehow with the compensation, I believe. I think you paid your compensation on board feet of lumber you sawed.

**Murphy** The rate of dues would be less on fire-killed than it would on green timber.

**Spanach** It was something to do with compensation, too.

**Murphy** Worker's Compensation. That might have been more hazardous.

**Spanach** I don't know exactly now, but I think I had something to do with it. Yes, and then we all had to build our own roads, and they were all winter roads. I remember one year Bob was going in to try and bring out the crops, and it had snowed a lot that year and I guess it didn't freeze properly. There was a lot of muskeg out that way. So he took in his Cats. That was the first Cat he owned, too, and he was marching it across the muskeg, and it went in. And then when it went in, it froze. So then he had to bring the mine company Cat from Cadomin, and



they had a heck of a time now trying to keep this guy out and not getting too close. They had to thaw the other one out in order to get him out. But they were afraid that this other guy would sink, too. So they ended up getting one from Luscar also—two of them to pull the one out. Then, a lot of times, they would load up two of these huge sleighs full of props and bring them in with the bulldozer. And then, when the road was nicely packed down and the bulldozer made a glaze through, the trucks would start hauling. But some of those roads were pretty good, like even in the summertime people used them for fishing. As long as you didn't run into muskeg, you were OK.



*Log Truck on Winter Road—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Murphy** How far away were the cutting areas from the mill itself? You mentioned Steeper. Is that where the mill was located?

**Spanach** That is where he had a planer and a small mill. Most planing was done at Steeper and tie cutting. He would have a mill set right in the middle of the timber berth, and then have the mill, the cookhouse, the works go together. Then it would be cut your logs and just haul them into the mill site.

**G Spanach** I thought he was in Lovett though, right?





**Spanach** Yes, but we had a mill there.

**G Spanach** But looking at the map, just to get an idea of the distance that ...

**Spanach** Yes, Lovett would probably have been—I don't know. That one by Cadomin was quite far, too. We would go to Craig's camp, and then from Craig's camp, we would turn right and go another at least ten or twelve miles.

**G Spanach** So Lovett would have been further?

**Spanach** Yes, and it was nice, you know. The countryside was beautiful out there. He also had a campsite at the edge of Mercoal, where he used to store these fire-killed logs, and he had some men staying there. So before the kids came along, and, shortly after we were married, we would walk out there in the morning. He would say, "Let's hike out to the camp and let's have breakfast with the cook." Well, you know, it would probably be 40 below, but you dress warm. You are walking fast, and there would be coyotes howling and wolves howling, but there was something picturesque about it. Like the fresh fallen snow, the crest of the moon, and all these things, you know the beauty of it. And I guess that is why I am so heart-broken now when they tell me I have to leave there. Because even now when I go up there, I think of the first day I met Bob and the things that we did when things were still going rough and his little broken down truck.

Oh, yes, he had a contract with the Department of Highways. He had this grader that you sat on and steered. He had one of those, and he had to keep what highway we had between Luscar and Cadomin. Actually, we did a lot of travelling through there, and then a little bit of travelling between Mercoal and Cadomin. There was just such a rough road, but he had to grade it every once in a while. So a buddy of his would pull the grader by the truck, and he would be handling this grader until better times came. Half the time, the truck would break down, and we had so many laughs over that. Then, depending where they were coming from, a lot of times I would walk up to Steeper with lunch to meet them and they would sit there. There was a little brook there, so we would make a picnic lunch and then I would head off. Sometimes, I would go for a ride on the grader, but it wasn't easy. I had to stand. There was only one seat on it, and, other times, I would just walk. But instead of walking behind the grader because it was so dusty, I would hike it down the railroad track. I would go faster than the grader, anyway.



*Hiking the Tracks [unknown girl]—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**G Spanach**

Did you ever go for a ride on one of the railroad speeders?

**Spanach**

Oh, yes, we did. As a matter of fact, one time we went to Cadomin and the truck broke down, and Bob had to get back because of business, so we rode on one of those. But it was one of those that we had to work for. It was a push-car. It was the one that you had to go like this on. We took turns on that, but you know we had fun. We stopped on the way to pick berries, and then we got home. Yes, there was no such a thing as a telephone, or, at that time, he didn't have one anyway. But it was shortly after we were married. He didn't have another truck. We just had that one truck, and it was forever broken down. Then he finally bought a brand new truck. A yellow Studebaker. Well, that thing was the talk of the town. All the kids ran over to look at it, and he gave everybody a ride in it.

