

This is Shelley Richer interviewing Mr. Wilfred Vye in his home at 308 Bowen Road, on July 18, 1985.

S.R: Hello Mr. Vye. What is your date of birth?

W.V: 1901.

S.R: Where were you born?

W.V: In Stoke on Trent, Stavishire, England.

S.R: Have you lived in the area all your life.

W.V: No. We noved here to Bridgeburg in 1912. We came on the boat named McGantic, two weeks after the Titanic was sunk. Boy and we was scared to death.

S.R: Could you tell me what school you attended and where it is located?

W.V: The Phipps Street School, the old school. That's where I started and that's where I finished. One of my teachers is still living.

Mrs. Smith down there, I guess her maiden name was Miss. Johns.

S.R: How did you get to school?

W.V: We walked to school. I used to live down at the bottom end of Phipps Street, right across from the doll house there, the middle house. When we came that's where we lived. From there, in a couple of years, we moved up into the bottom end of Dufferin Street. And then from there we moved...the house wasn't practically finished. My dad bought it and finished it on Brock Street. Then from Brock Street we wound up to live on 332 Phipps Street in a house my dad built because he was out of work and he had to start to built houses. One of his houses he dug the cellar by hand, and wheeled the dirt out by hand, made the blocks by hand, laid the blocks by hand and he built the house by hand. And I did the plumbing in it. But by that time it was a galvanized pipe, there was no copper pipe at that time, all galvanized fittings, threads and fittings.

S.R: Would you remember how much, back when you were building these houses, how much it would have cost to buy one new?

W.V: How much to buy it right now new?

S.R: No back then?

W.V: Ah, let me see. About fifteen hundred dollars, a three bedroom house.

S.R: What year was your school built?

W.V: The old school?

S.R: Your Phipps Street School.

W.V: Gee, that was here when I came.

S.R: Could you describe your school and the number of students it had?

W.V: Yes, it was a one, two storey... two storey, and there was kindergarten. There was grade one, grade two in one class. The teachers used to teach two classes. Then grade three, grade four in another class. Then the next one they called entrance. We had no high school, but we called it the entrance class, if you wanted to go to high school some other place you could go. In charge of that was Miss Seaton. And the teacher I had, her name was Miss Johns, but now her name is Mrs. Smith. And she's still living, Mrs. Smith.

S.R: Can you remember anything interesting, stories from your school days?

W.V: Yeah, a lot of them. A girl name Marrion Edward used to sit right in from of me. We had the desks with the ink wells, you know, we used to write with ink. The principal used to use manual work when you did something bad and you got a lickin' of something with either a cane or a strap, mostly a strap. I took this girl, and she had long, blonde hair, and I took it and dipped in the ink well. I got six lashes on one hand and six on the other for doing it. But it didn't hurt after two because your hand went numb, and they could hit you all day long and you wouldn't feel any more of it.

S.R: I take it they were very strict back then.

W.V: Yeah. That's about all I can think of.

S.R: Could you describe any changes that have taken place in your school? Have there been any additions? Is the school still there?

W.V: Well, the desks are different and they have a different system now, curriculum you call it, that's all different now. When I went it was mostly ABC, you know what I mean? All ABC and one and one made two, two two's made four, that's about as far as we went. There was no square roots in mathematics or anything like that at that time. We had homework every night too. We had to take our book home and do homework, spelling, and bring it back the next day.

S.R: Are you, or have you been, a member of a church?

W.V: Yes, I've been a lot. I joined the Disciples Church when I first come here, and that church was right there where Spears Garage is now, no it isn't Spears...Lloyd, is it Doan, the Chevrolet Garage there right on the corner, there was the church there. Then from there

I drifted to the Methodist, what they used to call the Methodist Church. That's the one on the far corner, it's the United Church now. From there I got confirmed, then when I got older, I got confirmed to the Anglican Church. And then when I got married, of course my wife's a Presbyterian, I got confirmed again at the Presbyterian Church. I should be pretty good. And I belong to pretty near every organization in the town. I belong to, I got a band my wife found the other day, CDC. Canadian Civil Defence. In the time of the war you know, everybody was supposed to be on the look-out. I belonged to the fire department, I belonged to the St. Johns Ambulance Corps., I was assistance Scout master in the Bridgeburg Boy Scouts, the first Bridgeburg Troup, I was assistant scout master of that. Then I started going to work when I was...my dad says come on you're about old enough to go to work. I was sixteen. I started to work at the, they called it the Chicago Bridge and Iron. We used to live...that was in Fort Erie, and I lived in Bridgeburg. There's also a dividing line by Gilmore Road. They always figured that Fort Erie was just a little bit higher classed people living in Fort Erie than they did in Bridgeburg. The dividing line was Gilmore Road. And Bridgeburg, Jack Atwood was the J.N. Atwood was the, pretty near the king-pin in Bridgeburg. He was the...he had a furniture store, he was the undertaker for the town, he was...he had a grocery store, and he had a flour and feed store. And he was the Reeve of the town and he was also the mayor...also the warden of Welland County. Now he practically run everything. The chief of police used to be J.R. Dowd. He was a provincial police, he was a Dowd. And the town police...the village policeman was a man named Jimmy McKey. Well they used to have a Dummy then at that station. The reason they called it the Dummy was it was just a one coach with a steam engine at one end and the other half of the coach was for passengers. And that used to run across the bridge, the International Bridge about every hour and come back every hour, just for people that wanted to go to Buffalo. The one day, this Jim McKey, our town policeman, village policeman, went to run after it. He was a little bit late and he slipped and the back wheels run over him and it killed him, so that finished him. Well, that was the dummy part of it. Well, that went on then for quite a while, and the ferry dock used to have a boat there, the Fort Erien. It

