

The following transcript of  
Thomas “Tom” Davies’ interview  
on

*Memories and Music*

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: Tom Davies  
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1981; Chairman, Regional  
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THEME: Establishment of regional government in Sudbury; the political career of Tom Davies; projects in Walden, such as the Anderson Farm.

G.P. Welcome to "Memories & Music." Today my guest is Tom Davies, an individual who is well-known in the area and particularly has been mayor of Walden for a number of years and currently is acting chairman of the Regional Municipality of Sudbury. On our program today we'll be recounting his involvement in politics particularly in Waters Township and the community of Walden.

(Music)

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G.P. Welcome back to the interview section of "Memories & Music." Tom Davies, acting chairman of the Regional Municipality of Sudbury, is our guest today. Tom, you became actively involved in politics, I think it was around 1969.

T.D. Yeah about '68 actually, the beginning of 1968.

G.P. What prompted you to go into politics?

T.D. Well it was a statement that was made one night at a social gathering that I was at with my wife where people at the table were complaining about a new zoning by-law that was going in which seemed to be very restrictive. And a friend of mine, Jim Kiss, who had come from Hungary and his wife from England, stated very point blank that everybody were like the rest of the Canadians. As long as you have two cars in the driveway, a coloured TV set and a split-level home you don't really care what's happening around because there seems to be apathy in regards to government, local council meetings. In fact, at the time they were talking about the apathy of the people showing up at the union meetings and that. And I kind of took that to be offensive and when I really examined that and when we really got into the subject I realized that really yes I hadn't been doing my homework. And it seemed to be like the rest of the



T.D. people at the table; if there was a question between a council meeting involving what the way of life would be for me and a hockey game that you'll find most of the people will watch the hockey game. So I got upset with myself that night and I was determined then that I would run in the following election and I did and was successful and became the Deputy Reeve of Waters township.

G.P. You recall who your opponent was?

T.D. Not at the time, I can't recall who was running in that ward at the time.

G.P. You had a ward system, did you?

T.D. Yes.

G.P. You were running in Waters Township?

T.D. Yes. Well, it was set up where you had a small area but you had in that Waters Township (which I consider a ward today of the town of Walden) there was several people who ran at large for that position on the council and that. I can remember at the time being there with people like Marc Laframboise and Oakley Pawson, Jim Kiss, Andy Pakkala, and Charlie White and some of the others.

G.P. Now you were elected as a councillor. Would that be the term?

T.D. I was elected, yes, as a councillor and, determined by the highest number of votes, that you were then assumed to be the deputy reeve at the time. Charlie White at the time was the reeve.

G.P. Charlie White was the reeve. Now this occurred in the fall of . . .

T.D. '68.

G.P. Right and you were involved as a councillor and deputy reeve until 1970.

T.D. Right. In 1971 I sold my businesses out. I took the year off as I've explained earlier and I reflected on the situation, studied to see what was the effects of the Kennedy report. I was constantly involved with all of those meetings. I remember meeting with Mike Solski and a lot of the reeves like Mayors Coady and Pelland today in regards to what was going to take place in 1973, January of 1973. I was successful, I'd five opponents at that time and two of those opponents, by the way, Bert Squirell and Charlie White are on my council today in the town of Walden.



- G.P. We were talking about the election for the Mayor of Walden.
- T.D. Right. The first . . .
- G.P. Election, right. You had five opponents.
- T.D. Five opponents, right.
- G.P. Tom, who were the movers back in 1972, the strong promoters of regional government in the area?
- T.D. I can remember Mayor Solski from Coniston was one of the prime people that went around to each one of the outside area municipalities in regards to this. Other than that the people that we were involved with were Municipal Affairs people from the Ontario government.
- G.P. Ontario government.
- T.D. Right.
- G.P. But locally, certainly Mike Solski's name would (unintelligible)
- T.D. Locally Mike Solski's name was there. He was the one that had the acquaintances, the knowledge, knew who the people were on the outside, and he arranged for all kinds of meetings with the outside area municipalities to bring them up to date with what was happening.
- G.P. These would be information sharing meetings in various areas?
- T.D. Some information sharing. Trying to . . . at that time nobody was quite sure what was going to happen because the Kennedy report had just come out. And after all the mains were down, I can't remember one local council in the area that was really for it. It was sort of put in the legislation was passed and that's the way it was. Not only did Copper Cliff, fight not to amalgamate with the city of Sudbury at the time but there were also resolutions passed by each one of the area councils that I can remember within the whole Sudbury District that they didn't want to participate at that time. I think it was felt by Mr. Solski, too, that the people didn't understand it that much and this is why the series of meetings went on. However it came about. The first election ironically was held in the early fall of 1972 so I was elected to office in October of '72 but didn't take office actually until 1973, January the 1st. So in that interim period where it was in limbo. . . it was quite difficult for a lot of people who had jobs at the time. I had, of course, I had sold my businesses so I had the time to spend - October, November, and December - in putting the whole thing together. At that time we had



T.D. 13 amalgamations of townships with the town of Walden coming . . . The name at the time, also, is very interesting.