**Murphy**

That was a truck?

**Spanach**

It probably would have been a half-ton. It was quite small. That was his first brand new vehicle, a Studebaker.

**Murphy**

That would have been a very heavy feeling, I suppose?



**Spanach** Yes.

**Murphy** When you were in the sawmill business, it sounded like you were running a crest of good markets for timber, but you ran through the wartime years when there was a demand. And then there was good peacetime in there?

**Spanach** Yes. During the war, you could have sold anything for anything. But he was so tied down to the mines, and he was very loyal to the mines, because the mines were the ones that gave him a start. So he kept that loyalty there, but, as he expanded, he could also sell a few sticks here and there.

**Murphy** Did you have trouble getting men to help work in the bush?

**Spanach** During the war, it was terrible. It was terrible. For a while there, they even had some Japanese prisoners of war up there. You had to keep them confined, and, of course, they are not your Swede or Norwegian sort of thing. In those days, the Swedish people, the Norwegian people, and the Slavic people— I don't know whether they had that background at home or the strength or what—but they were strong people and willing to work. Boy if you could get one of those, you would really consider yourself happy, and Bob had a couple of them. One of them actually was from Luscar. He was with him for years, and, another one, I don't know where he came from, but they were hard working men. My goodness, they would pick up those timbers, and loading those props into the boxcar. You know, it would take two men today to do it. That guy he put it on his shoulder like a toothpick and away he goes into the boxcar with it. Yes, it was quite the thing.

**Murphy** So those were all loaded down by hand, one by one?

**Spanach** Yes, by hand. I can't remember how long after the accident when he finally bought one of these loaders that could whip over and put a log on it and bring it back on the truck. That was the talk of the town, too. I will never forget. We had such a controversy over that because my father didn't think it was such a good idea. He was very old-fashioned, and he thought if you can't do it with your backbone, then it is not good enough. He couldn't figure out how this thing was going to work. They had this fellow who explained it to him and everything else, and, finally, Dad thought it over and he said, "Well, maybe it is not a bad idea." So we bought one, and, sure enough, it was a good idea.

**Murphy** Could you think about the time when the mill at Hinton was being proposed? I think the first agreement was made in about 1952. That must have been starting talk about it. Were the timber operators concerned about it?



**Spanach** The timber operators were very concerned. All of us that were there met several times with Norman A. Willmore.<sup>3</sup> He was the minister then. We begged him to leave us alone, and told him that the timber that the pulp company would be using we don't use anyway because of the size. But we met in Hinton. We met in Edson. We even met in Robb once, but to no avail.

**Murphy** Was there an explanation why?

**Spanach** I don't recall that there was. I know we were all cheezed off. There was Mr. Wagner from Robb. There was myself from Mercoal. The Crate from Cadomin. Corser, of course, and then the people around Edson. There were three or four small operators around Edson. They were all concerned, and they all wanted to be left alone but it wasn't to be.

**Murphy** And then the original mill was supposed to have gone in at Edson from what we understand.

**Spanach** Yes, there was a lot of talking that it might go in at Edson. I don't know how come Hinton got it. As a matter of fact, at one point, I think it was almost a sure thing that it would be Edson, but it went out to Hinton.

**G Spanach** He lost the dry cleaning laundry facility at Mercoal because he was so sure it was going into Edson, he moved everything into Edson.

**Spanach** Yes, you are right.

**Murphy** Really? Interesting. We understand there was a combination of the soil there on that old muskeg being judged not sufficiently solid for the weight of the mill and then they were concerned about low water flows in the McLeod River. So with that in mind they moved it up to Hinton.

**Spanach** Yes, it could be because there is a lot of muskeg around Edson. It is very muskeggy.

**Murphy** Were you at the famous meeting where Willmore apparently said that if you couldn't make it sawmilling, you could raise sheep?

**Spanach** Yes. There were a couple of verbal attacks on him that time. I can't remember now who it was, but, yes, you are right. He did make that statement. He said if you can't make it logging, go start raisinG Sheep.

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<sup>3</sup> Editor's note. Norman A. Willmore was the Social Credit MLA for the constituency of Edson from 1944 until his death in an automobile accident in 1965. Under Ernest Manning, he served as Minister of Lands and Forests from 1955 until his death.