used to go back and forth, instead of coming down the strait...ran, well it operated until such time as they built the Peace Bridge. Then at Fort Erie, that was a village too, you'd have a little train with a steam engine and a coach that used to run to Erie Beach. About every two hours it used to go. Everybody around this neighbourhood used to always go to Erie Beach. We didn't even know too much about Crystal Beach because that was too far to walk. There was no cars, too many cars at that time. And I think the fire department, hook and ladder, was a man by two horses belonged to Mr. Benner. He had two horses kept special, just the hook and ladder fire department. And they, what did they ring? I think they rang a big bell, yes it was a big...a big bell on the town hall. You used to ring that big bell when there was a fire, and it would come.

S.R: Who is the first political representative that you remember?

W.V: Who is the first what?

S.R: Political Representative. A reeve, anybody in bigger government or anything like that?

W.V: Oh yeah. There was a Mr. Pettit the Lawyer. He was a...in the government. You don't mean town, or village dou? Mr. Atwood was practically everything. He was a reeve, and he was a warden of the town, practically everything.

S.R: Would you remember when Mr. Atwood was a reeve and all the different things?

W.V: Yeah, this was around, oh it would be around 1918 anyway. And he had five children. And down on the boulevard there, just passed the shipyards he had a farm. And on the river side he planted five trees, for each one of his children. And those big trees are still there. They're maple trees.

S.R: Do you remember about what year that would have been that he planted them?

W.V: That would be, that would be around 1915 I think.

S.R: What are some of the changes that have taken place in the area, like.. ?

W.V: Well, the one change is they amalgamated the village of Bridgeburg to the village of Fort Erie and called it a town. That's one thing they did.

S.R: Are the difference in the size of the land holdings the same

now as they used to be?

W.V: The land?

S.R: Land holding, the lots, the size of the lots.

W.V: You mean the area of land?

S.R: The size that each person owned. Are they the same size now as they used to be or are they smaller now?

W.V: I think they were forty feet at that time, but I see in the paper now they were just, are going to change, that where forty feet is not big enough. I think a lot was forty feet at that time.

S.R: Could you take me down a memory walk on Jarvis Street? Do you remember the stores on Jarvis Street, or the people that owned the stores, or just describing the street? Jarvis Street.

W.V: Well, it was a drug store on Jarvis Street and Bobby Land was the drug store there. And then there was a John T. James had his store there. And Menohouse had a shoe store there on that street. Mr. Hogue had a dry goods, a grocery store on that street. And Vahay had a dry goods store on that street. Down at the bottom there, where the Simpsons Sears is now, there used to be a great big hole there. And the Truckland Baily Factory was there. And they used to have a gas engine with an exhaust pipe just out into the hole. And the kids in the winter time used to climb up onto the bank and throw snow balls up into this exhaust pipe and it used to blow them off just like a cannon. Of course at that time, when the steam engine you know, they had no electricity, no electricity, everything was kerosene and oil lights.

S.R: Do you remember when electricity came in?

W.V: I guess it came about, oh about 19...in the houses they came about 1920, I think. 1920 electricity came into the houses. On the railroad it came about 1920, because I used to go, when I got on the railroad I used to clean the oil lamps, and clean the mirrors back and front. Then I got promoted and I went to the cinder pits, shovelling cinders. Then I went to cleaning engines, wiping engines. Then I got to be a machinist helper, then I got to be the wrecking derrick engineer. We used to have a fifty ton derrick, but the equipment got so big they had to get a bigger derrick, so they got a hundred ton derrick. So I used to look after that. Then finally I was made engine house foreman, then finally I got laid off. And to get there to work, why

on this end we used to go across the...well it was Grand Trunk at that time, that railroad...we used to walk across the Grand Trunk tracks. If there were cars there, we used to crawl underneath them. How some of us didn't get killed, I'll never know. To get to the Chicago Bridge and Iron Works, it was up there in pretty near Amigari, you know where it is across there? Then from Amigari, they changed it, the Chicago Bridge and Iron Works, I said they changed it to the Canadian Chicago Bridge and Iron Works. And then from that, they changed it to Horton Steel. And that's still the Horton Steel. And I got...then when the war started, between 14 and 18, Canadian Alice Chalmers down in the shipyards there, they started to build the boats and paid big money. They paid eight-two and a half cents an hour and all I was getting was sixteen cents an hour. So I went to the boss and asked him...I was doing machinist work. I was running the lathes, shaper, drill press...drill, planer, if I could have a raise. He said sure, I'll go and see what I can do for ya. So he come back and told me he had a raise for me. I says, well what am I getting now? Well he says, instead of sixteen cents an hour, you're getting sixteen and a half cents an hour. I got a half a cent raise. So then I had to quit and I went to the shipyards. I got sixty-five cents an hour more down at the shipyards. And I worked there 'till I was laid off.

