

Beverly Branton interviewing Mr. Ray Miller on May 6, 1985. The interview is being held at the Fort Erie Public Library on Central Avenue.

B.B.: Could you give me your date of birth, Mr. Miller, please?

R.M.: September the 27th, 1930.

B.B.: And your place of birth?

R.M.: Niagara Falls, Ontario.

B.B.: And whereabouts are you living now?

R.M.: We're living on a, it's a lot, it's part of the original farm. Which is about one-half mile north of Niagara Christian College.

B.B.: Is that in the Fort Erie area?

R.M.: Oh, yes, that's in, that's in the Fort Erie. It was Bertie Township of course but now it's Fort Erie.

B.B.: Now, your family goes back in this area for quite a few generations, is that correct?

R.M.: The Miller family, our family, John Miller, would go back to about 1800, maybe just slightly before that.

B.B.: And his reason for coming to this area?

R.M.: I believe they came here, they were not United Empire Loyalists themselves, but they came here with the same feelings that.. They wanted to leave, they were loyal to the crown and they wanted to leave the United States. They came from Maneron township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, about 1800. The first two or three of the family were born there, near the Susquehanna River near Conestoga country.

B.B.: Would you just reflect back a bit on what, in the changes you yourself have seen in the Niagara Boulevard area?

R.M.: Well, there's a great many more homes are along the river then there use to be. There's not too many lots that are not built upon. Some areas is not built up quite as much as others. Between our place and Black Creek where it was the Dr. Cobb's estate, there's not too many homes built along there. But most areas are pretty well built up and at what time there was about..between Black Creek and Fort Erie.. probably, let's see, five or six farms and now I don't think there's any. We had a farm, and there was a farm, Hardy Miller at Miller's Creek and there was a farm what we called the Briggs & Williams farm, it was down at Baker's Creek and then there was the old Dr. Cobb farm where Sumbler Beam lived and that was about, oh, approximately

two miles from where we lived but the buildings are pretty well all gone. Our barn was burned down in '57. It was beginning to get well, a little bit shoddy, and so we decided, my father died in '54 so the barn was tore down a few years later. Most of the equipment was sold, dispensed with.

When we use to go for any farm machinery repairs we would go to Stevensville. There was Jim Baker was Massey Harris dealer and Milton Plyley was International Harvester and we went quite often to Stevensville because we'd go over there and my dad had a '29 Model A Ford coupe. That was the only car he ever owned. He bought it before he and ma were married and he still had it when he died in '54, May 17. of '54. We use to put bags of grain in the back of the car and go over to Daddy Beam's Mill. We called him Daddy Beam, I just can't recall his first name now but he ran a chopping mill there where we got grain ground for the pigs or whatever, pigs or cows or whatever you were feeding the grain to. And he ran the mill there in Stevensville. It was run by electric power and I believe they said that the line was rather inadequate that the hydro had in that time, back in the '40's and '50's and Ted Bissel who ran a barber shop for years in Stevensville and he's dead now but he had a barber shop right next to Daddy Beam's Mill and everytime Beam started up the big motor, the big pulley-horsepower electric motor and everytime he started up why if he was cutting hair, why the clippers would literally stop right in the guys hair and there'd be some pretty strong language because if you went to pull out the clippers why you might be pulling hair out. So, that's just a few of the little things I remember over there.

I also remember Lloyd Wale's cider mill and he ran that with a big, old gas engine and that could be heard, the noise from that engine could be heard for probably two or three miles or more, well outside of Stevensville. So we use to go over there and get some apples, take apples over to make cider and that's a few of the things I can remember.

There was..I guess Fred Staples had an insurance business there and I remember dad going there for insurance for the car and we didn't have him for insurance for the farm because we were always with the Bertie and Willoughby Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Co.. They seemed to cover a great many of the farmers in the area.

B.B.: Where were they located?

R.M.: I was trying to think who was the agent. They were not located in this area, their head office, it was, well I'm sure if it was up in Clinton, further up in Ontario or just where it was but they were, at one time Carmen Sauer back in the country, just shortly after my dad died, he was the agent and right now apparently the agent for them is Ted Jewson but I think that...oh, and in about 1846 we located an old tax receipt at home, in the township of Bertie and the farm was about 73 acres and it had on the house and the barn and a long shed where we had the car in and some equipment in there and the taxes was a glorious sum of \$46.00. It was just coincidental that it was about the year '46. But it was classed as agricultural but even then you consider what agricultural land is now and of course everything, inflation has gone into it and of course it's gone right up you know, as far as everything else is that way.

As far as phones were concerned we had a phone at one time in the house but it was not in my memory because the leads were in the wall, that is where they had been put in and we use to go to the neighbours and use their phones and of course it was the old hand crank phones. I don't know why the phone was taken out, whether my dad, they thought it was too expensive or whether others were doing what we done later, coming to the house and bug you for the phone, to use it or whatever but the phones were the old hand cranked phones. And that's when it was the Welland County Phone System which was the predecessor of I believe to Bell in this area.

B.B.: What year would that have been around?