**Murphy** And that is actually what he said?

**Spanach** Yes, that is actually what he said. I think a lot of people started disliking him from there on in. Not just the operators, but the people that worked for these operators, too, because let's face it, their jobs were at stake, too. Some of us took our people with us. Like the foreman would be there. Yes, he lost a lot of friends with that statement. I forgot that one until you mentioned it.



*Norman Willmore MLA 1960s—Weldwood Historical Photo Collection*

**Murphy** I remember reading about it, too. I was quite surprised for a politician to make such a statement.

**Spanach** Yes, he did.

**Murphy** He was re-elected wasn't he just the same?

**Spanach** Yes. I think so. It was in his riding, yes. I think he was re-elected.

**G Spanach** Wasn't he from Edson?

**Spanach** He was from Edson, and he was ministered here. He was minister. I can't remember for how long.

**G Spanach** Probably until his death.



**Spanach** Was it?

**G Spanach** Yes. He died.

**Murphy** He was killed on a highway.

**Spanach** That's right. It was around Edson somewhere. On the Edson highway he was.

**Murphy** Just the other side of Wildwood.

**Spanach** Yes, that is right. I don't remember all those things, but, if you talk about it, it comes back to me.

**Murphy** But your timber operators couldn't do anything collectively to lobby the government?

**Spanach** We tried, but we just couldn't, so we gave up. Then some people tried to work with the timber that the pulp company didn't need, like go into their berth, but it didn't work out. Like I know one of the people that worked for me rented my equipment and tried for a year, and he couldn't even pay his bills.

**Murphy** It wouldn't pay enough?

**Spanach** No. He just couldn't make it.

**Murphy** Was it the high cost of logging?

**Spanach** Yes, because you could only take a certain size out and the rest was theirs. And there was something else, too. I can't remember what it was that made it. It wasn't very feasible.

**G Spanach** One went to the mill, and the other went to the sawlog operators.

**Spanach** You are right.

**Murphy** So there would have been extra costs of handling, I suppose?

**Spanach** Yes, I think you are right. That was the one that did us in, yes.

**Murphy** And you didn't try yourself? You were still selling to Nelson, weren't you?

**Spanach** No, I knew I couldn't. I heard stories from others, and things were being dispersed. I knew I had to move on, anyway, because it was tough for the kids for school. So I thought now me leaving here and them being in Edmonton, and then this so-called good job came in. And I thought, "Well now, that is going to be the easiest job I have ever had." But it was good while it lasted, the whole two weeks. And that was it.



**Murphy** That was Coal Valley?

**Spanach** Yes.

**Murphy** And then what did you do? You went into general construction, roads?

**Spanach** Road or oil or anything that would get, and, there again, that was something that I always had to push one of the men ahead. If you thought the lumber business was a laughinG Stock, try to be in this business. This was hilarious. I will never forget. I went to City Hall once to get a license. We usually referred to a bulldozer as a Cat, so, of course, I went and I wanted a license for two Cats. Well, they sent me to get a license for a house cat. When I got to the house cat department, I started describing it, and this woman looked at me and thought I was nuts. Well, anyway, we both ended up having a good laugh over it. I ended up in the same place, and the guy that was selling me this licence just looked at me as if to say, "Lady, are you out of your mind?" And that is exactly how he treated me, too. But I got them.

**Murphy** Were you running your construction company out of Edmonton?

**Spanach** Yes. Well, we tried very hard. I had my father again and my brother-in-law and my brother helped a little bit, but there was just no work. None of us knew anything about that end of construction. We didn't know anybody that could maybe give us a guideline, and so what did I do? I would go to the City and pick up a little bit of City work here and there, which didn't lead to much. Then I would go to the government, and it was all picked up. But one year I had a hassle with them. They were doing a lot of work around Edson, so I went and everything was filled up. I said, "Well, you know I have had my name on the list for all this time. Everybody gets called up. Even people that live in Edmonton. I come from the area." Anyway to try and make a lonG Story short, I went to see Mr. Gordon Taylor who was the minister at the time, and I explained my story to him.<sup>4</sup> I said, "Look, I have got these bulldozers. I would like to get to work, and everybody else is getting work but me," and on and on I went. I guess the man had a heart in his chest, and so he accommodated me. Well, then, I guess it must have leaked out somewhere, so that everybody referred to it as "Mr. Taylor's Cat came to work to Edson." It was tough.

