

Beverly Branton interviewing Mr. Randall Messersmith in his home at 825 Edgemere. The date is June 6, 1985.

B.B.: Hello, Mr. Messersmith.

R.M.: Hello.

B.B.: Would you give me your date of birth please?

R.M.: Ya, January 22, 1916.

B.B.: And your place of birth?

R.M.: Buffalo, New York.

B.B.: And your occupation?

R.M.: Well, I was sales..sales mostly. You mean since I started work? I had eleven years with the American Optical Company, four years in the United States Merchant Marine..three in peace time and two in war time, and then back at American Optical and then finally twenty years with Adam, Melrum and Anderson Company, in Buffalo, New York.

B.B.: What brought you to Fort Erie?

R.M.: Well, we always eversince we were, my parents started it and my grandparents were over here at Cresent Beach. My dad was born in 1890 and my grandparents took him up to Cresent Beach. They had a big, old home up there. Eventually my grandfather sold it to a fellow by the name of Good, Daniel Good. They were a Buffalo family too. And ah..

B.B.: How did your grandfather get the property? What year would that have been?

R.M.: I don't know. That was way back when there was hardly anybody around. It was like, you know, no lights and all they had was a horse and buggy, strictly horse and buggy. And maybe two or three ferry boats going across the river and taking people back and forth. But ah..

B.B.: Do you know what brought him to the Fort Erie are?

R.M.: No, it just, it just brought all these people, it's just a nice area and it's lovely in the summer, swimming and that. Then they'd go back in the fall but they'd always keep a summer resident here. But then a lot of Americans like me did what they call landed. When you land then you become a resident of Canada. You don't lo se your citizenship but you are a resident of Canada. Like there's hundreds of thousand of Canadians living in the States the same way that I'm living over here. Ah, according to the immigration department for every American living in Canada there's eleven Canadians living in the States..Arizona, Florida, Carolinas, you know, I don't blame them. 'Cause after last

winter I was about to call it quits here, oh

B.B.: So you live here all year 'round?

R.M.: Oh ya, year round. Yep, yep.

B.B.: So your grandparents owned property down at the Cresent Park area?

R.M.: Oh, yeah Cresent Park.

B.B.: When you were a child did you use to go to the Cresent Park area?

R.M.: Oh, no, no. When I was a child our first home was right on the beach here. Three doors from Helena Street, just this way. And it was one of those that was really. . you know our whole front yard was nothing but sand and weeds, but now it's a big beautiful home. All of these homes have been transformed into mansions practically, real nice. But we did the best we could in those days you know.

B.B.: What are some of your first recollections of your home by Helena Street as a child?

R.M.: Oh, I don't know..running around all summer barefoot like the other kids did. Nobody had a boat, we built rafts, we had rafts, tied logs together and did the best at what we had. Big old collie dog, Laddie. And we use to paddle our ass all over you know this side of the reef. The lake is high now but in those days you could walk nearly out to the reefs and hardly get your feet wet. But now the lake is so high. It's something they're doing up at Lake Superior that makes Lake Erie so high they claim.

And we'd go back and forth to school in Buffalo. We'd ah, our dad or somebody would take us down to Fort Erie. We'd cross over on the ferry boat, walk up the hill, the Niagara Street hill and then get a trolley to wherever we were going. I think I went to School 16, or 17. I went to School 16 for awhile and then 17 and those were the real early days. Then we'd come back at night across the ferry and if we missed the little, we use to call it the Dummy, the Sandfly Express, but if we missed that then we'd walk back home all the way down Albany Road see. And those were the days when..now if a kid was near the lakefront the bus picks him up, but we did a lot of walking.

B.B.: Did you live all year round here, then?

R.M.: Not here, no. Just in the summer and we'd go back in October usually and come maybe in May.

B.B.: You were explaining to me a bit about the water system, the sewage system..could you explain that?

R.M.: Well, it was the pump house was right down here about three blocks down. And they had a pump down there and an old fella by the name of Tom use to go down once a day and oil it and he'd sit in there by the hour. And the pipes were put out in the lake, way down there, oh, I don't know how far out, not too far out. And it supplied water to most of the houses on the beaches here. And then in the fall they'd have to yank all that in with a couple of horses. Then they'd stack them up and leave them there and they'd blow them out with air or something to get the water out so they wouldn't freeze.

B.B.: So how long did you live in that home for?

R.M.: That house, oh, not too long in that house, about four or five years. And then we sold it and moved to Tonawanda and didn't come back here for quite awhile. Oh, and then we came back here..we were gone for a long time..ya, we had a house on Beachview and Lakeview and then twenty something years in that old barn over there.

B.B.: Tell me about the barn.