R.M.: Oh, I can remember their phones in a few of the homes right up 'til Bell took over which would have been, I think maybe in the mid '50's, someplace in there if I'm not mistaken, when Bell took over. I'm not just sure when they took over but they took over the old Welland County phone system.

And we had a gas well on the corner of the farm and in my time I never remember, now this is down close to the town line road, I never remember the well being functional from the stand point of providing gas. I remember that the casing, which is the inner part, pipe, which goes well nearly to the bottom. This well had been down to the red medina which is around 725 feet in our area there. They generally didn't drill much below that because if they

didn't get gas in the red medina which is a porous rock, to go into the white medina below that generally didn't prove to give them a much stronger well. But anyway, the dried pipe is put down, the outer case, the outer pipe is put down to the rock and the inner casing is put inside of that and the inner casing was rusted off down about oh, twelve feet or so which would have been the river level. The water was up in the well to the river level and it was always bubbling and we use to drop a match down in there and get back because it would...and it would just blow itself out. Well, this young friend of mine who lived down, incidentally on the Briggs & Williams farm there at Black Creek, his name is Jimmy Smith, I think he still lives in this area..anyway, Jimmy he didn't, he didn't believe me or wouldn't get back soon enough so it just, he wasn't old enough to shave, it just singed all, all the fuzz on his face, his eyebrows and the front of his hair, you know just sindged everything off onto him, because he didn't get back soon enough. But this well was drilled by drillers from Pennsylvania. They came up and drilled for the Gas Co.. Now I don't know what the gas company would have been called at that time. Years ago it was Provincial Gas before it was Consumer's Gas but anyway at that time it was not deemed to be a strong enough well to warrant keeping it. And my grandmother bought the well and dad and her use gas in the house and they also supplied gas up as far as where the Redemptoristine Nuns, I believe it's called The Monostary of the Most Holy Redeemer which is right next to the Niagara Christian College. That house was built in about 1826 and would have been my grandfather, and I just forget if he, I think he was about the first one to be born in that house of the family. There were others were born in the little log house that was back close to the barn, the farm house, back behind the dorms at the Niagara Christian College, the boy's dormitory and the duplex for the teachers and the log house was originally back there. Well anyway the well, the gas was supplied that far where the nuns now are. This is a great uncle of mine, Uncle Charlie and this is where this Aunt Gus who we'll refer to later, she was the one who had the diary, they lived in there. They were the children of the second marriage of my great grandfather. First wife was Sephira Riselay and when she passed on he married Sarah Haun and they had at least three children by the second marriage. And the first marriage was

a large family and I'll try to get into that a little later. This gas well it supplied all the gas they needed down there at the old home.

There was no storm windows on the house and there was no insulation.

The old house where my dad and grandmother lived along with the other children who were raised in there but who married and moved, well were given lots off the farm, my dad was given the farm because he looked after my grandmother until she, until just about she died, which was about February of 1930..anyway, the gas from the gas wells provided all the heat they needed for there, no insulation, no storm windows, The front part of the house was moved back in 1909 hwhen the Park Commission come through. It was built approximately 1825-1835 and it was beams, bark still on some of the beams, this would be the joints under the floor and some of the wall members and rafters with smaller poles with the bark still on and that was moved back in about 1909 when the Park Commission come through. And then the back part was built on in about 1910 by I believe carpenters by the name of Johnson from Ridgeway and anyway...

B.B.: Excuse me, in 1909 the Niagara Parks Commission..that's when they took over the Parkway.?

R.M.: Yes, that's right, that's right. I'll alleviate here with this gas heating bit. There was quite a battle royal between my grandmother and the Parks Commission and there was two or three others. I believe they might have been people by the name of McCrady's down towards Chippawa and possibly the others would have been up at Scottdales. And they did not ^{FC}except what the Parks Commission was willing to offer and it went before arbitration, court hearings, lawyers and we still have a number of the documents there that Gram Miller, as we called her, entered into a quite a lengthy, drawn out legal maneuvers to try and..well, they didn't want to give up the property is what it amounted to. They owned the property right down to the waters edge and they didn't want to give it up and the Parks Commission was called the Queen Victoria Parks at that time. They were intent and bound and bent at that time of course to obtain the full, right through from Fort Erie to Niagara-on-the-Lake. And they moved the house back, put in a basement under the back part when that part was built on about the time that the front part was moved back. And they put in a water line, and they put in a basement drain down to the river. They moved the back part of the barn back,

the front part of the barn and the middle section of the barn was torn down, they moved the back part of the barn back and..one of their lawyers told, so it goes, he said, ' Mrs. Miller, he said, you've got, despite what they've done, you've got done out of about \$200.' This is what I was always told and that would have been considered a good sum at that time. You know, because now it doesn't sound like anything but then you know, a dollar was a dollar.