I ran into somebody that knew something about that, so we were looking for a house for a place to live, and this fellow said to me, "I have got a friend that has some work," and he

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<sup>4</sup> Editor's note. Gordon Edward Taylor was the Social Credit MLA for Drumheller from 1940 to 1979. From 1951 to 1971, he served as Minister of Highways under the Ernest Manning and Harry Strom governments.



did have. He recommended this friend, and we did get a little bit of work. So he phoned me one day and he said, "You know, there is more work out there, but he said you would have to look at it." And I said, "Whereabouts?" He told me, "Red Earth." And I said, "Well, I am going to get my dad, and we will send him out there." And he said, "Oh, no. You have to come look at it yourself." I said, "Why?" "Well, I am going out there. I am going alone, and I want you to come and bring a sleeping bag," he said. So I said, "OK. Goodbye. I don't need any more work from you," and I hung up on him. That was a sick attitude.

I didn't run into too much of that, but I did run into ridicule. You know, "What is a woman doing with a Cat"? Like, even when I looked for work with the government, I knew my equipment quite well at the time, so I could describe it to a T, and so they would say to me, "Well, instead of putting your bulldozer to work on the highway, why don't you come here and work?" And I would say, "Why now?" They would say, "Well, you know quite a bit about it." "But I have this machine. I have to pay it off. I have to send my kids to school. What is wrong with giving me work where I can earn a dollar?" I said. But it was the same old story, you know. "You are a woman, and what do you know about it." "Well, I am a woman, but I am not going to be running the machine. There is going to be an operator on that machine just like on Joe Blow's machine, so why not let me get in on it?" There was always a hassle. So I could hardly wait until he (referring to George) grew up, and I said, "Here. Go. Do what you want with what you can." But he was a heck of a lot better than his mother. He made a good success out of it. I never did.

**Murphy** Why? I think that is a remarkable achievement.

**Spanach** Just barely.

**Murphy** Did you ever meet Emma Nickerson or Lucy Berube from Hinton?

**Spanach** No.

**Murphy** I think they must have run into similar things. They were truckers themselves. They tried to make it go on that male-dominated area.

**Spanach** If they did, I will tell you they paid the price. Being raised in a small town and not having any education would also play on me because you get intimidated easily. Like had I been, say, in a big city where more things happened and being exposed to more things ... Actually, in Mercoal, everybody that knew me kind of protected me. Like the mine people, they went out of their way to help me out. They knew me as Bob's wife and felt bad for the tragedy,





so instead of ridiculing me, they were helping me out. But then when I tried this other part in a strange city, a whole new ball game, it was. It was tough.

The International Truck—like the old white one. One of the fellows was driving it, and, there was an overhead bridge by Steeper, and he just zoomed right off and down onto the railroad track. Well, we fixed up the truck and that sort of thing, but it was never again in the same shape. So I was in Edmonton once, and I decided to go to International to look. I had talked it over with my dad, and I was looking at it and this fellow said, "Can I help you?" I said, "Yes, I am interested in buying a truck." And he just looked at the other salesman beside him, and he kind of went like this and they started to laugh. And there is me standing there like a dumbbell looking at him. So then the next time I went, I armed myself. I went with my dad, and I went with the bookkeeper. I stood there to show them that this is going to be done in spite of them laughing and that, yes, it is my truck because I am writing the cheque, but these people are going to negotiate for me. So I don't know if it gave me self-satisfaction. I don't know how they felt about it.

**Murphy** That is incredible.

**Spanach** Yes.

**G Spanach** That is the past generation. I guess today, Peter, the transition seemed enforced. But you are right that women are now working in the construction industry, such as truck drivers, surveyors, and equipment operators. Not only that contribution, but they have a different attitude towards their jobs, which is very positive.

**Spanach** Well, it is strange because when the war broke out, that is really when the women started in the workforce. When the war broke out, there were just no men. Every man was called up to the army and I can't understand it. Like the women were accepted in those days. What did they call her?

**G Spanach** Rosie the Riveter.

**Spanach** Right. Yes. She was accepted, so why couldn't the rest of us be accepted? Like when my husband was alive, I worked hand in hand with him and learned a lot of things from him. Otherwise, I would have not known what to do on first base. Anything that I ever knew about this, I learned through working with him and going to camps with him and that sort of thing. So why wasn't it good enough that I do it on my own? No, it wasn't. I don't know.