R.M.: Oh, yeah well it was just an old broken down barn with a big hay loft and everything and we just started from scratch. It was falling over and we got a contractor from Stevensville and another one and he jacked it up. And he put big railroad ties in it and he' jack it up oh, about a foot or so and then and then a man from Ridgeway put a cement foundation around it and then they put it down on this but they couldn't straighten it up too much or they'd break it, they say. The chimney was cracked anyway so eventually we had to take the whole chimney down and put a whole new one up. And it was just sort of a cockeyed old barn but it made a beautiful home. The living room was nine hundred square feet, thirty by thirty, big beams going through it and we panelled it all you know. Big kitchen and we made a game room. A lot of hard work and a tool room and the big hay loft upstairs we made a big beautiful bedroom out of it. We had four bedrooms upstairs, big bath.

B.B.: And that belonged..you bought it off the people from across the street.

R.M.: Ya, the people, a lady by the name of Mrs. King owned it, we bought it from her. In fact in those days I could have bought that house on the corner there, the one next to it and the barn from Mrs. King for 5,000 bucks. Today you're looking, well I know Mr. Sheer would sell the barn for \$65,000 alone. But those were the days when none of

us, I think I was making oh, at the most \$28 a week you know and nobody made any money. I had to borrow money from as I told you, from a farmer to fix up the old barn. But somebody with \$5,000 could have got that whole plot, the three homes there from Mrs. King. She was a little of an eccentric but she knew what she was doing.

B.B.: So how many years did you live in that home.

R.M.: About twenty-two, about twenty-two. And then due to illness and death in the family I moved back to West Seneca because I was transferred out to a brand new store out there, so I got an apartment out there, and lived out there for a few years. And then I came back here and got an apartment on the river and another apartment in back of that one. Brand new ones they built. And then we heard about, I don't know I didn't even think about it, some of the family started looking at a home on the lake. So just by word of mouth we heard about this. Our neighbour told us about it. A fellow from Chicago use to own it and I guess they..and we approached them and made a deal and that was it. Now I'm sitting here looking out on the water. But I've seen a lot of lake Erie I want to tell you. Besides living on it I use to work on it when the big William H. Donner from Bethlehem Steele, the boat I was on for a couple of years. And I don't know, every week, once a week we'd go up and back, up and back just..to Superior, DuLuth and that you know, we'd go and bring back a big order of ore for Bethlehem Steele. Of course know as you can see the economy then, you don't see any boats on the lake, you know there's one smoke stack going over there, there use to forty and there's twenty-two thousand men out of work. I mean that's the state of the economy that can't be helped so these guys I guess everybody knows the blue collar workers had it, men in overalls so their going to have to get more technical or something. But Buffalo at one time was the biggest inland sea port in the world, inland seaport, fresh water seaport. Ya, well that's not doing us no good in this neck of the woods. I can remember and you can put this is, when I was a little kid and I had a home down at that end of the beach, I woke up one morning and I looked out the window and I looked out at the point there and this great big Lake Erie passenger boat..I still remember the Octororia was stuck on the reef out there during the night. I don't know, there's a lot of different stories about the fog or they were drunk or something but they had to get a lot of boats to get most of the people off and maybe five

or six tugs from Buffalo and they finally pulled it off. But what a thing that was to look out there and see that big passenger boat out there. Those were the days when you had some beautiful boats, passenger boats.

B.B.: Where were they going and coming from?

R.M.: Oh, Cleveland, Detroit and right on up to Sault St. Marie or right on through the Detroit River up to Mackinaw and that..beautiful excursion boats..and great big side wheelers, the Greater Detroit and the Greater Buffalo. Big ones with ball rooms and bands and you know a lot of people having a lot of fun on them. Now that's all shot now. Those were the passenger boats. Plus you couldn't sit here for twenty minutes without seeing one or two freighters go back and forth.

That was the days when I say that was the most beautiful park in the Niagara or the North American continent at one time. It was pretty..boy it was beautiful. A fella by Mr. Bardol built it, a fellow by the name of Bardol. And he use to take such beautiful care. He had the biggest indoor swimming pool in the world right down there and then the dance hall and then next to that was a big pavilion with a big band shell and we use to go over and these orchestras come over and play in it. And at night they had some of the most beautiful fireworks, it was terrific! Ya, things like that you remember a long time.

B.B.: Go back to Erie Beach. Describe it where..exactly as you see it in your mind, right from the entrance way...if you were taking a day there.

R.M.: Well, it was on two levels. There was the lower level right on the ..and then it had these railings every few..60 or 100 feet big, a big via vase with a big light on it and then they had an upper level and another beautiful walk and all the lawns were manicured. And right down at the start was a big hotel, a wooden hotel and had a veranda on it, hundreds of feet long..I still remember that as a kid, that veranda. And then as you walked into the park it was just a beautiful lovely park with ponds and fountains and flower gardens. They had a zoo. And then at nights you could hear the lovely old carousel going with the , you know it's a little organ or whatever you want to call it, the drums playing. And the roller coaster and a million other things. They had a little movie on and we use to sit on the

lawn and watch the silent movies, Barney Google and things like that.