And the middle part of the barn was where my grandfather, Grampa Miller, and he died considerably before 1900, perhaps, I have the dates at home, but perhaps oh, fifteen years or more, he wasn't that old of a man when he died. And he was a cabinet maker by trade and that's where he made, done his work, and we have a number of items, they're solid walnut tables, a cherry wood, glass front china cupboard. There is what we just called the cupboard because it's, you can put china and stuff in and that's all solid walnut, that's there and numerous other things that he made and all his tools where there until after my dad died, and unfortunately my mother was in need of some money and one of these antique dealers, I think by the name of Button, she always said his name was, he come down from around Fonthill and he give her peanuts and he took all..there was some 46-48 of these hand planes, the kind where he used for making mouldings. Each plane were for a different shape, you know of moulding. It was all done by hand. And there was a great big chest and that was out in the barn and there was a few other things he took, corn sheller, different other things that would have been of interest to potential customers of his.

And the front part of the barn was right on the bank where there's a large walnut tree there now and I don't know how old that tree is but it's still there. And that front part had a laid stone foundation wall and in the time of, I wouldn't say it was the liquor prohibition, possibly it was even some stuff that was stored in there by a bootlegger. But certainly at the time when the kerosene, they were smuggling kerosene across the border and we know that someone was storing kerosene in there. Now we weren't involved in that but it's just that they would probably store stuff in there.

B.B.: What time about was this?

R.M.: When would that be? That would be, of course before it was moved back so that would be around the turn of the century, maybe give or take a decade either way.

B.B.: What was the roadway along that...?

R.M.: The roadway was just a mud road and it went very close to the bank and where the old walnut tree is, they went on the outside of that with the horses and the buggies and it got so bad that all the roots were exposed from that tree and when the Parks Commission come along they dumped load after load. They hired local people with horses and, we called them dump wagons, they could be filled up with ground or stone or whatever and they had a racket on them and a release. We had one there at one time and the whole bottom would open up like the bottom of a hopper car on the railroad and they would dump them. I don't know how many loads of ground on the outside of that and this tree is pretty well back although it is suffering from age and time but a lot of it was dead, and we cut it out, and it's pretty well grown back..this large black walnut, the biggest one that I know of around here. I would say that the diameter of the trunk probably is in the neighbourhood of five feet anyway, but it's probably hollow because squirrels get into it. And in the winter when the roads were very bad they use to drive on the ice. They would go down on the ice, that is with the horses and cart.

B.B.: Right on the river?

R.M.: Ya, right on the river, ya, go down on the river.

We kinda got away from this, I said that the gas in the house, they heated with the gas and when I, in my time, I remember being up in the attic being a lot of old stoves in there, the ones with fire brick in them and little plexiglass windows in them. I shouldn't call them plexiglass, it's called mica, and you could see through it, little square, about two inches square, and those were all up in the attic and we scrapped them but there was all kinds of stoves up there. And there was no controls on them. All there would be, would be valves to turn them on, no pilots or anything and they had so much gas..and this really shakes them for energy now a days.. there was so much gas that they had the winters opened in the winter time. And also, as I say they supplied gas up to would have been my dad's Uncle Charlie and Aunt Gus and those up there where the nuns are. And I can remember that one inch pipe being up there and it was all rusty and at different times we would dig up, tear up different pieces of it, it was just down underneath the ground.

I don't know if it supplied more than those two homes or not but it finally give out because the water got the better of the well and one time Charlie Wale, who was the same man that run the cider mill in Stevensville, he use to bale gas wells and his rope broke and his baler and all the rope are down in the bottom of that well. And the baler is similar to the type that they use when their drilling gas wells now a days. It's a long, about twenty-five to thirty feet long piece of pipe maybe about an inside diameter of maybe three or four inches. And at the bottome there is a special valve and when it is let right down to the very bottom of the well the weight of this pipe would push this valve up in and then the whole thing would fill up with water and as soon as it was lifted up the weight fo the water above it this valve would drop in the bottom and you would take all the water out or when they were drilling it would be a fine, ground up stone on the bottom of the well. It would all be lifted up and they would take it out and drop it in a wood trough and then as soon as it hit in there then all of the stuff would run out of it and run out whether they were drilling the well or if they were bedding it to take the water out. But it was a wet well. By that it was fairly wet and so it was abandoned so...

B.B.: I wanted to ask you too..you had mentioned that your farm went over as far as the N.C.C. property..

R.M.: Yes that's right.

B.B.: Do you remember what was there...?

R.M.: That was originally now. That was in the original crown grant. We did not own that in my dad's lifetime but you see where my Uncle Charlie, they owned that. That was there, Lot 15, Concession 5, Niagara River and also farms went back into Concession 6, part of Concession 6. So you see, the original John Miller who would be my great, great grandfather, they had the property all the way down to as I said where Dr. Chathman lived and that would be at least a mile and a half or a mile and three quarters below our place. And in the original Miller family there was all girls except the one boy, my great grandfather Jacob Miller and there was Elizabeth Miller and she married John Birch Miller, the eldest son on the Andrew Miller family who were the ones who took up the property from Millers Creek up, including where the Marina is, where the old shipyard was. And she married and they removed, so the word is, you would say in other words they moved, but they called it removed