G.P. That's what I wanted to ask you about.

T.D. We had 13 different townships, towns, and villages, etc., like Whitefish in the Naughton area and Creighton and Lively and Waters Township, Drury, Denison, Graham Townships, Lorne, Louise, Hyman, Trill, parts of Fairbank, Creighton, - all amalgamating with all these different roads boards with all their different books and that having to be put together so that it would be one by January the 1st. When you, we're talking about how did the name Walden come about we had all kinds of public input in regards to the new name for the town because of course we couldn't use the 13. And the final decision was made. There was a fellow who was a councillor in the town of Lively named John Robertson who came up with the name Walden. And the biggest townships, of course, at the time, or the populated areas, were Waters, Lively, and Drury, Denison, and Graham and what they did was actually take the 'W' from the Waters, 'Wa', 'den' from . . . Drury, Denison and the 'l' in the middle for Lively, and that's how the name came about.

G.P. So it was a term or a name rather that seem to please the majority of the people.

T.D. Right, right, Gary.

G.P. A very wise decision, I think, looking back.

T.D. Well it was acceptable.

G.P. Tom, you mentioned that there was quite a bit of opposition, once the government was formed - the Region. Why would there be opposition in the communities? I know it perhaps varied from area to area but in terms of your area?

T.D. You had local animosity where different roads boards and that disappeared. In our case, you know, I think there were about five or six different roads boards. You had councils of the different townships disappearing and . . . one, two, I should say two different representatives from each township being elected and so I think the people sort of felt at that time that they had very close access to the people that represented them and they didn't know the system was going to work. A lot of the outside area municipalities, of course, saw the writing on the wall . . . the unorganized townships especially, because at that point they hadn't been paying for such things as hospitals and welfare, etc., etc. Some of them we even found had been under the control of the Espanola Board of Education and a lot of updating had not been done because they didn't have the resources to . . . in



T.D. the summer camp areas, and that, where they hadn't been taxed properly for school taxes . . . So people saw right off the bat that they would be, be being brought into line for them to contribute along with not only the city of Sudbury taxpayers but the places like Lively and Waters township and the rest of it. So I think that fear factor was there and of course it was justified when you look back on it now because the taxes did come up. It was only fair that they would contribute to the system too.

G.P. And in turn receive certain benefits along the way.

T.D. Oh yes. In return they received a lot of benefits. There were a lot of negotiations that went on at that time taking over roads with the Ministry of Transportation and Communications - the start-up costs. A great deal of deliberation taking over of cemeteries and landfill sites, of course. With legislation coming down, they had to be closed. It was quite an involved time. I can tell you that it seemed like every night there was meetings, meetings, and meetings, till 1, 2 o'clock in the morning and internal staff that you had to amalgamate - bring together, of course. Through the years they had been rivals 20 years previous to that and you had to bring them all together a . . .

G.P. They had to sit around a common table.

T.D. That's right and do a job. And we were very fortunate. We had a good staff, well-qualified. Some of the people that worked part-time decided to not come in-house, that they would stay with their present jobs . . . some of them, like one of the oldest fellows, Ben Moxam who was probably the fellow that taught me more about municipal politics and how the inter-workings (unintelligible) more than anyone else. He decided to stay with Inco because he only had a few years left for his pension so it made room. We had a couple of transfers out, people go out back to their homes, job openings that come up. So our whole office amalgamated at that time and because there was so much work to do there was no time for any petty jealousies and it worked out beautiful.

G.P. It's often been a successful formula in other areas.

T.D. Right.

G.P. Well, you can well imagine the anxiety of the constituents at that time because they have been accustomed to a political system for years and it seemed like a very sudden change I suppose.