S.R: Do you remember what year the shipyards was opened?

W.V: Remember what year...

S.R: The shipyards was opened.

W.V: Well, that was a steel works before the shipyard opened. That would be oh, that would be a way back in, much around 1910, around 1908, around in there. And then, of course when the first world war between 14 to 18, they started to build the boats and they made the ways in there and they launched them sideways. They didn't launch them back end. They slid them down sideways in the holes.

S.R: Do you know why?

W.V: Well, because the...I think because it was easier to do it because they had a canal built right along side the boats. See, and they just slid it in. It was a lot easier to do, to launch them that way. I give you the names didn't I? War Leveret and War Vixen and the South American and the North American. But after that why, after they got done, why we all got laid off.

S.R: Did you ever visit the community that was down there known as Shipyards, Ontario?

W.V: Yeah. But there was only just a few houses down there. We used to...we've got a lot down there, we still have one now. My dad used to walk down there on Saturday afternoons and Sundays and plant potatoes, and walk back again. From Shipyards to Bridgeburg. There was no transportation much back in them days. We used to walk all that distance.

S.R: Do you remember any of the things they had down there?

W.V: I think they had a, gee, I think there was a hotel down there but I just can't tell you just what it was. Back in there someplace.

S.R: Did you ever have an occasion to visit the Biltmore Club House? What is now Niagara Christian College on the Boulevard. It used to be a casino.

W.V: Yeah, but we didn't take too much attention of it because we figured it was just some building, and we didn't know too much about it. Oh yeah, softball teams used to to there and have their dances. And then there used to be, the Stratton Hall used to be down on Jarvis Street. That was a place where we used to go for dancing and things like that. That was way back in 1925, I guess wasn't it? And then we started the Credit Union. The railroad then, used to be the Grand Trunk, then it changed to the Canadian National. And the other railroad used to be...I forget just what that was. Pierre Marquette used to run in here at one time. They had a round house here. And Wabash used to run into the CNR there. The Wabash railroad used to run in here at that time.

S.R: What year did you start working on the railroad?

W.V: 1920.

S.R: How many tracks were there when you started?

W.V: How many tracks? Well, they had a round house with enough for twelve engines, twelve pits to run engines in, and a turn table so they could turn it around on the twelve tracks. But the CNR, the Grand Trunk, they must of had about twenty-four tracks. But the CNR, the Grand Trunk dominated most of the traffic down on this end. We had mostly the...fast freight used to go through from Chicago, New York and things like that.

That was a big thing in Fort Erie, the time they built the hospital. Doctor Douglas put all his money into that and built that.

I think Fort Erie was still the Village of Fort Erie, wasn't it at that time? I think it was.

S.R: Do you remember about when that would have been?

W.V: I guess that would be around 1925, wasn't it? Well then, when I got laid off, I went to the CNR, it was the Canadian National then. Well then we all got laid off because they switched from steam to diesel. They didn't need so many men to look after them because when they had the diesels...because they were just like a car, they never stopped if you wanted to keep on running. I went to the CNR in Toronto to work for a while. I come back one night and my wife said to me, says there's an add in the paper they're going to build a brand new water filtration plant on Rosehill Road. Why don't you put an application in for it? Well I said, that will be just the, a political job, I'll never get that. Well she says, put in for it anyway. So I put in for it, and I put down my numbers from my cards, my...I'm a portable engineer, Ontario portable engineer with a number, I can't tell you the number right now, and I'm a traction engineer, Ontario number. So I showed the...I sent these numbers in to them and, my gosh, I was made the assistant superintendant. A man named Mat Snishen was made superintendant and then made new, three other fellows to work different shifts. Well then Mat Snishen quit in about a year, and I was made superintendant. That's the best job I ever had in my life. But I started in at...I was fifty-nine...I started in when I was fifty-nine, when I was laid off. That's when the plant was built. But then when I come to be sixty-five, to pension me off, the region was taking over the Ontario Government Water Plants and all facilities like that. I didn't have enough time in for, to get a pension. So the Ontario Engineers asked Mr. Hyde, if you mind if I work another five years 'till I was seventy, because the purification watermen was kind of hard to get, and he said sure. So I worked there 'till I was seventy. And that was the best job I ever had in my life.

S.R: You liked it better than on the railroad?

W.V: Yes...