then, to up around Talbotville, up around St. Thomas. She married the eldest, Elizabeth was the eldest, and in the John Miller family she married the eldest boy in Andrew Miller family, John Birch Miller..they lived up there. And the next one was Mary and she married John Simons Atwood, I believe his name was. The first Atwood in this area and he was sort of an itinerant or lay, one of these riding preachers. And so we were related to all the Atwoods. And then the next one, I believe was Catharine,..I could be wrong now in my geneology, but I'll try to be right here..Catharine and she married John Riselay. And then I believe the next one was Jacob and he married Sephira Riselay who was a sister to John Riselay..so this is where we come in to two brothers marrying two sisters, in two families, the Riselays and the Millers. Then we had Veronica and she married Daniel MacAfee and they had no children. She died in about 1850 but we believe, the records seem to indicate that Daniel was a brother to Captain SamuelMacAfee, who was well catologued to the one who helped MacKenzie to get across the Niagara River at MacKenzies Crossing. And they were not very well liked after that and the, I believe, ~~at~~ though of course this Veronica had died, and Daniel married a Hewson. Now possibly, I'm not sure whether Hewsons, there's some in Ridgeway, but anyway..But anyway Captain Samuel MacAfee and his family and I would presume Daniel and his second wife they were not liked around here after that bout of 1837 Rebellion and they moved to Stevenson County, Illinois. I think I've got in wrong order here, there's a Anna and I'm not certain but she might have been a little older than my great grandfather Jacob. And Anna married Alfred McCarty who on the deeds is listed as a wagon maker from Pennsylvania.

Incidentally, this is being recorded I know and I presume it could stand for a lot of people wanting to get in touch with us, but we have literally bushels of documents, all the Crown deeds, or all the deeds rightback to the Crown, all the deeds of the property. I've got the original will of my great, great grandfather John Miller, who's dated in 1828 and he died in about 1841 or '42, that's there and he mentions in there about giving this Elizabeth, the one that went with her husband to Talbotville, near St. Thomas, he was given, or she was given his riding horse because she was a great horsewoman. In fact, all the Miller girls were known as being expert horsewomen and they all rode side saddle. I don't know if the skirts were too

long, you know, but they rode side saddle.

B.B.: You had also mentioned that you had a diary of a great aunt...

R.M.: That's right, we have her diary and in this diary she has in there when my dad was born in'.I have written it down here someplace..my dad was born in March 9, 1883 and this is how wide a span of years it covers. It's about twenty to twenty-three little booklets written primarily in pencil. Some of them are getting very faint. She has when I was born in September 27th, of 1930. In fact, the diary goes from about 1870 until about shortly before she died in 1832[1932].

B.B.: Can you think of anything...

R.M.: Anything in there? I wasn't able to find, in looking last night, I wasn't able to find the exact date; she has it in there when the first car came down the Boulevard. She has in this diary when different members of the family died. Also, that there was people, friends, and relatives were visiting in their place, in other words they had visitors almost daily, quite often people stayed overnight. They, if there was nothing of interest on a particular day, she just wrote down 'nothing' by the date, but there had to be an entry for everyday of every year, right through the full time span she kept the diary. She has in there when there was a man come to their place, what we would call a tramp now. They use to come to my mother and dad's place and they'd want to chop wood in the Depression; chop up wood for something to eat. And you see they'd stuff a strawberry jam sandwich in their pocket or anything you know, stuff to eat. And we'd swear to it that they had some way of marking the house, where another one coming along would know it was a place they could get a hand out. I've heard of this before being the case. Anyway one tramp come to their place and he got sick. And he stayed there and they fed him. He was there for a few days and he got sick and the man died and they obviously didn't know his name but they paid for his burial because she makes this and I quote: "And we buried that man." And they didn't know who he was or anything about him but they looked back to see that he had a reasonable burial.

And they went very often, ah, when I say very often, perhaps once or twice a week, when weather permitting, I presume, not when the river was full of ice..they would go over to what was called the Rock. And for quite awhile we couldn't quite figure out what that meant but then it become apparant that it was Black Rock

in Buffalo which is the oldest, the oldest part of the city. And they'd go by boat, they'd row over there.

B.B.: How about the shipyards...?

R.M.: The shipyards..o.k. the shipyards, um, I don't remember anything about them other than I remember there was a couple of rooming houses that were still up in my time and the one of them I remember burning, in a fire. The one was called 'The Red Pig' and the other was 'The Green Goose'. Now I can't remember which one of those is, it was that burnt. But the one is still up, that is it's still there and it's being used, and it's on Miller Ave. just a little bit west of Cairn's crescent when you cross the little bridge there at Miller's Creek and then Miller's Ave. goes back there. And it's a long driveway, it's back in on the right when you're going off of Cairn's Crescent and the man who lived in it for a long, long while Lloyd Willick and he sold it and a man by the name of Al Eve presently lives in that. And that is about the only remaining building of the rooming houses that the men stayed in that worked at the shipyard. It was, Canadian Shipbuilding was in there, Canadian, I believe Alice Chalmers and Canadian General Electric were the last ones to own the land. My Uncle Carl worked in the power house there. They generated all their own power. My Uncle Bill, who had Miller's Cabins he, that and crescent is where now, is Idle View Restaurant and he worked naturally on the construction of the boats. I don't know if he was a rivetter or just what. But my dad didn't work there because he was at home farming and he told one account..he worked there when they dismantled, when they tore all the stuff down; worked there with the horses and things, but not during the time when they were building boats..he told of one experience where at noon he was back at the field and they had a great big crane there, it was on, elevated off the ground and it was on set or rails and that went right on out to what was called the 'slips'. There was two slips there. That's where the Parks Commission has the boats in. And he noticed it starting to roll. It was around noon time and he was coming in for lunch and he thought, 'my gosh they better stop that pretty soon', and it kept right on rolling. And it come up a gust of wind and she went to the end and tipped over and right, dumped right over in the out the end, in the deep water. And they went and got a horse or whatever and went up there to see if anyone was killed or drowned