T.D. Yes and even within the city . . . the city core. They'd had some bad experiences with a previous amalgamation, the years before, that was McKim, and I think they were looking



T.D. at it that it would be a lot worse than what it was. But it . . . I can remember the first few years in regional government. It was beautiful. Whether it was the cost of people not knowing each other and having respect for each other all the way down the line, but they had so much on their plate that they had to deal with that it seemed. . . that things worked in the first two years unbelievably well.

G.P. Good. Tom I'd like to pursue that notion in just a minute but first we'll turn the program back to Doug McLaughlin, our music host.

(Music)

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G.P. Tom Davies is our guest today on "Memories & Music" . . . Tom being the acting chairman for the Regional Municipality of Sudbury. Tom, in this area, of course, you have been known as the Mayor of Walden for a number of years, almost a decade in fact. What have been some of your . . . some of the projects that would . . . that when you look back that you consider quite significant in that area. Some of the major changes that have occurred in Walden since '72?

T.D. Well before 1972 for years trying to get people together to, say, build an arena was a pet project. It always seemed to fall down at the last moment or you couldn't even get people together very much in those days because of course nobody knew how they were going to be able to finance something like this or how it would work. In '72 before I came into office when I was elected in there, but we were still in that sort of limbo, I met with our administration staff. There was a hearing to the OMB with the arena project. But we did considerable work to make sure that that was on stream. It's something that the people realize now and that most of the people at that time realized would be a good thing, so the arena project was the number 1 thing and we finalized that in that first year of '73. Got it under way and I can remember the turmoil that we were in. . . having nets and clocks for the arena and having to order ahead of time before the OMB hearing decision came down. . . the plexiglass and a Zamboni machine which had to come out of California. So that was a hectic experience in our life, but we did get it under way and it's probably one of the nicer arenas in North America today. The other things were the upgrading of all of the ballfields and recreation places. The Anderson Farm Project has always been a pet project of mine. I always thought that in the future people look at the historic value of that farm being, in the future, the centre of the town that . . . It will be something to be treasured by all of the people, not only in Walden but in the Sudbury District eventually. I know Ray Moriyama the top designer for the Science Centre here, is very excited about it. When we had him out there he was looked at with



- T.D. anticipation of some future connection with the Science Centre here. The other things, of course, is the upgrading of all the roads and the back local roads boards and that. There was a tremendous amount of money put out by the Ministry of Transportation and Communication. The upgrading of all the cemeteries, the water and sewer projects throughout the area which totals into the million of dollars now. . I think pretty well everything is sort of on a "go" situation. All of our road work, and that, will be completed. Of course, you know Gary, the water and sewer projects will be completed within the next year or so. The paving projects are part of that parcel and have been laid out. We have a 20-year recreation program laid down with all the capital costs being finalized probably within the next year. So that all those facilities have been worked out and we've got an overall plan. The final thing, of course, was to try and get the water into the Rockville area of the Ritari subdivision just north of Lively and that is now a success and people recognize that. I believe it's Cecchetto in there that's got the contract and that will be finalized by this fall.
- G.P. Tom, going back to the . . . what you referred to as I think what you call your pet project or certainly an important one in your mind, the Anderson Farm. It's located right in the community isn't it.
- T.D. Right in the community in fact the Board of Education are also looking at it with anticipation, too, because in the school system right now to go down and see farm animals and that you pretty well have to get in a bus and go down to Noelville and that. Our hope is to upgrade the barn and that has been done eventually to have the senior citizens people in that area with a new library building and that, and that would be the focal point of the whole area for bringing in different groups - school children and the rest of it and perhaps in the future have the live farm animals there. We have saved even the chick hatchery because I don't think too many children today get the benefit of watching chicks being hatched and that. So there are some exciting things that are going on and that and I believe with all sincerity within the next 10 years, it'll be looked at throughout the whole community as something that should, has been, has proved successful in preserving some of our heritage in this area.
- G.P. I think you've also been acquiring artifacts, have you not?
- T.D. Yes.
- G.P. You've made an effort to (do so).
- T.D. Over the years I have been collecting old pictures and artifacts and that. The volunteer fire department has been helping us along this way. They've got some machinery and