B.B.: Where were they shown?

R.M.: They were played on a screen, not on the water but right down on the beach sort of, a big screen. That's where they had a projector up on top of the roof on one of the buildings and they'd show it. Ya, it was just a big, typical amusement park, a real nice one you know. The dock, the big dock was just down on the other end. You can still see it and the boats use to come over from the foot of Maine Street across..you had two feed boats, the Chicora that was one, and Ossian Bedell. And a lot of people would come over the ferries to Fort Erie and drive down. Then I guess when the bridge opened in '28...But the park, they had to make a deal with Crystal Beach, they had to close one of them. So Mr. Hall he owned Crystal Beach and Mr. Bardol I guess they got together and made a deal. They finally closed Erie Beach and left Crystal Beach opened. That was the deal. It was suppose to be on lease where they couldn't use it never as an amusement park for ninety-nine years...You could do anything you want with it, build on it or build homes and that but so far nobodies, I can't understand, I'll never know why the Canadian government doesn't grab it, you know the Niagara Parks Commission. My god, what a beautiful marina that would make or just lovely homes or something. But the lots right down at the other end of the park, just vacant lots, \$50,000 a piece they want with no homes on it. But they did, Buttonwood did try, they spent a lot of money on it but it ran into a lot of money. They were dynamiting out in the lake and everything. I guess it's all on solid rock and it's..but it's still in my opinion a beautiful piece of property. But the only one that can do it, it's got to be the government you know because you can't get private investors to spend that much. But it sure would make a lovely piece of property. And it'd be real nice instead of lying there like a jungle with these you know..I guess the cops are afraid to go in there sometimes, these kids the way they ruined it. But a lot of fond memories of it.

B.B.: Tell me some of them.

R.M.: Well just they were good times. When we were kids there use to be a zoo there. I remember the beautiful peacocks you know and

some of the pretty..the animals there. And ah, right down here where the Waverly Hotel is, that use to be the old original Pierce home, Dr. Pierce. In fact, they wrote that up in the news, they asked me a lot of questions about that. Ya, that's the old Pierce home, Dr. Pierce owned that. It use to have a porch all the way around it. And then I guess they died and somebody else took over. And then it went from there to a bootlegger. One time I think it was a tea room too, a tea room. And so many people have owned it now, but oh, this guy has spent a lot of money. Wow, he's spending a fortune on it, I don't know where he's getting his money from but..he says he didn't get it from the government or anything. Other than that...

B.B.: So what did Dr. Pierce do with his home?

R.M.: I don't know, eventually his family must have sold it. You know they must have just sold it like all these homes. I use to years ago mention all these people. There was the Rungs, the Hunts, you know the Aldermans, the Wilks but they're all gone. I think most of the kids are all gone too. You know they get scattered all over the world. I remember, in fact that lady wrote a wonderful book, one of the women wrote that book on Cresent Beach and it's darn near sold out too. I remember a lot of those people. Danny and the Rix's, they were there for years and years. Real staunch families, good old staunch Buffalo families.

B.B.: I'd like to go back to Erie Beach again. The hotel..what color was the hotel..do you remember?

R.M.: No, I think it was just a white, just a white, as long as I can remember, as far as I can remember. It's been years since they spent any money on it. I think he's going to make a big patio out there and then he's expanding the kitchen I know way out.

B.B.: That's the Erie Beach Hotel...?

R.M.: No, no, oh I thought you were talking about the Waverly. The Erie Beach Hotel was just a big white clapboard hotel. Big, long white it had, like I said, it had a big porch on it. And I was out on the Pacific in merchant marine when my mother sent me pictures and it burned. I don't know I think it was in the fall probably 'cause ... But from then, after they closed the park, I think in '28 or '29, I think the final day was in the 30 I think, from then it just started to deteriorate you know.

And one by one they'd set fires to different buildings.

B.B.: Do you remember the inside of the hotel..what was in there..was there a restaurant or...?

R.M.: Oh, ya there was a great big dining room and that, I don't know it was pretty small ..but I remember it very plainly. About,you should check, pick up the phone some day and call the Buffalo Historical Society on Nottingham Terrace and spend an hour in there some day. It's beautiful. I went over with a friend of mine from the beach when they had the Pierce Arrow display over there. Now I bet you they have a library, I bet ya you tell them, explain you need pictures of the old Erie Beach and tell them you are from the Fort Erie library and they should bend over backwards to help you. And I bet you they got all kinds of photographs and that and articles maybe too. That's the historical building right on Elmwood and Nottingham Terrace. You can't miss it. It's a lovely place. You could spend hours in it. It's not the Museum of Science it's the Historical building right on Elmwood, eight minutes from the Peace Bridge. But I'm pretty sure that's the best place if you want any data on the Erie Beach or the park or Peace Bridge or the ferries. I remember the big old ferry. There use to be Newton and the Jamaica. They were side paddle wheelers. And we had a big storm one fall and it blew both of them up at the beach there at the little Baby Hole where the people use to swim and that. I twas so funny to see these great big, they were big boats with side paddle wheels on them.