and there was nobody injured because the guy was out for lunch and he had forgot to chain the thing to keep from rolling and it just took right off from the wind and went to the end and dumped over.

Boats that were built there and we've got pictures of them. It's recently been scrapped up at Port Colborne but it was christened under another name. I think all of our family would have been up for a chunk of an iron from it, for a piece of memoriable. It was the E.B. Osler, was christened there. That was one of the boats. And another boat, I think about the last one that was built there was the tugboat that was used for many years in the forebay of the Canadian Niagara Power Company, including Niagara Park down in Niagara Falls. And I was told this, I work for Canadian Niagara Power and I was told this by our, oh, he would be our, not our auditor but company secretary, financial secretary here in Fort Erie, and he use to be in the Falls. And that old steel tugboat, they use to use for breaking up ice is one of the last or possible last boat built down her at the old shipyards. They had contracted with the shipyard company to build this tugboat, to break up the ice in the forebay.

B.B.: Was there a grist mill that was located in...?

R.M.: Yes, that was down there and that mill..this is the bill of sale for that mill from my great grandfather. That mill, I'll get here and get some of that information...ah, you asked the mill, there, we refer to the area where the mill was built as being Decew's Reef because it was Decew who built the mill there. He come there in well, probably be safe to say..the information is here but it would take a bit of time to dig out..he came and he bought the land from Jacob Miller and the stipulation was that within a short period of time, that he had to build a mill for the people of the area to grind their grain and to make flour for bread and so forth. And the mill was built and it was very successful except every winter when the ice came down in the spring, the late winter and spring, it tore out the water wheel which was apparently some distance out of the river, the water wheel and the supports, the bearings and the shaftings. And so eventually he abandoned the sight, he give it up so to speak, and went up somewheres near Port Colborne and built a mill there. And, but the mill itself, the late Bert Miller, he told me, he remembers before the algae and that in the river, he could see where the irons

were attached on the rock bed, it's quite shallow, where they were attached, the irons which were used to support, hold this here shafting. So, it was about an acre, it was about an acre and a half, and it was sold with the express purpose of building a mill, and it was a building there into the bank and that's about where Bob Climenhage lives. He is the next house, the second house down from the nuns, the Redemptoristine Nuns are. And the house right next to him, between the two is a part of the old summer kitchen, from off the back of the old home where the nuns lived, and it was a summer home for many, many years. And now it's not being used, it's owned but it's not inhabited. And it's a very old building too. And the one where Climenhages, where Bob lives, is an old home, they use to call the Love home. People, I believe, by the name of Love was in there, Clines were in there and then I think, for a short while, Lloyd Wale from Stevensville owned it and then Bob Climenhage bought it from him. But that's where, we have some photographs of some buildings that were up in that area and they are really old log houses and some old, old men out in front of them but I wouldn't want to say for certain that it was a picture of the building, of the mill. But there was an old building up there because out in the Parks Commission, in the ground there, if it's ever dug up for any reason or another and there seems to be lots of old bits and pieces of brick and mortar and so forth and so, that is in the area where this mill was.

B.B.: What about the Black Creek area?

R.M.: Ah, Black Creek..the Black Creek store is an old, old building. At one time, I'm told in the basement, it was used for a jail. It was, ah, Jenks were down there, ah, in my time and I don't know who the owners were, there were several prior to that time and I think there were different ones in there, the Storms, that lived near there people by the name of Storms owned it for awhile, this is back around the late fifties; and then I believe Lloyd Wale, he's quite a man for obtaining property and holding mortgages and so forth, he owned it for a bit; and we have Sid Payne in there now which, he's operating the Black Creek store.

They use to float booms and logs down Black Creek from back in the country. They would be hardwood and the logs were taken up the river by oxen and mule team and they use to stop along

different places along, the drivers. They were , I suppose they were taking them over to Buffalo and they would take and stop for lunch and play dominoes. And we have a few of the dominoes there yet, and I think around somewhere. They were like black wood, I don't know, maybe walnut or some quite dark wood, maybe it was stained. And you know what dominoes are, they've got the, o.k., they, pardon me, were set in with, the white was like an ivory was set into it.