**G Spanach** Women are now driving trucks.



**Spanach** Is that right?

**G Spanach** She (Amelia) cut her own lawn. She shovelled snow, and she came out of that Edson area. And that is Tony Roth's sister.

**Spanach** Well, you know something? I never thought anything of it. That was just part of my job to go and chop wood and fill the woodshed up with it. And I wouldn't think that there was anything wrong with that, but nowadays it has changed. That part of it anyway. You know, we would take our coal buckets and run to the coal shed and fill them up with coal and bring it in. Then you chop the kindling, and, if you are short on wood—like the miner's wives—you think, "Gosh, he is going to come home tired from the mine. I better go and chop some wood." And in my case with Bob, a lot of times, he would no sooner come home and somebody would say there is another breakdown here, a breakdown there, or drive me here—his time was never his own time.

**End of interview.**



## DISCUSSION OF PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDED WITH INTERVIEW

**Murphy** We are looking at photographs now. These are identified by letters. So whatever you can tell us about these photos ... ?

**Spanach** Photo A is definitely coming in from the bush somewhere because it is all level ground around one of the flats. But what flats? George what are flats called? I can't remember.

**Murphy** What is that man hauling?

**Spanach** These very well could be lumber logs.

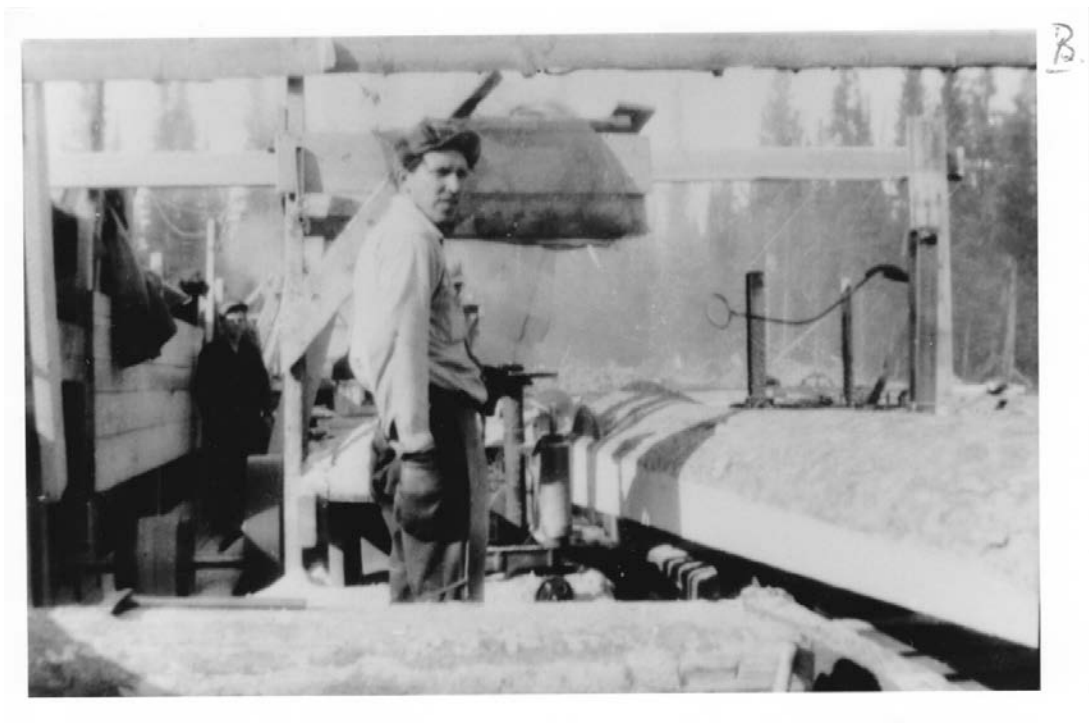
**Murphy** Are they cross-hauling?

(See photo in text: log truck on winter road)

**Spanach** Yes, they were all like that. This is coming in from camp.

**Murphy** From one of your bush camps?

**Spanach** Yes. Photo B: that's the mill, and that is the Sawyer standing beside it at Steeper.



*Sawyer at Steeper Mill—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Murphy** At your Steeper mill?