S.R: Could you describe the Customs' Yards at the railroad?

W.V: The customs?

S.R: Yeah.

W.V: Well just explain, how do you mean?

S.R: I heard they were, when the railroad was really busy the customs yard down there used to be busy like crazy. What did you have to do with the freight to make customs become involved? Why were customs down there?

W.V: Yeah. Well they had the, they had the custom offices up here at the Victoria Yard, that's where the subway is. That was Victoria Yard at that time. Through freight. Why the customs used to put a stamp on the car, through freight. Anything that wasn't through freight, they have to break a seal and go and inspect it, then reseal it again. It saved a lot of time. Most of it was all through freight sealed. Those cars they didn't bother with. But they had a custom office up there at the Victoria Yard.

S.R: Do you remember any of your bosses?

W.V: My bosses?

S.R: From on the railroad.

W.V: Yeah, sure. Roy Grice was one. I started with Roy Grice and then he went, then a fellow named Aldrieve, then after Aldrieve was myself. I was also the derrick engineer too.

S.R: How did you get paid down there?

W.V: Once in every two weeks. I used to get eighty six dollars for two weeks.

S.R: Was that considered good pay?

W.V: Oh yeah, that was, that's supposed to be good pay. Yeah.

S.R: Could you describe any of the union activities from when the union became?

W.V: Yes. The union came in there. But they weren't too noisy and boisterous. I was never ever on strike in my life. Of course your unions were all kind of new at that time and we practically agreed with whatever the management wanted and we got along pretty fine. There wasn't any hot heads mixed along with it like there is now, fighting for something that they don't know what they are fighting for. And then we started a credit union. That was started by a man named Jack Foster and Bill Johnson and what's the big fat fellow, what's his name? Oh Jack Foster and Bill Johnson will be alright. We started when Mrs. Mabee was in there. We started from a few thousand dollars, but I understand now they've got about five million dollars into it now. So it must be doing pretty good.

S.R: Do you remember when the union came into the railroad?

W.V: That was about 1930, I think it was.

S.R: Do you remember any accidents that took place?

W.V: Well. Mr. Johnson that I was just telling you about. They were working in the round house there, pulling the engines in the tender, doing repairs and pushing it together again. He was underneath there and he got his leg cut off. Then I was telling you about the town constable running after the dummy . That time he fell under the wheel and it cut him in two. It killed him right. And then another accident was from the power company at the...Fort Erie. The young lad was up there trimming the Christmas trimmings up on that medallion in front of the Canadian Power building, and he, the ladder slipped and he fell down, hit his head on the sidewalk and it killed him.

S.R: Do you remember what his name was?

W.V: Yeah. Minor, first name was...last name was Minor. Gee, I can't get his first name.

S.R: What's a derailment team?

W.V: Well that's a car jumping the tracks. That's what a derailment is.

S.R: I heard there were derailment teams back then.

W.V: Well, a derailment team would be...we called it the wrecking crew. Mostly they had a derrick. I remember the derrick for the New York Central, but I don't know who run the CNR's. But it was a regular car repair job. When they had a derailment team they used to take these fellows off the car repair and sent them away wherever the derailment was. Most of them used to be at Canfield. You used to have to go up there and put them on. Sometimes they were caused on account of a sharp flange on the wheels, sometimes it would be a broken rail and sometimes it would be some object they'd run over. The cars would jump over these things and just go off. Then the wrecking crew, out of the car gang, used to have to go there and put it back on again.

S.R: How was it working for the railroad during the depression? Did the railroad help people or were people laid off?

W.V: Well, it was very good for a while because those big liners used to go through here. You'd call them liners. They used to take the water on the fly. Used to have a trough right in between the tracks

about a mile long and it was filled with water. On the tender part there used to be a...you could move a handle and drop this trough down. They used to fill up the tank with water before it came to the trough. Then it would go back up again. Then it didn't have to stop for water, it could keep on going. 'Take water on the fly', they used to say at one time.

Oh yeah. I was out of work and my dad was out of work too. He said, what will we do, so he bought a couple of lots. There's one here on Brock Street and there's two on Jessie Street. He got a wheelbarrow, and a shovel, and a pick and he dug that cellar eight foot deep by thirty feet wide and thirty foot long. He dug that by hand, and wheeled the dirt up by plank with a wheelbarrow. After we got that done, we bought a machine, a second hand block machine some place, and we bought a lot of cement, and we bought a lot of gravel. Where we lived on Brock Street, 318 Brock Street, back where the garage is, we started to make cement blocks. So we made enough cement blocks to lay the foundation for this house. Then my dad went ahead with the help of a man named Charlie Davis and Mike Beam and Mr. Gilmore, and they built a house down there and the house is still up. Then he made such a good job of that, he built two more on Jessie Street and another one on Phipps Street. As I said, I did the plumbing on the one on Brock Street but I didn't know nothing about electricity. A man named Electric (electricity) was just starting to come into town at that time and there was something new. The man that did the wiring was a man named Houston. Houston, he did the wiring because that was an awful particular thing, was doing the wiring. It had to be done right. But anyway, he built five houses like that in Fort Erie.