Another thing here that would be of interest..ah, in the house that my dad had there, there was wood stoves we used 'til my dad died, there was several of them which we always went back to the woods and brought in. Summer it was by wagon and winter it was by sleigh, and team, in both cases. My dad was great with horses, he never cared much for tractors and cars. And the wood, lots of times the wood was wet and you made, you got more out of making the wood than burning it. The two wood stoves that were there until dad died, we only heated the back part of the house, the front part and the upstairs was closed off upstairs all winter. There was no insulation, no storm windows, as I said, it was clapboard, it was split lath and horsehair plastered. We use to put hay around the bottom of the house because when the Parks Commission moved it back it was just on a few concrete abutments here and there and it was all open underneath and we put some plank around it and put some hay and straw to keep the wind out from blowing so badly underneath the bottom and there was only a basement under the back as I mentioned. And the heating with wood, it produced a lot of dampness and the no storm windows on the window, you couldn't see out the windows when it was real cold weather because you had a about a quarter of an inch of hoarfrost, over the inside of the window. I can remember, very well my nails, finger nails, going in there and just scratch down through the frost, it was just like a shower of snow on the floor. And that would melt off on the south side anyway when the sun would come out on a bright day and there would be water running down the windows and around the window sill. There was certainly no reason for a humidifier in the place. And the wood was often times, bed wood or wood made that was starting to rot a bit. You would have bad places in it like you get in a rotter, in the centre of a potato or anything like that, and you'd get big wood ants coming out. They'd feel the warmth and you'd

either have to kill them on the floor or they'd get burnt in the stove. The front part of the house was, where the split lath was, this was as I say not heated in the winter and my aunt, my mother's sister, she lived in Buffalo, she used to come over for Christmas, every Christmas, we always decorated the tree and she'd always help me and my mother, my dad..she'd come over in the summer as well..but it was unheated, she was in the spare bedroom upstairs; one Christmas when she got up her false teeth was froze right in the glass of water and she had to, where she put them the night before and she had to bring the glass downstairs and thaw them out, her teeth were froze right in. And I remember dad used to speak of a white, bit of snow, sprinkled of snow, being on the bed covers on the foot of the bed, just a light sprinkle, coming around the windows and through the walls. And it was an old house but it was built in those times when they didn't consider too much insulation. The rooms in the front where it wasn't heated, we had walnuts up in there and that had a tendency unfortunately attract mice and rats. And one night, I remember we were all woke up by a rat running across the piano keys and playing the piano, so.. Dad always slept in the cot in the dining room so he could keep the fires going.

That '29 Model A Ford he bought and he had until he died and that was the one I believe he bought from W.G. Wilson. I'm not sure if he was here in Fort Erie or possibly in Ridgeway. He was a Ford dealer.

He had a horse, he liked horses, that he called Hero and even after he died, the little two wheel sulky, like you'd have for harness racing was up on the overlayers in the barn, which would be some beams and stuff we use to put up there and have planks on that and we would pile a surplus of, oh sheaves of oaks and wheat on that before it was thrashed and the front overlayers of the front of the barn, dad's sulky was up there and this horse he called Hero, he used to wing races, quite often, quite regularly at the old Bertie Fair which was held where the Fort Erie Race Track is now and he, we, during his, well when he got older, or before he died we did get a six horse power, Gould, Shapley and Muir gas engine and later a Fordson tractor and we used to saw the wood then and instead of by hand we could saw with a Massey-Harris cord wood saw. And that's where I guess I developed our interest in collecting old gas engines and we have over two hundred of those, the boys and I and we've got quite a few tractors, quite a few items

of early farm equipment and...let see what else we can get into here...
oh, here's something here that would be of interest. This was recounted
by the late Bert Miller, approximately about a quarter of a mile below
from Frenchman's Creek is a little area where you can park your car, it's
a little parking area..now this is not the one above Frenchmans Creek
Bridge, right at the bridge but it's the first one below about a quarter
of a mile, it's kind of a high spot and the Parks Commission has
constructed a spot in there where people can park offthe road...and
that is as I understand it, is what is known or was the sight of the
home of Peter Nettle and his mother. We have a picture at home,
an old photograph and it shows the home pretty badly deteriorated,
it must of been some time after anyone had lived into it. It's all,
you know, it's all kind of starting to fall down. But the story of
Peter Nettle is kind of interesting. I guess he was kind of a hot
head. I don't know if his father was alive at this time or not. His
mother obviously was and there was fellas that use to come over
from Buffalo and they would fish along the shore and I suppose the
odd time they would land. And Peter Nettle must of been quite
a one to go over to Buffalo, to Black Rock, to frequent, should we
say bars, or whatever over there and he must have known these
fellows. There was three or four of them in a boat and I guess maybe
he possibly had been drinking and he come down there and they got
into quite a heated argument and I don't know if he told them not
to come ashore or if he told them to leave or whatever. And he
went back to the house and he come back with a gun and they were
still there and he shot one of the fellows. Now it was according
to Bert recounting of the incident, it was perhaps some six months
or so before the authorities came down from Welland and arrested
him. And he was taken over there and had a trial and he was in
jail for awhile. I presume, perhaps before the trial. And his mother,
the account goes, his mother use to take over baking, pies and cakes
and whatever for him..he was in jail. And then when his hearing
come up, the court action, he was aquited on grounds of self-defense
and he was out. And for a long while he never went over to Buffalo,
I suppose he was afraid of what may happen. And there was a sister
of one of these brothers who was killed..andthey were gunning for
him, so to speak..and one morning Peter Nettle was found in his
boat over in the barge canal, the Erie Barge Canal on Black Rock.