B.B.: And they both blew up on the beach.

R.M.: They were both up on the beach, the Newton and the Jamaica, ya.

B.B.: Was anybody injured?

R.M.: No, no it was at night I think and they were tied up, and they just blew, they just broke loose. And they had the City of Toledo. That was a terrific big boat. That was a side wheeler too. And then the New Orleans, that was a propellor driven boat. But once the Peace Bridge got going they couldn't compete you know, it was just a useless battle. Then the little Dummy use to come from Fort Erie down along the lakefront here. There was an engine and a couple of cars and we use to call it the Dummy or the Sandfly Express, I guess it got better known.

B.B.: Where would it drop you off?

R.M.: Well the final stop was right down here at the front of the hotel,

right down here in front of the Waverly, it came down. And then they'd back it up and down at the other end of the Grove they had a big turntable and they put the engine on the turntable and turned it around and let it go back down. It was quite a thing. It was a nickel from here to Fort Erie.

B.B.: What was the Grove like?

R.M.: Just pretty, beautiful you know. It was real nice. They took good care of it. Lovely place to eat or bring your lunch or just wander or walk through it.

B.B.: What did they have..picnic tables...?

R.M.: Picnic tables, yep. And they always usually had entertainment, somebody singing or a nice orchestra or a band or a, you know.

B.B.: Did they have like a band shell?

R.M.: Oh, ya they had a big band shell, yep next to the dance hall. Sometimes they even had open air dances out there. And then naturally the big swimming pool that use to be the biggest in the world. Oh, there's a picture of it, isn't there a picture of it on that calendar? Let me take a look and I'll bring it back.And this is where you use to dock. You know where Gene Agrette's Red & White store is well it's right here where my thumb is and this is where your car came off the ferry and the passengers would have a gang lane and they would come down. And up here would be where the little Dummy and it's cars were and you'd get on that and come up to the Beach. But that was the Newton and that had another twin called the Jamaica. I wonder..oh, here..there's the beautiful old dance hall see and here's the swimming pool.

B.B.: Now is that facing the lake?

R.M.: Oh, ya. It's right down here, you can see it. And this is a boardwalk and here is another big pool. This is the biggest indoor, outdoor pool in the world. It had you know people coming from all over, they'd high dive. Here it was a little shallower for people who couldn't swim so good and out here it was deeper.

B.B.: So this on the left was more of a wading pool?

R.M.: Ya, well ya. Little..

B.B.: How deep?

R.M.: Well two feet, four feet. Then you'd get out here and it would be five or six feet. And here it was six feet.

B.B.: And the high divers would...?

R.M.: Oh, ya they had big platforms, when they'd bring people from all over. They had stands all along here and they'd fill them with people. And this was all nice beach here, back here where I said on certain occasions they'd have the fireworks. And that was a lovely ballroom and down below it they'd have dressing rooms and a bowling alley and things like that.

B.B.: In the dance hall they had the bowling alley?

R.M.: Down below it, below it. And then you had your dance floor and then up here was a balcony where you'd walk all around and see all the dancers down there.

B.B.: Where was the Casino?

R.M.: Right..you mean the dancing? The dancing would be..this is the Crystal Beach one I think, ya, wellit would be similar to this but they had a balcony all around it. Here they don't you see. That's the band stand.

B.B.: So there was a large athletic field?

R.M.: Oh, ya there was an athletic field.

B.B.: Where was that located?

R.M.: Well from here it would be on the left. If you got off the boat someday and walked down the park, it would be on your right. But..it's too bad now but I went to look the other day because the town is doing something down at the end of the road here 'cause that use to be just bad but now I think they are making it nice for awhile. People can go there and swim 'cause it's all sand down there, pretty nice. And boy, the town is doing it I think. They brought a lot of loose gravel and they had machines down there the other day working on it which is good.

B.B.: Were you ever over to the athletic field to see any of the athletes?

R.M.: When I was a kid but other than that..they'd have ball games and stuff like that. And I remember every year, I think on the 4th, there use to be a little air strip over here where they had airplane and usually on the 4th, they'd fly out over the lake here and a guy would jump from it in a parachute and usually the Bardol boys would go and pick him up. That was a big deal too.

B.B.: That was on the 4th of July weekend.

R.M.: Ya, that was on the 4th of July. And they use to keep over here

in a barn. It was a two, a two winger by-plane.

B.B.: How far back did the property go..right up to the Dominion or even further?

R.M.: Well, no the big parking lot use to be on the other side of the, that Waverly Hotel here. That was all a parking lot for the Grove then. And the land as I say went all the way down to where the big old pier is. And it stopped there and there was some lovely homes there. In fact, the Bardols had two homes down there, themselves and two of the sons.

