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Date: 2010 interview about the 1940s

Description: Albert Buswell talks about sheep shearing time when he was a boy on his family farm on Swans Island.

Interview with Swans Islander Albert Buswell about sheep shearing in the 1940s

My name is Albert Buswell lifelong resident of Swan's Island. Well, my parents were Ted and Alberta Buswell. Somebody gave my mother we called them 'yows'. Of course it's really yew but on the island we always called them 'yows'. It was sort of a pet for us kids and then I guess they had it bred and it had lambs and you know it, things progressed and they had two or three sheep, so we got permission to put sheep on Harbor Island and you know the flocks they grew and basically the sheep pretty much took care of themselves until we would go on and round them up to shear them and also to take off the male lambs for eating and we'd sell them around the island, you know. We'd round up friends you know you 'aught a' go on the island and chase sheep. "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, all ready to go" and we'd try to drive them into a fence and they'd get away and then we'd have to drive them again and go back another day or sometimes we'd just run them down to the shore and that's what we kids did.

And then we had these hand shears. And all of us kids learned how to shear sheep. We usually take a picnic maybe some of us hadn't been there for a whole year and you'd walk around the beaches and there is always stuff that drifted up you know, lobster buoys that belonged to so and so and you take them back and give them to 'um'. It was a great life, you know.

On one occasion we had this big ram and we thought it would improve the breed. They'd get better wool you know and so forth and so they put this big ram on the island with our "yows". Well, when it came time to round them up we got them in the fence that ram was you know like twice the size of the others. So my mother got the job of shearing it. So my father it was custom to tie two legs fore and aft and that was enough to keep the sheep under control. So my mother was shearing away and either the knot slipped or the buck somehow got away from that rope and he got all four legs under him and he got up. And my mother was hollering for help clinging to that ram and they went rolling down the slope with the wool half sheared, you know, that was trailing out behind and they were rolling over and over and she was trying to hold on to him 'till my father could get there. Well, in the process the old ram kicked her in the leg. For days after that she really hobbled around, but she got better. Many, many, years later when she was having her ailments and having to go to the doctor and they gave her the x-rays... The doctor walked in and said "I see you had a broken leg at one time." "Oh no, no," she said. "I never had a broken leg." (laugh) "Yes," he said, "right there that was broken at one time." and she remembered that story about that ram and how he'd kicked her and she had hobbled around and she'd been walking on that broken leg all that time. (laugh) We were tough in those days, really tough. So that was about all I can tell you about the sheep. It was just an extra source of income. The old story is that everyone says we were all poor but didn't know it. That was

very true. Never had a lot of money. (laugh) My whole entire life never had any money, you know. Never really missed it. As they say, rich in other ways. Yup. Really.