He was dead, his body was over the side and his head was in the water. And afterwards it seem that the sister, I presume was a younger sister, anyway she said that Peter Nettle got his due. In other words they settled accounts with him. And that's kind of, I don't know if you want to call it frontier justice or not, but that's the way it was. And that was certainly in our Fort Erie area. It was Bertie Township at that time.

And my dad, and my Uncle Bill that was Millers Cabins and my Uncle Carl, they use to fish along the river using the sein~~g~~. Now I guess it was illegal at those times but anyway they had a sein~~g~~ there and there was a hole right in front of our place or slightly above the old homestead and it usually would yield, pretty near a boat full of bull heads or cat fish of perch or even rock sturgeon and things of this nature. And that is just below Decew's Reef where this hole is and there's a 'A' there formed by the strong current going across the reef and when it comes to the, where the reef breaks off and it becomes deeper, the current goes out in the river. In the winter time you can watch and there's a certain area in there where the ice is going upstream very, very slowly due to what's called the eddy. In other words it's kind of like an eddy of a current. And I suppose the fish would come back into this area and in this deep place and the swift current and the end of the rock, it's always rough there even if the river is very, very smooth and we call it the Devil's Half Acre, where the reef ends. And this saying came from Tom Briggs who was a game warden on Lake Erie and Tom was a brother to my Uncle George Briggs here in Fort Erie, who people will recall the Briggs Paint & Wallpaper.

And they had an Imperial ESSO gas pump, one of the old visible kind, where you pumped it up and you could see how many gallons was in there and went by gravity into the car. And they had one of those pumps right on the curb, right on the sidewalk on the curb of Jarvis Street, right in front of the Briggs building. That I remember very well, that pump. And that building was built in about '28 and that pump would have been in there into, well almost to World War 11. And that of course is the building that's recently suffered two fires there.

...we talked here about the shipyard...

And our people had come here in about 1800. And the other

side of the family was the Riselays. And they were in the Niagara area as early as 1777. Christian Riselay, who is the same relation to me as John Miller, in other words a great, great grandfather, he has fought with Butlers Rangers at Niagara in December of 1777. And the source of that statement is the log book of Colonel John Butler. And the Riselays were U. E. Loyalist and I'm a U.E. Loyalist in virtue of being a direct descendant of Christian Riselay and so of course with all the other members of the Miller family and their descendants and the Riselays as well. I mentioned that my grandfather and grandmother on my dads side were double first cousins to one another, in other words two children of the Riselay family, a brother and a sister married two children, a brother and a sister in another family and the two youngest children of those two respective marriages were my grandfather and grandmother on my fathers side. In other words they were double first cousins to one another.

And my Uncle Bill at Millers Cabins also had an ESSO visible gas pump. And Joe Morningstar..now this is down within about three quarters of a mile south of Black Creek..Joe Morningstar had an ESSO there and Charlie Wale, just they were relatives and they were only about athousand feet apart, they had (I've got down here three hundred feet apart but I think I'm a little bit close on that) they had a gas station as well and they had Sunoco and while they were relatives they didn't get along that well together because they were in competitive business, gasoline wise.

My Uncle Bill and Joe Morningstar both had a stand where you could get ice cream and pop and hot dogs. I don't think Wales had anything like that down there at their place. This Charlie Wale was an Uncle of Lloyd Wale of Stevensville and he also operated Wales Cider Mill in Stevensville. In addition to the stand Uncle Bill sold, he sold in the stand, what was called 4.4 beer. That was very weak. I guess it was the only thing they could sell at that time, I don't know if they could have got a license for anything stronger than that.

Uncle Bill and Aunt Irene at Millers Cabins was always filled up with tourists during the summer, especially when the Fort Erie Race Track was in operation. Uncle Bill was what you call a 'good mixer', he could make himself at home with tourists no matter where they come from, what state they were from.

And down just on the Willoughby side of the Town Line road, that was Willoughby at that time, it's now part of Fort Erie, people by the name of Burkes built a home there and I suppose that would be back possibly sixty, sixty-five years ago because it's been there as long as I can remember. And they were summer people, lawyers at Buffalo and very well known in the Irish community over there. They had a picture in their home, one of the original pictures of that was made or drawn up of the Battle of Ridgeway, where the Fenians who were Irish people came over and they engaged the Queens own there at the Battle of Ridgeway. And these people, Burkes use to put in the dock every year and take it out in the fall. And Uncle Bill would help them a lot put out the dock every year and they use to, when the dock was in, as soon as they were done, they use to grab Uncle Bill and the boys, they had five boys, and they'd grab him, fully clothed and everything and throw him off into the end of the river. That was kind of a standing joke and they always use to call him 'Poop deck Pappy'.