**Spanach** And this is actually just parked in front of the house. The house is out this way, and there is the truck and there is the school.

**Murphy** At Mercoal?



*Truck in front of Mercoal School—Mechanical Loader in b/g - Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Spanach** Yes. This is my husband with some of his friends. That was his first mill, and that was at Gregg River.

**Murphy** Do you know who any of those other people are?

**Spanach** No, but they are listed on the back of the picture. It was given to me by someone from Luscar, and he has got the names of the people here. The only one that I do know here is him, and that is him right near Bob.

I don't know who this is. It is a truck driver, and he is in one of the camps in the bush. He is just probably getting ready to load up.

**G Spanach** I will just interject for a minute. This is kind of the same photo as C, and that is that mechanical loader that they got? And, as far as we know, it was the first one in the area. I am not sure whether it worked on hydraulics or cable, but this frame here would lay down



and they would roll the logs onto it. Then they would put them back up, and then there was two pegs or stands at this other side to hold them when they flipped them over. Yes, it was. I remember that. I got to know lots of them.

**Murphy** So the mechanical loader was Photo C2.

**G Spanach** But you mentioned it in the earlier story, Mom. I think you forgot that what we were talking about was that mechanical loader.

**Spanach** Yes. Sorry. The loader that we were talking about earlier is on this. And that is my husband's first camp. That was some of the wives of the people that worked for him. I guess they just drove out for the day for a picnic and decided to pose for this picture.

**Murphy** Is that a sawdust pile in the background?

**(See photo in text: Bob Spanach and friends at first sawmill, Kaydee AB, 1939)**

**Spanach** Yes. This is somebody just in the bush camp. He is probably just getting ready to load up. I don't know who you have got here, George, on this white horse.

**G Spanach** I don't know who that is. I have no idea.

**Spanach** It is not Diana because her horse was brown.

**G Spanach** There is somebody standing by the Mercoal sign on the railway. I don't know who that is either. I just kept it there because it said "Mercoal—one mile".

**(See photo in text)**

**Spanach** This one is one of the workmen. I don't recall who he is, but, at any rate, it is probably his buddy just taking a picture of him, maybe after supper or something.

**Murphy** At camp?

**Spanach** Yes.

**Murphy** He built his own camps, then, of logs?

**Spanach** No this was provided for them. The bunk houses and this is log. Sure it is. Photo H: This is the mine site at Mercoal, with all the props loaded beside it.

**G Spanach** They are showing them the wood yard.



**Spanach**

Photo H1: that is the logs. This was probably during break-up, and somebody needed a bunch of timber, so it was shipped by rail because the trucks couldn't manoeuvre because of the roads.



*Log Decks at Mercoal Mine 1940s—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Murphy**

Are those mine props?

**Spanach**

Yes.

**Murphy**

And they were shipped standing on end?

**Spanach**

Yes.

**G Spanach**

We have pictures of some of those.



J  
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*Log Truck with Mine Props—Note Rail Cars in b/g—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Spanach**

Photo K: this again is the mill (one of the mills, but I am not sure which one or where).



— Steeper Mill —

K



**Murphy** So even towards later days the mills were all opened, were they? They are not closed in?

**Spanach** They were covered. They had a roof over them. That was about it.

**G Spanach** The roof would just span over the planer, I think.

**Spanach** Well, actually across the whole operation, I think.

Photo L: this would be at Steeper. This is where the landing was. That is where all the surplus went, and we used to do our loading there because we had side tracks there. This is just finished loading at the camp, and he is ready to come to Mercoal.

**Murphy** Those are good sized logs.

**Spanach** Yes. That is going to the mill.

**Murphy** Was his saw big enough in diameter that he could handle those size logs?



*Log Truck with Large Logs—Steeper—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Spanach** Yes. Photo M: this is somebody. He is just leaving the bush to come to Mercoal, again loaded up.

**G Spanach** That is an old Ford truck, is it?





*"auto chains"*

*loaded with sleigh behind.*

*M.*

*Log Truck with Sleigh—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Spanach** Do you notice the chains on it? You couldn't go without chains anywhere then.

**Murphy** And he is hauling a sleigh beside?

**Spanach** Yes.

**Murphy** Is that the sleigh you were talking about before?

**Spanach** Yes. Mercoal—I have no idea who this is, and this is our cook. He was a fantastic cook that guy.



**G Spanach**

That is with a team of horses.