S.R: So that helped him get through the depression then?

W.V: That helped us get over the depression, yeah. And one of them, he sold one of them at that time, and he sold it for twenty-eight hundred dollars. That was lot and house and everything. You couldn't even buy a garage now for twenty-eight hundred.

S.R: Do you remember anything about smuggling?

W.V: Oh yeah, yeah. Gee, I shouldn't tell you about that. Yeah, I used to go, and if I bought a new pair of pants I used to put them on, and put my old pants over top of them. And if I bought a new shirt,

I'd put it on under my old shirt and keep that, the collar, tucked in so they couldn't see it. The same with new shoes. I'd wear an old pair of shoes over, and throw them away, and wear the new ones back.

S.R: Were customs very strict then?

W.V: Oh yeah. There was one lady there, her name Mrs. Trench. She did...watched the ladies. A lot of them, the ladies tried to get away things like that, they used to have a, more like a bag, they used to strap underneath their waist, underneath their dress you know, and put their parcels in there. But she was so smart, she could smell new clothing, if you had any new clothing on. She was that smart. And pretty near every time...and then she'd take you in someplace there, the restrooms they had, and make you undress and find out. And she was pretty near right ninety-nine percent of the time. And then, the liquor store when the prohibition was on, why, they used to have row boats on the Canadian and American side. Used to bring them, their liquor and the beer over to, on this side of the International Bridge to the Canadian side. Before they got the, where the customs was, they used to lower the beer and the liquor down into the water in a net with a rope on it and leave it there. And then night time, why when things got...why they'd go out and pick it up and bring it into town. That's how they used to smuggle the liquor over.

S.R: Do you know anything else that they used to smuggle?

W.V: Beer and ale and...oh bicycles just lately. That was after the bicycles started to go. They used to ride, as I said before, they used to come across the bridge and buy a bicycle and ride it back. That's the way they used to do...

S.R: Were things a whole lot cheaper in Buffalo even back then?

W.V: Yes it was. Things are cheaper in Buffalo.

S.R: Was there much violence involved in the rum running days?

W.V: Oh gee, there was a lot of it going on in the night time. There was a lot of it. Especially on this north end, down this side of the International Bridge. Then they used to go from upper Grand Island, then from Grand Island on in. But that's the way they used to haul their liquor. They used to bring a lot of liquor and beer over. Sometimes they come and land, if the coast was clear. If the coast wasn't clear they would put it in the water and mark it, where it was and pick

pick it up some other night.

S.R: How old were you when you got your first car?

W.V: I don't know how old I was when I got my first car. I started work when I was sixteen. I think I was twenty. I got a Ford, a four cylinder Ford Coach. I got it off of Mr. Spears in Stevensville, and I paid seven hundred dollars for it.

S.R: What was the year of the car?

W.V: 1920 I think it was.

S.R: Do you remember the cost of gas?

W.V: Yeah. The cost of gas at that time was twenty-five cents a gallon.

S.R: How many miles per gallon did the car get on the twenty-five cents per gallon?

W.V: The car used to get about forty miles per gallon. Forty miles on the gallon. It was only a four cylinder car and there wasn't no automatic gadgets on it. It was just a straight engines you know. No power steerings, or air conditioning, or things like that. Just a four cylinder engine. About forty miles to the gallon.

S.R: Do you remember the speed limits in town or on the major roads?

W.V: Yes. Twenty-five miles an hour.

S.R: It was the same every where?

W.V: Yep.

S.R: What were the roads like to drive on?

W.V: Gravel it was then. The roads was all gravel. You couldn't go any faster if you wanted to. Fort Erie's roads was gravel and so was Bridgeburg's roads was gravel.

S.R: Do you remember when they got paved?

W.V: They got paved...oh they didn't start paving till about, up around 1930. Wouldn't it be around that time? I think it was. They started putting sidewalks down first before they paved the roads. That was a bonanza because everybody bought roller skates then. They used to go up and down the sidewalk on roller skates. That used to be quite a thing.

S.R: Do you remember what you did for entertainment, such as on a date?

W.V: Well yeah. What we did...we used to go over to the picture show. That was on, where the used car lot is now, on the north side of Phipps Street. We used to buy a bag of popcorn and go to the show every saturday night.

S.R: Do you remember what it was called?

W.V: That was mostly our entertainment, or maybe we'd go to Erie Beach about, maybe once every second week, maybe, because it was nothing to get in and the tickets on the amusements was only five and ten cents. I think an ice cream cone was five cents, sucker I think, they were two for a nickel weren't they? Cimmanon suckers.

S.R: Do you remember what the picture show was called?

W.V: Bellard. Oh no it wasn't. Vints (Vints was in England). Vints I think it was.

S.R: You mentioned Erie Beach. Did you go there often?