B.B.: Which homes were they?

R.M.: Well one, the first one was Eddies, the first home and then way at the end up on the hill was Bob's. That was another Bardol or was it Frank's, no Bob. But there all gone now, all gone. But the father made a lot of money. he was a real nice gentleman.

B.B.: Do you remember some of the rides?

R.M.: Oh, ya.

B.B.: Some of the names?

R.M.: They had the Dodge, you know you'd get on these electric cars and they had these cables that twirled around, little airplanes that flew way out over the water. I remember that.

B.B.: What was that called?

R.M.: I can't remember what it was called. And they had the Blue Streak, one of the first roller, was the Blue Streak. And naturally they had the Fun House and then they had a big thing where you get on a little piece of carpeting and come tearing down these big slides you know. And then they had another big ride where you'd go through these tunnels in a boat and then in the end they'd take you way up top of this thing, you'd go whoo crashing down into the water in this boat you know.

B.B.: Do you remember the name of that ride?

R.M.: No I can't remember.

B.B.: What about the Lindy-Loop, do you remember that or the Wildcat?

R.M.: Oh, the Wildcat, I remember that. That was another big roller coaster they built, ya.

B.B.: What about the Tumblebug?

R.M.: Tumblebug, ya I think that went around like this, around in a big circle if I'm not mistaken.

B.B.: Do you remember any other of the rides, any of the names or...?

R.M.: Well I don't think us kids did too much riding. If we'd scrape of few cents together we would rather get a hot dog or something.

B.B.: Okay, what kind of food stands did they have?

R.M.: Oh, typical. Ah, flossy, cotton candy and real good waffles with the powdered sugar on it. And naturally wonderful hot dogs. And I guess a lot of ice cream and stuff like that. And they had a couple of places where people would come with the kids and eat you know. Indoors and outdoors, indoors if it was raining and out doors if it was a nice day.

B.B.: Do you remember, just thinking back to the Casino too, what was the color of the Casino..what was that made out of?

R.M.: I think it was white.

B.B.: Do you remember what colour the roof was?

R.M.: Red, I'm pretty sure...it was red I think...I'm pretty sure it was red...sure it was just nice white stucco like and you could walk on the outside of it, all the way around it, all the way, on the second tier, the second level, the first level and I think the roof was all nice red. There was another little wading pool behind it, all nice wading pool. And then dressing rooms and all that underneath there. And on this side way over there a big open air dance floor with a big band shell in it where the big orchestras use to play on the outside. And the crowd would sit up on the nice ~~planting~~ lawn there and listen to it.

B.B.: Do you remember some of the names of the bands that use to come?

R.M.: Back in those days? Oh, I can't remember, I can't remember. It's going back in the twenties, twenties ya. The thirties was the final day. But they were nice dance orchestras, sixteen to eighteen piece dance bands you know. They were nice ones. But some would come and play all season there you know. The musicians would get a big old place on the beach someplace and all live in it. They were good you know. But ya, that's about all I can remember of those days.

B.B.: Were you ever in Crystal Beach?

R.M.: Oh, ya. I took the boat over a lot and we use to go down and take a car ride down there. And we were one of the first groups of people that ever discovered Sherkston. I remember Sherkston when we use to call it the 'Deserted Village', back in the twenties.

B.B.: Tell me about that.

R.M.: Nobody ever went there. It was, well just a few people on the beach.

My Uncle Walt Hayes use to have what is known as Pleasant Beach and he had a couple nice lodges there and that and..beautiful beach. And then Sherkston use to be a quarry. They had a quarry there and there use to be railway tracks. And I think at one time they could even bring freighters or barges in but I don't know how close But I know it was a big quarry. And you know they use to getsand and gravel or something but...as I say there was hardly anybody there but now it's, any good weekend I guess there's thousands of people there.

B.B.: You'd get there by boat did you say?

R.M.: No, by car..oh, you could go by boat if you wanted. No we'd take a car. Sure we use to go up there when we were kids going to Kenmore High School even. In those days we'd get in our old Model A or you know one of these cars and come over on the Bridge or the ferry boat and go up there. That was back in the thirties and we had a lot of fun then too. Ya, you'd make your own fun. The kids today don't know how to do that I don't think. Well, I see some of them here, they're pretty good. They go down here and get a big bonfire going and I've never seen them get out of control but they seem to have a good time.

B.B.: What did you use to do for entertainment, around, when you came in the summer?

R.M.: Oh, we had a pretty good circle around, acquaintances you know. And July and August we spent most of them just in our barefeet romping around the whole place. And money in those days, you didn't need much, you seemed to make your own entertainment. Like I said, the kids today have a sailboat, motorboat..we just got a bunch of logs together and made a raft and that was it. No such thing as you see today when in another two, three weeks there'll be a dozen boats out there. But...

