

IRON RANGE RESEARCH CENTER

Oral History Interview

NAME: Martha Martilla

OF TAPES: 1

INTERVIEWER: Jerre Pete

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PLACE:

ACCESSION #:

Tape 1/Side 1

(Interviewer) Jerre Pete: I guess what we're gonna do is try to uh, the history of the Vermilion Reservation and uh, maybe talk or something about the school, and uh, something about the people you knew. If you want to start off, you can tell us about where you were born and when you started teaching and stuff like that.

Martha Martilla: I was born in Tower and I started teaching at the Reservation in 1936 I think it was. My mother died in January and I teach right after. It's either 1936 or 1937. Oh, I know so many of those people. Oh, they were such nice families and oh - they respected me and it was very, very nice. My best teaching days were out there. I spent seven years out there. And I had coffee in several of the homes after school, and then I also visited with women after school outdoors and in some of their homes. Grandma and Grandpa Pete were right next to the school and I always talked to them there. In the spring and fall they were always sitting outdoors. And Annie Chosa was - wasn't far from

the school and I'd have coffee and doughnuts with her. She'd make fresh doughnuts and I'd have coffee and doughnuts with her after school.

I: Do you remember how many kids were in school at that time?

MM: Oh, probably... I had probably about 12 or 15 and probably... well maybe the upper... I had first, second and third and the upper grades - they were probably about the same number of children. We had two rooms. We had oil here. I didn't have to worry about the heat. And, of course, we didn't have running water; we had outside toilets. But eh, the bigger children carried in the water so we didn't have any problem. But we had to clean up. We didn't have a janitor, we had to clean our own rooms. Keep them nice and clean. And we had - normally we had a full meal and one of the women from the Reservation would come and cook a meal and they were very, very good. I just looked forward to eating those meals every day! I used to get there around seven o'clock in the morning so I was hungry by noon.

I: Yeah.

MM: Spotlessly clean! Dishtowels were boiled after each meal and everything was so clean and nice. And Thanksgiving time, just before Thanksgiving they had a big Thanksgiving dinner at the school and... and then they plant... well, we planted a garden so uh, they had a nice garden and uh, the upper grades worked on the garden most of the time. I taught sewing to the older girls and they made shorts and tops and, mostly out of flour sacks. I died the flour sacks different colors and then they made clothing out of that.

I: Uh, what else do you remember about the school? Was there kids uh, children that came from uh, different places in uh...

MM: You mean from out there?

I: Yeah.

MM: Most of the children were right from there except a few from Lake La Croix for a matter of weeks, end up be weeks. But they all lived in that same area. I used to stop at uh, "School Rock." Dan used to come pick me up and I used to walk. Sometimes I'd walk to Columbus' house. Columbus' was on the road, you know. Just before...

I: *(Unclear.)*

MM: Yeah. And I would visit with her and wait for my transportation. Then they could just turn around there. They didn't have to come way to the school. And I used... sometimes I'd visit with the Gawboy family, had coffee with them after school sometimes.

I: Was that the Gawboy in ...

MM: His folks. Jim. Jim Gawboy and Helen.

I: Did you know the Chief over... John Sahabadio? When he was the Chief?

MM: Yes. I used to go, his grandson... I don't remember his name -

I: Wallace.

MM: Wallace. And he was very shy and didn't want to come to school. So I'd go practically every morning and pick him up. And it was quite a long ways to walk. He'd come. The chief wasn't feeling so good. He'd be always lying down on the davenport. I didn't even see him at that point. He was very shy. I went to get him, he'd come to school, I had no problem there.

I: Maybe I should ask you some questions about the *(unclear)* Some of the other stuff that went on in the area here. Maybe fishing and trapping and more, maybe? What do you remember about that?

MM: The sawmill was in operation every winter.

I: Yeah. It probably was.

MM: It seems they had some big doings in the summertime. I remember, I remember frying hamburger and it must have been a summer occasion of some sort. I think that as I remember. Making and selling hamburgers there. Real big occasion. I think it may have been like in June or something.

I: Did they have Pow-wows here every year at the Reservation too, then?

MM: Yeah, they did. Yes. But they were on lots of weekends, so I didn't have any part in part in them *(Unclear)* And some of my students would stop in and visit me at, when I'd come, when I was at home. They'd come - some would even stay overnight with me over the weekend. Yeah.

I: I'll have to think. Try to think now. You used to have celebrations too, at that reservation. Canoe races and stuff?

MM: Yeah, that's right. The classrooms were in that old laundry building. We put two classrooms in it. They were kind of drab, I remember. I made curtains to put on there. 'Cause I had the primary grades, and I had curtains on all the windows so they would look more homey.

I: There used to be a number of buildings at that school up there? And later on there was just that one building.

MM: Yeah, right. Yes they were all torn down, weren't they? Weren't they those old buildings out there. What did they call them. You know, when they came and stayed right at the school?

I: The boarding houses.

MM: Yeah. Boarding. They came, right, and stayed there. That was.... Yeah. Mrs. Gawboy, she must've been the teacher before I was there. She... I don't know who was in between me and her.

I: Yeah, 'cause like, I think one of them buildings, Reuben's still got that one building up there, that was moved from the Reservation.

MM: There was one building, I think my cousins bought a building from there. And that was moved across the lake and there are several other buildings in town there that were moved from the Reservation. In the wintertime they used...