W.V: Yes, well no. That was quite a luxury when I went to Erie Beach because, you have to get down to the south end some way, where the ferry dock is. There was a train used to run from there to Erie Beach. A little train...and come back again. I don't know how we got to the ferry dock. We most likely walked most of the time or if somebody had an old car you got a ride.

S.R: Do you remember what year Erie Beach opened and closed?

W.V: I would say 1910, but when it closed I really don't know.

S.R: It opened around 1910?

W.V: 1910, I think.

S.R: Was it opened for very many years?

W.V: It's only been closed about...1970, was it closed? That would be a guess, I guess. But mostly, all the people here mostly, usely went to Erie Beach because they were closer. Crystal Beach was so far away, they didn't have transportation to get there.

S.R: Do you remember who owned Erie Beach and had it all built up?

W.V: They used to have a boat that...before the International Bridge was built, they used to have a boat go from the ferry bar across to Buffalo and back. They had two boats used to go every hour back and forth.

S.R: Do you know what they were called? Were they the Canadiana and the Americana?

W.V: That was the Canadiana. That used to go from Crystal Beach to Buffalo. They were bigger boats.

S.R: They were just small ferries then?

W.V: Yeah, down at this end.

S.R: For Erie Beach?

W.V: Yeah.

S.R: What did Erie Beach have to offer in the way of entertainment and amusements?

W.V: Well it had the bump-t-bumps. That was a bump-t-bump, you sit on a carpet and go down a big bump. And there was a merry-go-round. It went out like this (indicating with his hands). And then there was a ferris wheel. It used to go around like this. And then they had a shooting gallery, and then they had a, they had a roller skating rink. A big...the bottom of the floor I think was made of steel and you could keep on skating around. Made of steel on the bottom. The big top of the year was the farmer's picnic at the, at the Crystal Beach. They used to have a beautiful dance hall there, beautiful music. Most everybody used to go dancing. Oh, then they had that thing, it was like tubs on ropes. More like a merry go round. One that went around and about and things would sort of swing you out like this. The faster it went the more you'd go. And then the Blue Streak, that was another high, high thing. You'd sit in, about four in a car, and you'd go down and side ways, like this and back like that. But we could only afford to go to Crystal Beach maybe about once a year, and maybe Erie Beach about twice or three times a year.

S.R: Do you remember very much about Crystal Beach?

W.V: Yeah, quite a bit. There was a...it was just like Erie, only on a bigger scale. They always had more attractions because the Buffalo boats used to go across back and forth, the Canadiana and the Americana. They used to go back and forth across there. And of course they had the dance hall, a big dance hall. It brought quite a few people too, you know.

S.R: Do you remember any famous people, the bands or anything like that that came to visit the dance hall, to play or sing?

W.V: Yes I do, but gee...Benny Good... was Benny Goodman one of them? I don't know whether Harvey James was there or not? Rudy Vallee, yeah, Rudy Vallee.

S.R: Did you ever visit the Ontario Hotel in Crystal Beach?

W.V: Yeah, they had a hotel there. I guess it's closed now, isn't it?

S.R: Do you remember what it was like?

W.V: Well, no more than any other hotel, you know. You couldn't...in prohibition you couldn't have a drink. Sixteen was the limit wasn't it? You couldn't have any liquor or anything like that.

S.R: What, back then it was only sixteen?

W.V: I think sixteen, I think you couldn't go in under sixteen, I think.

S.R: Do you remember when it changed to eighteen and twenty-one, and now it's nineteen?

S.R: Do you remember the peg-leg railroad?

W.V: Wasn't that the Erie Beach railroad they used to call peg-leg railway? It must have been, because that's the only peg-leg railway that I know that it could be. It run from the Fort Erie ferry dock to Erie Beach. Only about four miles I guess.

S.R: Do you recall when the Peace Bridge opened?

W.V: Well that's right here in...you'll be able to get that out...(looking in a Times Review Magazine)...he was a reporter for the whole town practically. What he didn't know it wasn't worth knowing. Then they had the...what paper was that. They used have the Bridgeburg Review, it wasn't the Fort Erie Times at that time. It was the Bridgeburg Review. And the Buffalo Express we used to get, the Buffalo evening news we used to get, the Toronto Daily Mail we used to get. It used to be the Toronto Globe and Mail we used to get, and the Buffalo Enquirer we used to get. There was all kinds of newspapers.

S.R: About the Peace Bridge, was there any special celebration or anything when they opened it?

W.V: Yeah. Gee, I could guess, but I don't want to guess too much for fear somebody contradicts that in that paper (the old Times Review he's referring to).

S.R: Do you remember when the fire department started in Fort Erie?

W.V: Oh, I think the department was started in Fort Erie for...quite some time because when they started off they just used to havtime because when they started off they just used to have a hook and ladder and pulled by a couple of horses belonged to Benner. And that's quite some time ago. Before they had cars and gasoline I think.

S.R: Do you remember the Bertie Fair at the old Fort Erie Race Track?