B.B.: When you compare Crystal Beach to Erie Beach, what was..was there much of a difference in your eyes?

R.M.: Well, I don't know, except for the distance. And of course Crystal had it over Erie in one way, they had a lovely sand beach. Erie never had a good sand beach. That's why Mr. Bardol built that big pool down there you know. It was beautiful fresh clean water and all that but they never did have a decent bathing beach. But Crystal Beach always advertised that lovely bathing beach. And then they

had their beautiful dance hall too. And just about any ride they had was at Erie Beach. But between the two Beaches they had to close one and I guess they all got together and decided that that's got to go. But that was the prettiest Beach by far.

B.B.: Erie Beach?

R.M.: Oh, yes very pretty! Prettiest beach by far.

B.B.: The pool it was, was it fed by the lake?

R.M.: Oh ya they had big pumps, big pumps ya. Ya, it was quite a thing.

B.B.: What happened..what would happen in the off season to Erie Beach?

R.M.: Well, they'd board most everything up and they'd usually have one man, I think his name was Johnson, he use to be the caretaker..the watchman, use to call him the watchman. He was the caretaker and he would just keep his eyes out on things you know in the winter time. They, I guess they do the same thing down there, just try to make it you know as winter proof as possible and let her go to the following June or May. But they would always have a couple of watchman you know to care of it, a big investment.

B.B.: Where would you go shopping?

R.M.: Ah, Fort Erie or Ridgeway. We did a lot of shopping in Ridgeway too.

B.B.: Have you seen either Ridgeway or Fort Erie go through many changes?

R.M.: Well the biggest change I think is the big mall down there, the Mall ..I don't know. Since I've been here they've built a couple of schools and they..I guess the roads have improved.

B.B.: Do you remember when some of the Parkway was filled in..the Boulevard was, the water came up pretty close to the Boulevard there..do you remember that?

R.M.: Oh, ya I've seen some bad storms on the beach. I've seen waves crashing up at the bottom of the stairs there many a time. And that's what practically took all of, well Erie Beach. It always crashed up there and did a lot of damage.

B.B.: Every year that would happen?

R.M.: Not every year, might be two or five, or ya get a real dilly, I mean a real hum-dinger. Oh, it'll get nasty, powerful bad, nasty. 'Cause I was out on the ocean and I've seen these lakes get just as bad. Quick too, they come up awfully quick.

B.B.: Were there any railways that came out this way, other than the Dummy?

R.M.: Well just..the Canadian National had tracks right down there, just at the curve where they use to go around there. And then on Helena Street the tracks are there too but they stopped that just a couple of years back. Sure I remember when they had great big steam engines and passenger trains and freight. And then they had the deisels and mostly freight and finally they just abandoned it.

B.B.: Where was the station located?

R.M.: One was in Fort Erie and the next one would be in Ridgeway. In fact, that station is down at Oakes park now. That's the Railroad Museum. They brought it down I'm pretty sure.

B.B.: Was there one at Rosehill?

R.M.: Rosehill, I don't think so. Wait a minute let me think. There might have been I don't know. There might have even been, way back years ago at Cresent. There could have been, I don't know. I don't think any of these stopped..I don't know. But in the 1800's I guess they did have a train running from here all the way up past Ridgeway, way back then in the late 1800's, early 1900's.

B.B.: Do you remember Heatherington's store?

R.M.: Oh, ya sure. Harry Heatherington he was a good friend of mine. Before him, it was always a good store there. They use to have such wonderful meats as I recall. Harry Heatherington had real good meats. And his wife Audrey she was a nurse I think. I don't know if she's still alive. Then before that there were the Rungs and then before the Rungs there were the Hunt brothers, they owned it. My brother Craig, when he was a little boy he use to deliver for them. They had a little Model T truck and they use to deliver groceries up and down the Beach.

B.B.: The people would phone in their orders?

R.M.: Phone in or just leave a list with them and they'd make it up and Craig would deliver it.

B.B.: When did the telephones come in?

R.M.: Oh, in the early days we never had a phone. If you wanted a phone you'd have to go to somebody who had one or else go to the store or something I guess. But that house down there, we never had a phone I know. It'd be hard to say when they came. They must have come in the twenties, the late twenties or thirties or..we had phones around but not every house had one. 'Cause why, a lot of those people would spend only three months of the year here, just

the nice summer months and then go back. My father would have to go back and forth to work everyday usually and a lot of the kids went back and forth to school until school let out. They they would spend the whole summer here. And most of them did like everybody, the kids would lay on the beach and enjoy the sun for a couple of months you know or swim or go out in their boat.

B.B.: Has it changed much around here, over the years?