I: They used horses to move them, huh?

MM: Yeah. *(There is a short pause in the conversation.)* Yeah, they were all good cooks. Many different people that came in, stayed for a short time, and then they'd get somebody else. Lenore Driscoll, she came. She's at the nursing home. I visited her in Ely. She's at the nursing home. She was cook many times a week, and her mother - Annie Chosa, and your mother and...

I: My aunt, too.

MM: Yeah, Aunt. Mary. Yes, Mary. I can't think of who all. They were such good cooks.

I: I think, what's her name. Alice Long was her name.

Unkown voice: Mary? Mary Donald?

I: Mary Donald. She cooked there too.

MM: I read Christmas programs. That was fun. Every body came. It wasn't much room in the classrooms, but we managed! We had lunch after the program.

I: What about that farm they had up there then? Was that in operation at the time you were there?

M: Well, we had a garden there. Now that has all homes. Was that the place that guy has all new homes built?

I: On *(unclear)* Point out there?

MM: Yeah. Yeah, I worked with Miles Nelson. He was the upper grade teacher there. And then he was there for a few years, then a teacher by the name of "Dennio" came. I think... I can't remember if Dennio was before Miles Nelson, or after Miles Nelson.

I: I remember him. Mr. Dennio.

MM: Yeah, Dennio. Yeah. *(There is a short silence here.)* After lunch some of the older boys used to come at night. I lived around George Clayman. They would teach me quite a few Chippewa words and I had quite a vocabulary, but I've misplaced them so I don't know where they are. I wish I had them! I wonder where I put them? They'd teach... I'd say "How do you say this word?" And they'd say them. I had quite a vocabulary. I always knew when they were talking about me. I knew enough words there! *(Laughs)*

I: That's the first thing you learn.

M: You learn, right! I imagine a lot of the homes have been torn down. Where Harry Boshey lived. He wasn't too far from the school.

I: It must've been most of the people like close by there. 'Course, Admins lived there. Tom Boshey.

MM: Yeah, Tom. Tom Boshey. Oh, yes. I remember ... where he lived.

I: George Curry.

MM: Yeah. And Howard Pete's family, and Alice Pete. Peter Pete. I would get there around 7:00. Between 7:00 and 7:30, and get home around 6 o'clock. It was a long day, but... Yeah, that was my first years of teaching. I really enjoyed it! I think of them, It would be very often! Yeah, if I see any on the street they all recognize me, you know. The grocery store and that. I imagine they're all new people there now too. From Nett Lake and... Yeah. People that know it all.

I: Like a lot of them, I believe half of them people that would, you know, move in.

MM: How many new homes have they built now?

I: Six. And they're going to make 6 more.

MM: Good night! Are they in the same area where...?

I: Yeah.

MM: I suppose a lot of the people from there are employed at the Bingo.

I: Yeah.

MM: Employment for a lot of people, anyway!

I: Yeah. That casino put a lot of people to work.

MM: Oh, that's good!

I: And they got that whole building now, and they're going to add more yet!

MM: Yes. People from Tower and Soudan are making... And Range towns. They come from quite a distance, don't they?

I: So, they got a big (*unclear*) up there. What else went on out there, you know, a long time ago. Anything else? That you can remember?

MM: I can't think of anything else. Like I said, I should've had a diary. Kept a diary. Now I'm keeping a diary of different things that I do. Yeah. Interesting.

I: Yeah. You know if you knew, too, it was going to go on like this you could've done it back then. You wouldn't have a ribbon.

MM: Um Hmm. That's right.

I: Is there a lot of tape?

Another voice: No. Just is about done now. Yeah. It doesn't have to take long.

I: When you want to quit, just quit. It goes about a half an hour.

Another voice: You ever been up to Ely to interview Frank Toutloff? Did you know him?

MM: No I didn't. I had heard of him.

I: Jerry interviewed Mary Anderson.

MM: You know, I've heard of her so much, but I've never seen her.

I: Who are some other people?

Another voice: Jim Windigo.

I: Anybody that's had anything to do with it. (*unclear*) In fact, we were going to try to do my aunt out in, from New York. Rosemary.

MM: Rosemary?

I: Yeah. But she passed on.

MM: Oh. Was she Rosemary Cutiff?

I: Yeah.

MM: Oh, yes. She spent several weekends with me. Oh yes. She passed on.

I: And then there's Margaret.

MM: Rosemary. She lived way in New York.

I: She lived up here for awhile. About 5 years.

MM: Yeah. I used to see her occasionally. Real nice girl. Rosemary. She had that uncle - the (*unclear*). Yeah. She used to talk a lot about him.

I: Well, I want to thank you for all your help.

MM: It wasn't much! I've enjoyed doing it. I really enjoyed it. My contact with the reservation... We were in business for so many years, my Dad was in business for years and years and years and he stopped. He had a lot of those Indian friends, you know. He talked about those people so nicely.

I: You never took any pictures of the people out there?

M: No, isn't that funny? When I was teaching? No. What was his name... he just died shortly, maybe this past summer. Olson? Ted Olson. Yeah, Ted Olson was there for... He was there for about 6 years. I beat him by one year. I was there seven years. And he just passed on this past summer. Ted Olson. I think he probably lived in the cities. I really didn't know much about him. He had some relatives here and they mentioned to me that he had died this past summer.

End of tape.