**Spanach**

A team of horses. He was probably giving them sugar or something.

**Murphy**

Did you ever have occasion to cook in camps? Did you ever have to fill in?

**Spanach**

I did once. Actually, our cook got sick, and it was at the landing, but nonetheless it was the camp. Yes, I cooked for about three days.

**Murphy**

By then, you were accustomed to cooking for large numbers?

**Spanach**

Yes, at home I had learned. There was always dogs and kids playing together with all the snow. This is an old picture. It is like in the early 1930s when I first arrived there.



Photo: this is an accident. I can't remember how this Cat went over. He just slid over on his side, and the other guy is trying to pull him out of the ditch. This was between Mercoal and Steeper.

**Murphy** Was the Cat alone or was it on a truck?

**Spanach** It wasn't on a truck. They must have been walking it.

**Murphy** It was just another incident, then?



- Spanach** Yes. You could see the good old-fashioned way of lifting it with the logs. Right up with the log and then give it a heave-ho! You don't have any of the grader here with Dad on it, have you?
- G Spanach** Not with him on it. There is one there, I think, of a trucker Chap [???
- Spanach** If that is the case, then, I am sure he would be on it.
- G Spanach** Peter, in those days, remember that equipment was moved by truck. If they [???] just had to go [???
- Spanach** This fellow turned out to be one of the best Cat operators we had. He later went on to marry my sister, and, when we started this construction, wherever we got a job, they would ask if Mike was going to operate the Cat. That is how good he was. Unfortunately, he died very young, too.
- Murphy** It would be interesting to see the cable controls on those.
- Spanach** Yes.



- Spanach** This is leaving the bush. This is from tie camp. He has got a load of ties there, and he is ready to go. He is going to unload them at Steeper, and do you notice how deep the snow is? There are a couple of shacks here, but they are all covered up and you can just see the peak of the roof here. We used to get some dandy snowfalls up there.
- Murphy** And then you would have to use Cat, too.
- Spanach** And then not only the snowfall, but then it would drift in. It would be terrible.
- Murphy** And then the ties were loaded onto cars?
- Spanach** On CNR cars, and then they were all shipped to Winnipeg.
- Murphy** Why to Winnipeg?
- Spanach** I don't know, but they all went to Winnipeg.
- G Spanach** This one is Photo U, and it is of the truck. It had the company name.
- Spanach** I am not sure if this is Steeper. I think this is Steeper. Photo XX: this would probably be at Spruce Camp, too. There are a lot of buildings here, so it must be one of the big ones. That would be lumber.



- Murphy** Just going back to Photo U. Is that the sawmill in the background?
- (See photo in text: **truck with lumber 1950**)
- Spanach** No. I am not sure if this is in the bush or if this is at Steeper. I think it is Steeper, but I am not sure—the landing.
- G Spanach** That is at Steeper.
- Murphy** You don't know who the guy driving is?
- G Spanach** Yes. That is Bill Kosnitia. There were two brothers. They used to come from Spedden and work for Dad up there. In the winter months but in the summer they farmed.
- Spanach** Yes, it really worked out good. In the summertime, they would work their farms, and, then in the wintertime, they would come up and work in the logging camps, and it was good for both.
- Murphy** Were the logs skidded by horses?
- Spanach** They were skidded by horses. We had our own horses. Photo XX: this could be at Steeper also.
- G Spanach** I think this was in one of the bush camps. Just by the background. There is the forest in the background here and Steeper, and the way the mill ran it probably would have been.
- Spanach** Well, there was bush across the road at Steeper.
- G Spanach** I am just guessing, too.
- Spanach** Let's call it the Bush Camp. We are not far off. It is all in the bush anyway.
- G Spanach** That is B. There are a couple here. This one, Photo W, is that the road grader when he did the work for the highway?
- Spanach** Yes. That is the grader. Sometimes, he pulled it by truck and here he is pulling it with a little Cat. Yes, they would be grading the road between Luscar and Cadomin and also Mercoal and Cadomin. But more Luscar because they used that road between Luscar and Cadomin more than we did between Mercoal and Cadomin because it was very poor. Just a little bit of rain and you got stuck, and you stayed there. You walked home, whereas Luscar the grade was different and the soil was harder, so that even if it rained a little bit, you could still get through.