R.M.: Oh, over the years..I don't think it's changed that much. The beach to me was darn near the same. This looks nearly all the same. This house has been here seventy years. In fact, most of these old timers, these old timers I can remember most of the people who lived in them. They haven't changed much, the houses themselves. Sure they might have added a room on or painting and did a little work but the houses themselves are pretty much the same. Baćk there is what's built up, most of those houses, a lot of that's been built up see but all of these along here I bet you hardly any of them have changed much. Oh, ya well some of those houses down that way, the houses are still there but you can't recognize them maybe, changed them so for the better.

B.B.: Down towards Erie Beach.

R.M.: Oh, ya they spent fortunes on them, fortunes..like our house you'd never even know it, never know it.

B.B.: What did some of these houses sell for?

R.M.: What do you mean? When we bought ours? I don't know, my dad bought ours. I think he sold it for around \$1600, not thousand a hundred. Now that house right on the market if you wanted to check it out, the listing....but way back in the twenties I think he sold it for \$1600 or less. Of course we didn't have any money. We had a furniture store, we lost that but it was pretty rough in those days.

B.B.: You were at the Peace Bridge opening you said.

R.M.: Ya, Prince of Wales cut the ribbon on it. We heard he was coming over so me and my parents and I don't know an aunt and uncle and we went down on the Boulevard to watch them..and then they came down the Niagara Boulevard but they came by awfully fast. I remember one of the policemen coming by in a motorcycle, said he's in the fourth or fifth car behind me and you could see him. Ya, they had a big bunch of dignitaries down there and that's when they, oh, they made a big deal out of it and that's when they officially opened

it. I don't know when the actual opening was..I think it was in '27, it might have been in '28. I guess it was in '28 when it officially opened. But now it's the biggest port between North America, between two countries I mean..it is, Fort Erie is. I don't know how many thousand 22 thousand per day I think, average. Fourth of July or something, Memorial or, you know it's triple than that

B.B.: That must have improved transportation.

R.M.: Oh, sure..you'd get through much faster and there's less fuss and the price is the cheapest you can get anywhere. They use to go by the length and the weight and all that and the wheel base which is ridiculous.

B.B.: What do you mean?

R.M.: The wheel base, if you owned a big Pierce-Arrow you paid more than a guy with a Ford or a Chevy.

B.B.: You're kidding..they'd weigh it?

R.M.: Ya and you didn't have any computers or any way of checking on any cars. Some of these ticket takers made a fortune. They'd wear big boots and about every fourth one went in their boots you know, you know. A friend of mine use to work, be in immigration, in fact he's going to buy a house, he's coming back..he went down to Florida and the Carolina..now he's negotiating to buy a house over here.

B.B.: But when a car would come through it would depend on the size of the car?

R.M.: The wheel base.

B.B.: The wheel base of the car.

R.M.: The wheel base, the wheel base, it depended on the model of the wheel base.

B.B.: Do you remember what the range was in price?

R.M.: No, but it was more and then each passenger was more too. But now if you buy a book of tickets it's not bad.

B.B.: So each person in the car had to pay?

R.M.: Ya, the car, the driver, plus the passengers. And it went by the wheel base.Ya, if you owned a little car you didn't pay as much as the guy with the big car.

B.B.: When you'd come over on the ferry where would the customs officer be?

R.M.: Well he'd be on shore. He'd have the little offices on shore and

they'd check you as you came as you'd pull up to the ferry they'd you went around in a big circle, half circle like and they'd check you through, a couple, two or three gates and then you'd be on your way. They were pretty good and they'd do the same thing across the river in Buffalo. You know you'd have to pull off the ferry and they'd check you and you'd be on your way. But ah, Fort Erie hasn't changed too much. No, Fort Erie hasn't changed too much.

B.B.: Well can you think of anything else as you look back?

R.M.: Not really.

B.B.: Well you've given some very interesting information.

R.M.: If it wasn't such a jungle down there, I was down there the other day for the first time, couple of my friends walked down with me, 'cause we saw these bulldozers and all that and they're doing a terrific job down there. It's the first time anybody spent a nickel down there in years and years. And that's nice for the people to get down there you know because there's no place to launch a boat or nothing around here. It's ridiculous. You want to launch a boat you've got to go way down past Fort Erie or up here, I don't know where you would go unless you can get down a road and pull up on the beach or something. But they are making it awfully nice. When you go down, you should go down that way and look down to the right. That's where they're doing all that work. In fact, you should get out of your car, go down and take a look. And there's the little pier down there, oh see years ago..here I'll show you something.....

.....

B.B.: You were mentioning that Mr. Bardol built a pier.

R.M.: That's what we called the 'little pier', ya. And it's this side of the dance hall, maybe three, four hundred yards. And his idea was that his pier would bring in sand on the other side of it. It would create a real nice bathing beach for the people that came over, to have a beach. And, but apparently it didn't work. It didn't bring in a lot of sand like he thought it would. And if you go down, well I don't know what they are doing now but you, like I said you should take a look in it. So that's why they had to spend multi thousands of dollars to build this swimming pool which cost in those days almost a million.

B.B.: So was the pier at the edge of his property?