- T.D. that put back into grade order and we'll have all kinds of things to put in there, as soon as the house property is ready. We've refinished everything. Anytime there is an announcement that the house is open, I would hope that everybody in the area would go down and take a look at it. We've done all of the walls, brought them back into their original condition, stairwells, and the rest of it and it'll be furnished shortly.
- G.P. Is the intention to have the house as a representative of a house during a certain era? As much as possible.
- T.D. I can't talk, right, for the committee but it would be representative of that. They've toyed with the ideas of the areas such as Creighton, Whitefish area - each having a certain room within the house and the artifacts coming back from that era - being put in there for display.
- G.P. Tom, are there any other projects as you leave as mayor of that community, any projects that you were looking down the road as ones worthy of examination at least? Perhaps even some of them were coming on stream.
- T.D. Yes some of them are coming on stream. Our council, of course, knows what is happening and it'll be just a smooth transition with the new mayor Alex Fex coming in. I met again with council back two weeks ago to bring them up-to-date on some of the negotiations that are coming along. One of the big things that we are working out, that we're in the final stages and I guess there'll be announcements very shortly in regards to it as we negotiated with the Chairman of the Board of Inco, Mr. Carter and Chuck Baird who is now the President or the Chairman of the Board, when they visited Sudbury back a couple of years ago, that we would be entering into an agreement with International Nickel Company and the town of Walden in a joint venture for a tree nursery and the site has been chosen. It's a very exciting project because . . . I think we all know what the feeling is towards greenery and trees and that. So the details are being worked out now. The formal announcement will be set for the next couple of weeks. That will be an exciting project along with the Fielding Memorial Park which will go on in approximately that same location. The government has come down with funding in that. There's hundreds of thousands of dollars. The design has been done. A very exciting thing which will probably be the information hub centre for the Science Centre in Sudbury because it will be on the main bypass and the design is fantastic. Baleshta, Stefura, Townend have done a wonderful job on it. All of the details and that will be put together, but the model, and that, is available now for the general public to take a look at. That will be coming on stream possibly by next summer. In fact they'll be starting the work later this year. So all of these things coming together and upgrading



T.D. of a massive new baseball park at Hillcrest that right on the bypass itself with soccer fields and softball fields will all be brought to fruition by next summer. So those are continuing things that are going to happen.

G.P. Other items that we'll hear a little bit more about in the future, particularly the Tree Nursery and the Fielding Memorial Park.

T.D. Definitely.

G.P. Good. All right Tom we're going to break at this point, turn the program back to Doug McLaughlin. When we return we'll wrap the program up.

(Music)

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G.P. Welcome back to the concluding part of our interview section of "Memories & Music." Our guest today being Tom Davies, acting chairman of the Regional Municipality of Sudbury. And Tom, I believe it's this month when you'll in fact become chairman of the Regional Municipality.

T.D. That's right Gary.

G.P. You've been vice-chairman and have had the opportunity of working with I believe the chairmen over the years as a councillor.

T.D. Yes.

G.P. Could we reflect upon those individuals just for a few moments beginning with Don Collins?

T.D. Don Collins was the first chairman that was appointed by the province actually and Don came in and started everything. He was a good footman at the time, he . . . tremendous amount of work that he put in to get things together and organized this. He had a lot of background with the Ontario government and of course that's what they needed at that time. When Don left, of course, Joe Fabbro came on and . . .

G.P. If I might just interject for a moment, you mentioned that Don was appointed by the government and I believe that was the procedure whenever they established a regional government was it not?

T.D. Yes, they appointed the first chairman.

G.P. Right.

T.D. And some people took offense to that because he wasn't from the area. But Don had a lot of connections. He had been involved quite extensively in some of the things that



T.D. happened and this. He was chairman of the Ontario Water Resources Commission when they dealt with the Valley East system so he had quite a bit of knowledge of what was happening in the area. When Don left, of course, my old friend Joe Fabbro came on. I heard a lot about politics from Joe Fabbro - many meetings in Toronto, I'll tell you, he had Sudbury at heart first, no matter what. You know people that maybe didn't get along with Joe thought . . . that Sudbury came number 1 with him and I was very proud when I used to be with him in Toronto because it was Sudbury first - Sudbury region first anyway. (Un)fortunately when Joe left us, we had a young inspiring fellow in Doug Frith. I had the privilege of being vice-chairman with Doug Frith for about 18 months . . . When Doug left I was acting chairman again for that interval when they decided on another chairman and that, of course, was Delky Dozzi. Delky to me was a personal friend. I had known him all my life - a real worker and the untimely death of Delky was kind of a blow to me at that time and . . . then as vice-chairman again I worked under George Lund and George now has left and here we are. I felt by this time I should have the background, the knowledge to know what's going on. There would be no traumatic change or having to learn the ropes of the job if I haven't learned it now I thought it would be incumbent upon me to know what I was doing before I got in and consequently I didn't jump into the fray, two or three times previous to this, Gary.