- Murphy** So there were always two guys?
- Spanach** Yes, and Bob usually did the steering. I don't know why. I shouldn't say steering. It would be angling of the blade, you know, how you are going to turn the blade to get the proper angles. In the summertime, that was a little bit of extra income, in the early days when he first started. That came in very handy. And when he expanded, he didn't have the time anymore, and, by then the government kicked in with their graders and stuff.
- G Spanach** [??] didn't figure he had the wherewithal and just left home. He went back with his brother and came in, and he wanted to see the boss. So they saw the boss and wanted to know how much that Cadillac cost, and how much would it cost for two. Well, the boss was staying pretty up with them because he didn't think they had the wherewithal either, so Dad said he wanted a red one or white one or whatever. So he worked out a number, and he said, "No. How much for two for cash?" He opened up his briefcase, and he had all the cash in the briefcase.
- Spanach** So I guess they started talking, then, did they?
- Stevenson** But there are people around. I know a couple that just bought a Buick Regal, and they just wrote the Bank of Montreal, Tofield.
- Spanach** And this is the station at Mercoal.
- This is the town in 1931. That is the year I arrived there. You can see that boxcar standing there. It probably took two years for that thing to move off the railroad because most of the coal then was shipped in gunny sacks because people would order a sack of coal, and that was it. It wasn't a carload. This is in 1926. That is the main street in Mercoal. The hotel, the pool hall, and whatever else they had there ... and this was later on when the hotel was built up a little more.
- Murphy** But that wasn't your husband's enterprise?
- Spanach** No, this was though. This was the hall there.
- Murphy** Was it a community hall?
- Spanach** A community hall and theatre. Actually anything that you needed a hall for, and, even once in a while, we would have a church service there. Then we had one small Catholic Church in Mercoal, but, like at Christmastime, the local priest would have a general service for



everybody, so then we would have it in the hall because the capacity held us all there, whereas in the little church there was no room.



*Community Hall built by Bob Spanach—Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Murphy** Then would somebody bring in movies for the hall, then?

**Spanach** Yes, we had a person there that operated the projector. But we had movies two or three times a week.

**Murphy** And they were talkies by, then, too.

**Spanach** That was quite a busy hall for a while. This is the one with the garage. That was my husband's.

**Murphy** The garage in the foreground.

**Spanach** Along the highway, yes.

**Murphy** And then the mine in the background.





**Spanach** That is the townsite in the background. Well, yes, there is still part of the mine up here, too. That is the mine there. There is the highway. There is the garage.

**G Spanach** That is an aerial view. I haven't seen that one before. Then there was a mill right in town there.



*Aerial View Mercoal - Amelia Spanach Collection*

**Spanach** That was there and gone before I got there.

**G Spanach** There is a bald spot there, Peter.

**Murphy** Of the sawmill?

**Spanach** Yes. I guess that was in the boom days before the Depression.

**Murphy** And what number was that?

**Stevenson** That was A3.



- Spanach** Photo H: that is the mine. (See earlier photo)
- Murphy** It shows the timber piles and mine props. Do you recall what year those were or approximately?
- Spanach** Well, they had to be during the booms, so it had to be during the late 1940s or early 1950s.
- Murphy** That was the rebuilt garage?
- Spanach** That was the rebuilt garage, the one that burned down.
- Murphy** Thank you very much for doing this interview with us, and for your hospitality. It has been an interesting and insightful afternoon.

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## Amelia SPANACH



SPANACH, Amelia

April 15, 1926 – April 21, 2012

Mom passed away on Saturday, April 21, 2012, as she lived her life; peacefully, with dignity and surrounded by the support and love of her family.

Amelia will be dearly missed by her son, George (Linda); daughter, Diana (George); brother, Mike (Rita); six grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews. Amelia was predeceased by her husband, Robert; daughter, Mary; parents, George and Mary Pankovich; brother, Dusan; and sister, Annie Marinkovich.

Amelia will be remembered for her integrity, compassion, and dedication to her family and church. Funeral Service will be held on Thursday, April 26 at 10:00 a.m. at St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church, 12904—112 Street N.W. His Grace, Right Reverend Bishop Georgije of Canada, Reverend Dragomir Ninkovic, and Very Reverend Father Mircea Panciuk officiating with interment in Edson Glenwood Cemetery. In lieu of other tributes, please consider making donations to the St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church, which will be forwarded to Serbian Orphans.