R.M.: Oh, ya just about ya.

B.B.: Okay and then from there, after that was where the swimming pool

was?

R.M.: Ya, ya that's right.

B.B.: And then the dance hall?

R.M.: Ya, ya.

B.B.: And then...?

R.M.: Well the pavilion with the big band shell on it and then there was nothing but just rocky beach. And then you had your first level with the lovely walk on it. There was some nice green grass and flowers. And then an upper level.

B.B.: And what was on the upper level?

R.M.: Oh, just a couple of amusements and things like that and they had a zoo and a merry-go-round and a, oh, the Fun House and things like that. And then the park, ah, the Stadium.

B.B.: And then where was the airstrip?

B.B.: Oh, that was way over, way over. Past the Dominion, past the Dominion.

B.B.: The other side of the Dominion?

R.M.: It was just a little bitty thing. Ya, the guy, they kept the airplane in a big old barn in those days. Now where it is I don't know, it's gone.

B.B.: Was there any more of the Park on the other side of the Dominion?

R.M.: Oh, no no. The park ended right down there. You see it ended right down there. I'll show you. I could show you some of the time. If it wasn't such a jungle now it's terrible that they let it go like that. It's too bad. And the Niagara Parks Commission they do such a wonderful job from here to Lake Ontario. They do such a wonderful, lovely job, why they don't make a deal and grab this and they could make such a pretty place out of it. I can't understand it. And everybody agrees with me. To let that thing just go to waste like that is a shame. As I sat it use to be the prettiest park in North America. They sure let her go. Even if they just made a lovely park out of it you know, a few nice picnic tables.

B.B.: Well can you think of anything else?

R.M.: But they've tried. Buttonwood spent a lot of money in there. And then way back years ago they were going to have, they dug for sidewalks, laid out all the you know the boundaries and that and then that all went under water too, just collapsed.

B.B.: What were they going to do?

R.M.: Subdivisions and houses and all that you know but I guess it's just

it's a lot of money.

B.B.: Was there any other plans of opening anything else up, that you remember?

R.M.: No, a lot of talk but they never got..I saw the plans when they first started. It looked awfully good to me. I was one of the first one to get the plans 'cause if they were ever going to make a public condominium or apartment down there I wanted one facing right on the lake you know. They had plans of a lovely marina and a restaurant you know and all that but it's just..couldn't go for it. I know they tried, they worked on it. I don't know where the money went. I guess it just dissolved. But if you want when you leave here, if you want I'll follow you down in my car just down to the end, to the thing here and we'll take a look and I'll show you what I mean. 'Cause this I believe they should do. 'Cause there's too many..this will keep some of the kids, they're causing a lot of confusion..and where a mother and her kids can come down and you know. And I think they are doing a lovely job now. That's the first time as long as I can recall that they've ever done anything. But we were, I can remember when we were..years and years ago when we were staying over, I'd come over and we use to go with some of the farmers around here and cut ice out in the lake. And then we'd store it in the big barn here with sawdust you know and make it last all summer long. They'd deliver ice, they'd deliver ice for the refrigerators.

B.B.: So you use to cut it. What would you cut it with?

R.M.: Oh, ya. With big saws, ya those farmers they were tough boys. They'd go out and ice fish out there and get big bags of blue pike. Now you don't get anymore blue pike. I don't know, they're all gone it's incredible. You use to get bags of blue pike. Yep, you really.. in those days...

B.B.: And you'd store this ice in a barn?

R.M.: The big old barn back here..it's gone now. He delivered all summer long. Twenty-five pounds, fifty pounds, a hundred pounds..that's the only way you'd keep your food cold.

B.B.: And the sawdust would keep it ...?

R.M.: Oh, no that was in the barn. That sawdust would keep it cold.

B.B.: Well you've given some very interesting information.

R.M.: Oh, I sure hope so.

B.B.: Well you have. Possibly, maybe when I go back over the transcript

I'll come up with a few more questions that I can ask you.

R.M.: Ya, but you might spend a beautiful afternoon that you might not know, if it pans out, I'm sure the Historical Society has some beautiful stuff there. And I think they would only be too glad to co-operate with ya, but if it did pan out you'd say boy I'm sure glad I made the phone call and called them. But you could try them someday and ask them if in their library they've got some information on the old Erie Beach Park and just see what they say. That might be a good idea. You might spend a hour just looking at beautiful photographs and all that you know. Because there are some people over there that are dedicated, old park lovers like that. I can't think of a couple of their names now, it drives me nuts. I mean you know of past days of, of what one time use to be the most beautiful city in the world. I remember Delaware Avenue it was like a tunnel with the big elm trees, you know it was just a big tunnel of beautiful branches. And the old parkway with all the bridle paths and that. Ya, that's progress, uh.

B.B.: Okay, well thank you very much.

R.M.: Oh, you're more than welcome, I'm sure.