G.P. So the region has a new chairman in a strong . . . in a way that continuity is still there. In a sense that you have been on since '72.

T.D. Yes.

G.P. And involved.

T.D. The continuity is still on and I have had to run the office several times in the past when fortunately we had deaths in the office and . . . people leaving to go to other fields.

G.P. When you reflect upon, well a decade in politics . . . over a decade in politics, you must have, I assume, many fond memories.

T.D. Many fond memories.

G.P. You wouldn't stay in politics unless you did.

T.D. People I've worked with over the years. It's been really a privilege really when I think back of all of the different councils especially in the Walden area that I've worked with. I've found really over all of this time, that each man or woman that comes on, you know, really tries to do the best job possible. Touch wood - I have never met one yet that



T.D. was out for their own interest. Everybody seems to try as best they can to do the best job possible. It's unfortunate sometimes that people aren't left there a little bit longer. I'm all for a longer term and it's . . . not because, myself, I've felt that through the years we've made representation and passed motions that a person should be on there a little longer. It almost takes a year, as you know, to get your feet wet, to know what's going on. By the time you get into that second year, a few months before the election, there you are again.

G.P. You're campaigning.

T.D. You're out campaigning and that. It's unfortunate that some times you have a total change in a lot of councillors and different councils throughout the area and it starts back to square one. So continuity is a good thing and I'm not against the idea of somehow having a longer term of office, say three years even and where even on a staggered basis if that's what they wanted. Where a person would be, some of them would be on for three years and the next person on for two years and one year as their term - and you could revolve them. But you need that continuity for fiscal policy, good fiscal policy, especially when you are looking at restraints. Not bad like in the 50's and that when there was all kinds of money around and that and you wanted your pet project done but I think with a little bit more longevity you find that people would look at that fiscal program and that's what we need today - is to be able to cut it down to a fine line.

G.P. Looking ahead Tom what do you see for the region?

T.D. Well I'm not a person that goes out and optimistically blows off that this is going to happen and that's going to happen. To be very honest throughout the world today, not only in Sudbury, the province and Canada and that, it's not as good as it has been in the past and I would suggest in the region that we're going to have a very slow growth period for a while. I think that there's going to be a lot of soul searching in regards to government policies and government projects and the number of things that are going to take place. I think that there is going to be a tightening up of fiscal policy all the way down the line. I think we're seeing that in the States. That over through all that comes against through Canada the same way and I think we'll find usually next year that you'll start to see a tightening up of not only personnel, but also different types of programs that have been allowed to go on in the past. People are taxed to the hilt . . . It's hard enough to put food on the table today without going into some of these four or five programs and I think we hear that everyday on the street that enough is enough. And I think we're going to have to reflect on that sort of thing. I think we have to be conscientious . . . we have to be responsible and we're going to have to tighten our belts as far as government spending goes.



- G.P. All right and not to despair and look at it from a different perspective, there are some exciting programs coming on stream. One being the Science Centre, I think there are a number watching with interest.
- T.D. Those things, though, you can look in hard terms of economics and that. That is going to be something that if it comes the way we're expecting it to and it's not from a political point of view. Everybody that has been involved now - that is going to be a boon to the economy of this area and things like that.
- G.P. It'll be quite an attraction.
- T.D. Right. It'll be a world-class thing and I think it'll prove itself very shortly. I'd hope to see a convention centre and something else because a lot of communities like ours survive just on the convention centre alone and that has an off-shooting . . . different things that will happen in the community. It'll be a boon to the economy.
- G.P. Tom, I think the local newspaper, a local Sudbury paper referred to the end of an era I believe when you left Walden as mayor. I assume, however, though that you are tackling your new job with vigor and looking forward to the challenges ahead.
- T.D. Yes we're looking forward to the challenges and you know as well as anyone else there are a lot of heavy things on our plate right now . . . It's going to be a lot of hard work for the council this year to get things back on an even keel. It will be exciting. But we propose that we'll be doing a lot of running back and forth and a lot of negotiations with our friend the Minister Claude Bennett and with the Minister of Transportation and Communications, Jim Snow. The indication, so far, I've been in contact with them this week . . . it's an open door policy and I'll be leaving as soon as possible to get down there to talk to them for the benefit of this region.
- G.P. O.K. I'm glad that you're able to find time for the interview today.
- T.D. Thank you very much Gary.
- G.P. On behalf of our listening audience, Tom, thank you very much for taking time out from your busy schedule for this interview and best of good fortune as Chairman of the municipality.