W.V: The Bertie Fair yes. The Bertie Fair used to be an annual thing. It was more like a miniature Toronto Exhibition. And that was the...and I think it was held at the race track, wasn't it? Yeah. It was a, more of a agricultural affair you know, farmers and one thing and another like that. You could have stalls, you know baked goods or whatever you...yeah that was an annual affair. The the other annual affair used to...when the shipyard was going down

there. We used to have an annual, they used to have an annual picnic. They used to get a boat and pick up passengers from here at Bridgeburg and at the Shipyards and take 'em to Grand Island for a ride. A big day. That used to be a big highlight of the year.

S.R: Do you remember any other special gatherings, social gatherings?

W.V: Yes. The...when the Credit Unions started in town, why practically everybody had a credit union. The CNR had one, the Customs had one and we used to have an annual...when we used to have annual meetings why we used to have a dance along with it. You had to take your own drinks and...boy that used to be a grand time. About six of those a year pretty well.

S.R: During prohibition, were there any places here that you could still go?

W.V: You mean to get a drink?

S.R: Something you would rather not talk about? Yeah, you can tell stories but you don't have to mention any names.

W.V: Well, practically...yes it was done under cover, but pretty near all the hotels used give the drinkers, under cover if you wanted anything to drink. Or buy a bottle and smuggle it over the river from Buffalo.

S.R: Were the police very wise to this?

W.V: Well they knew it but they, you know, they used to look the other way, a lot of the people. Some of the hotels they kind of closed up a little bit, closed them up maybe for two or three weeks. They were kind of easy. They weren't too hard on them, because they knew what was being done.

S.R: During the depression was there any government aid? There's welfare now, did the government used to help you out if you couldn't work or anything like that?

W.V: No, that was...we never got no help from any government.

S.R: Not until later years?

W.V: No, there was no insurance or anything like that, no.

Yeah, they had a lot of land there, a lot of wood and a lot of woods and trees in there. We, my dad got permission from the Canadian Alice Chalmers to go into this bush. We bought an old trailer for twenty-five dollars and my car, I think was a Pontiac I had by that time, and they give us permission to cut any tree that was laying down and have it. But we couldn't cut any tree down, dead or alive.

So we went and worked in this here bush all one summer cutting trees with a cross cut hand saw. A cross cut hand saw and an axe. We had a...we got enough...we used to take a trailer load home every night and we had enough wood to last us for two, for two winters by doing that.

S.R: You said the Canadian something.

W.V: The Canadian Alice Chalmers, that was the shipyard.

S.R: Were there very many sports activities in Fort Erie?

W.V: Yes there was. There was softball and hardball and that's about all. And they had a wonderful old Ontario baseball team in Fort Erie at one time. They would match any team in Canada. Jack Williamson and Jack Halk. Jack Williamson was the pitcher and Jack Halk was on third base. Ray Young was on short stop and Harvey Hannis was on first base. Skip Howe was a catcher and Abby Morrow was on second. They were just as good as...I think, I think they come within an ace of winning the all Ontario champions from Oakville one year.

S.R: What was the teams name?

W.V: Mentholatum's they called the team. They had a real good...

S.R: And what position did you play?

W.V: Oh I didn't...I played softball. Then we, the town started a softball team. It was the McMorris and Fort Erie Dairy, and our company, and the Fleet Aircraft, and the West Ends, and Crescent Park had a team. But that was all local and it was soft ball. We played pretty good ball.

S.R: Do you remember about what year it was that the Mentholatum Team did so good in the all Ontarios? Just approximately.

W.V: Oh, I'd say about 1940-45.

S.R: Do you remember the old arena?

W.V: Oh the one that burnt, the one that fell down, burnt down didn't it?

S.R: The one that had a cave in?

W.V: Yeah, the one that caved in, it was all that snow. No I didn't go to that. I didn't do much skating, because I say, I was on nights most of the time on the railroad and I didn't take too much part in outside activities.

S.R: Is there anything else you can think of that you would like to discuss in closing?

W.V: Yeah, I had, for my education I went to, as far as I could to grade...I think I quite at grade five. And then I had to go to work, because my dad wanted me to go to work. So then I joined the correspondence school, and I was three years learning about steam locomotives. I went to night school in Black Rock three nights a week, and learned all about machinery and things like...and mathematics and square roots and things like that. So actually I was six years studying.

S.R: And that's what helped get you your job on the railroad?

W.V: Yeah, that's right.

S.R: You mentioned the Civil Defence, could you please explain it?

W.V: I used to belong to the civil defence league in the first world war, and our job was to do, was to go up and down the streets and make sure there was no lights showing through any windows or doors that could be, attract attention of any airplanes going over or things like that. It had to be strictly total darkness. We used to go up and down the street. That was our jobs to...I used to have, what street did I have? I think I had Phipps Street that I used to go up and down on watch. There was different ones that was located on different streets to make sure there was no lights showing, on account of zeppelins and dropping bombs and things like that. So they wouldn't know or have any guidance to do things like that.