...ah, there was something else I was just thinking in regards with..

Oh, also Uncle Bill he, in my lifetime I remember, I was very small at the time but there was quite an ice jam in the river and he, it was foggy and I can remember a time seeing him disappear in the fog, he walked across the river on the ice. Now these were cakes of ice, small not large, it would be very dangerous thing and he done it I'm sure just for the glory or the name of it. It would be a very dangerous thing to do but he walked across and he walked back again after talking to some people on the Grand Island shore. Now that's the first time that anybody had walked across and been able to come back. About a hundred years before that a man had walked across on a large cake of ice which it use to freeze out a long ways in front of our place and the Gander Flats just below the town line road, just below where Burkes use to have their dock, there's a marsh there and they call it the Gander's Flats, and the ice would go, would sort of swing out because of the current and the wind, west wind, it would swing out the upper end of the great big piece and it would swung around and over and jam on the shore of Grand Island and on the Gander Flats, it's a bit of a point..and this man walked across but before he was able to come back it let go and he couldn't, he had to get back by boat or other wise.

And I believe at the same time, a cousin of mine from Stevensville said, at the same time that Uncle Bill walked across, he and another fellow walked across but I don't remember seeing that unless they went just a little bit later. But I can remember it was foggy and I can remember kind of seeing disappear out and walking across the river on the ice.

..and these are probably some of the interesting things that people are interested in..

They use to always, there's a place on the bank there, it's just below the Redemptoristine Nuns, and they use to always call that Uncle Charlies watering hole. They use to drive the sheep and the cattle and stuff down the river and my dad use to drive his horses with the harness on it and everything, right across the road and down the bank and got them a drink in the river. Well I suppose that was because they were use to doing that because his great Uncle or his uncle rather, Uncle Charlie and them who use to help a lot, they use to do that at this place there and they use to also dip, they use to take the sheep down there and they'd have to dip them or whatever you say, put something on them to kill, I don't know to kill ticks or whatever, sheep dip and I don't know what it's constituted of, some kind of chemical I suppose or something you know ~~that~~ they put in the water. I guess maybe they get the water out of the river and perhaps and have it in some kind of a big container because you couldn't put stuff in the water, it would just float away. In my time I remember the Brethren in Christ people had their baptism at the very same spot.

And another incident that was in this diary and also Bert Miller recounted it, up here in the country, back up on the Bowen Road, up near the Queen E., you've got Ralph Curtis and then you've got Laurs, there's the Laur farm, the Cutis's were related to the Laurs. Years and years ago, in that family was a young fellow by the name of Jimmy Laur. And he was suppose to have driven his horses down and out on the flat rock bed of the river there at Decew's Reef. And as you go out there in some places it drops down very abruptly and it's very deep and that won't be too wide and then it would become shallow again. Well he drove the horses out there a ways and the horses dropped into one of these spots and they started to flounder

and he was afraid they would drown and he took and he walked out on the tongue to try and get the..you know, try and release the horses so they could swim and get away and he got tangled up in the harness there. He was drowned out there in this, this is at Decew's Reef.

And also, these same deep spots in that reef, they can, you can come down from up above, closer to the Nuns where the reef starts and there'll be a deep spot down through the rock and all of a sudden it will abruptly stop and it will be shallow, as I say inside, shallow outside, and this here deep spot will stop and be shallow below that. And sail boats, I have seen them come down and as you know they have a centre board and they would come down and get in one of those deep spots, not realizing it. People may be not, maybe from Buffalo or wherever, and they would come down on that and the centre board would jam against the end of this rock and they would drop their sails, they would be just about tipped over, the mast would be forty-five or even sixty degree angle, getting down closer and closer to parallel to the water, just about tipped over. And they'd take their sail down and they'd try and pick up the centre board and they couldn't because the current pushing hard against the boat and it would jam right into the box, the centre board box in the sailboat and it was against the rock. And they'd try, boats would come along, and they'd try and blow them out. Well they couldn't because this wouldn't be very wide and they'd try and pull them in and they'd try and pull them down. So they finally find out that the only way to get him off of that would be to come down and get a rope on them and tow them straight up because that's the way they came down in.

And then I remember some fellow, he must have been drunk it happened a tug boat and he was in the river there and he was kind of oh, aimlessly going around, here and 'yon and he got out and got jammed on the reef waith this tug boat and I can remember Burkes, they had a Chriscraft and they went up there and tried to pull him off and different ones tried to pull him off. I was out on the Chriscraft, Burkes,with them. I was just a young kid at the time. Finally, the coast guard or someone had to pull him off and then this guy, and he started fooling around again and he hit the reef on the other side and he put her in and sunk her. And I don't know if they ever raised the boat or not.

But dad, we use to always saw wood by hand, for the fire wood and I got some pictures of dad sawing wood by hand there but, ah...

B.B.: Well, Mr. Miller you've given some very interesting information. Possibly we will be able to speak again and you can fill us in on some more things.

R.M.: Ya, yes. There's lots of more stuff.

B.B.: Well thank you very much.

R.M.: Okay.