S.R: You have a little buggle pin. What's that from?

W.V: The Fort Erie Buggle Band.

S.R: And what did they do?

W.V: We used to march up and down the streets practicing. March up and down the streets about twice a week playing our buggles...playing different songs and say 'Hail, Hail, The Gangs All Here' was one, 'Can't Get Up In The Morning' was another one. Oh, several, three or four we used to.

S.R: And who was your leader?

W.V: Calder, Calder. Mr. Calder, he was a scotchman.

S.R: About how old were you when you were in this band?

W.V: In that, I was about 17 I think, 17, 18.

S.R: Where did the group meet?

W.V: We used to meet in the town hall, everybody met in the town hall because that was the only hall we had.

S.R: Is the town hall in the same place it is now?

W.V: Yeah, and the Mann Stratton, they had a place where you could

meet. A dance hall that was down there by, oh I guess right where the, right at the bottom on the corner there, where that big hole used to be where they...in that building there. We used to meet there.

S.R: Oh on Jarvis Street?

W.V: Yeah.

W.V: Yes and the lodges in Fort Erie are quite active. There was the Masonic Lodge was quite big and the Oddfellow Lodge, which I'm past Noble Grand in, and the Orange Lodge which you don't have too much of any more. And what, between going to the lodges and practicing for baseball and playing sports, why I didn't have much time to do anything else. In fact you used to get the dickens from home because you were out all the time.

S.R: Do you have a closing comment to make?

W.V: My closing comment is that, I think they spoiled Fort Erie and Bridgeburg by reaching out so far. I think just Bridgeburg, the village of Bridgeburg and the village of Fort Erie and Stevensville and Ridgeway and Crescent Park, Crystal Beach would be very far enough for anybody to handle. And I think now they've got it too large and I think they've spoiled the whole system. Which is going to cost too much to, to build up and put all the sewers and the water system and the electric lights in.

S.R: Thank you very much for the interview Mr. Vye.

W.V: Well, I hope I helped you but I suppose after you have gone I'll think of a lot more that I should have told you.

W.V: There was more businesses on Jarvis Street I didn't tell you about. And one was Briggs, he was a paint and paper store and he was the only gasoline station in Fort Erie. He, it was a kind of a pump with a great big gas barrel and he had to pump the gas up into it and it showed off by gallons and then they used to let it into your car. And then there was a Foits Tobacco Store on the far corner that sold papers. And then there was a Mr. Valvo, he was the shoe repair man. And then there was the...Mr. Purpura, he had a fruit store for bananas and potatoes and things like that. And then there was Mitchels, had a bakery and an ice cream parlor there. And Mr. Richard White, he had a butcher shop. And there was a laundry there, the name Charlie Pong, he was a Chinamen. He always used to call me Mr. 'Y', Mr. Y, that's all he could say. Further down

I think there was a W. R. Kraft. There's a W. R. Kraft Store, dry goods store there. And the Review, the Bridgeburg Paper building was on that street. I think I told you that didn't I? The street was all gravel and sidewalks and there was hitching posts along the street where you could tie up your horse so they wouldn't run away.

S.R: Were the sidewalks cement or wood?

(his wife)Wood. Pieces of wood, you know with slats. I used to find pennies down there. Spent a lot of time looking for them.

W.V: (hitching posts) They're just like a fire hydrant only they're made out of wood. There's a big ring on the top of it where you could tie your horse up so it wouldn't run away while I was in the store.

The first world war they had conscription and eighteen to forty-five was the age and I thank the Lord I was too young for it. That's the reason I didn't have to go. But I was, I belonged to a patrol with an arm band on it, a Civil Defense league. Used to check that when night came, every light had to be out on account of the German Zeppelins were raiding this country, and they wouldn't give them any signals so they wouldn't have nothing to drop the bombs on. The main things that we were on guard for were...Civil Defense, was on account of these Germans...they built these great big long balloons. They were like a big cigar. Great big long ones, and they used to carry a crew of about seven or eight and just loaded with bombs. They just used to fly over the country and every place where they saw a light they used to drop a bomb. They didn't know where they were dropping them, just drop them anyway. That was the reason everybody had to have the lights out, and couldn't show any light so they wouldn't have no place to drop them.

There was a cooperative grocery store started like they used to have in England, that was owned and shared by the people. You were supposed to get groceries there cheaper, but they got so they didn't go very well and they had to charge higher prices than what they had. They had a delivery. I had...I used to drive a delivery truck. It was an old Ford with no top on it, a four cylinder Ford and I used to...with an open trunk...and I used to deliver these groceries to people around the town. But anyway that went under and the people who had shares in this, why lost there money because they didn't have enough business.

S.R: And this store was on Jarvis Street too?

W.V: That was on Jarvis Street. That was in the Credit Union building now, on the bottom floor. And after they moved out of there...building, Mr. Hogue went in and started another grocery store right after them. And he folded up in about a year because he didn't make a very good go of it.