

Diana Matthews interviewing Elsie Seil at 333 Rose Ave. Fort Erie.

Monday, April 15th, 1985.

D.M: Hi Elsie, can you tell me your full name?

E.S: My full name is Elsie Seil.

D.M: How long have you lived in Fort Erie?

E.S: Since fifty... well, I came over in 1925, but I really became an immigrant in '54.

D.M: Where did you come from?

E.S: Buffalo.

D.M: So are you an American still?

E.S: I'm an American citizen, but I'm just an immigrant!

D.M: How old are you now?

E.S: I'm 88 years old now.

D.M: Did you go to school in Fort Erie at all?

E.S: No.

D.M: Just Buffalo?

E.S: Just Buffalo.

D.M: I understand you worked at Erie Beach when it was open, when was that? When did you work there?

E.S: That was when.... in 1927 and '28.

D.M: You worked there two years?

E.S: Two summers.

D.M: What kind of job did you have?

E.S: I operated the frozen custard machine.

D.M: How much did a frozen custard cost then?

E.S: Oh, my word! I don't even remember, I think about three tickets.

D.M: Did you have to buy everything with tickets?

E.S: Oh, people had to buy tickets

D.M: They didn't spend money to buy things?

E.S: No, everybody.... they had booths selling tickets

D.M: What kinds of rides and attractions did they have there at the park?

E.S: Well, they had the Verners Ginger Ale stand and they had a potato chip place, I can't say it was fish and chips because they didn't serve fish, but they served the regular English potato chips with a vinegar. The first time I knew about vinegar! The two fellows that run the place were really English. And then they had the eating stand, a couple from.... came down from Rochester, New York. Their name

was Schleigel, and they operated the food stand and served meals.

D.M: What kind of rides did they have?

E.S: Well, they had the regular..... they're rides were..... too many rides. They had the animals, they had sort of little donkeys like, or small horses that the children used to ride on. but the main..... what I used to think was so wonderful was the way they had their swimming pools. They had a beautiful dance hall and they had a swimming pool on either side of the dance hall, one was for children and one was for grown-ups. But they were heated to a certain temperature in the pools.

D.M: Was the water from the lake?

E.S: Yeah, from the lake. But they were heated. They had a beautiful dance hall. And another thing that was very nice, every Sunday afternoon they used to have a sort of a religious service. People would gather from..... on the side of a... like a hill almost. They would congregate and they'd have a singer from Buffalo and a speaker from Buffalo. And every Sunday afternoon that created and got crowds. That was one thing that I thought was very lovely. I know my folks and everybody when they'd come visiting, the first thing they'd do would go down Sunday after noon and sit and wait for the service to come along.

D.M: Most of the people that came to the park, they were Americans, weren't they?

E.S: Oh yes. And the dummy train that used to bring the people from the ferryboat.... and I think alot of people used to..... the youngsters used to love to get on the dummy train, we used to call it the dummy train.

D.M: Where did it run?

E.S: Along from Fort Erie, where the boat would come in from across the river, it would meet the people and the dummy train would meet them and bring them up along the waterfront up to the beach. And they'd have certain hours to bring the people and certain hours to take them back.

D.M: Why was it called the dummy train?

E.S: I don't know, but it was called the dummy train!

D.M: The Americans that came to the park, they came across on the ferry?

E.S: Yeah.

D.M: What was that called?

E.S: Well, they had a couple of boats that used to even carry the automobiles across on the cars.

D.M: What was the park like then? In pictures it looks so nice and now it's so run down.

E.S: It was a beautiful natural park, it was a natural park. Everybody felt terrible when they had to..... when they gave it up.

D.M: Why did it close?

E.S: Well, I know that when the Bardols sold, they sold it to a man from Buffalo and whether he wasn't able to make a go of it or.... anyway, maybe he got a better price when Crystal Beach started dickering, and one by one, one piece at a time would go up to Crystal Beach, when they sold in , when this one closed in 1929. I've been here... we've had the house open..... of course I was working back and forth, living in Buffalo and Niagara Falls and I'd come weekends until I came here to stay. As I say I came as an Immigrant in '54. But I've been coming over here since '25, 1925, when I was young and in my prime!

D.M: You mentioned the religious ceremony at Erie Beach, did you go to church in Fort Erie?

E.S: No, I don't. I used to go down to the church down on the Boulevard, but I'm not able to go without help.

D.M: Which church is that?

E.S: Well, they're all alike to me! It's not Catholic.

D.M: Anglican?

E.S: Yes, the one up on the knoll there, down in Fort Erie.

D.M: Did your husband work at the park with you too?

E.S: Yeah.

D.M: What did he do?

E.S: He run the Verners Ginger stand, he made all the ginger ale. Lifting and things, got himself a hernia! Took that to his grave!

D.M: What was Fort Erie like at that time, was it any different than it is now, has the population changed quite a bit?

E.S: Well, I can't say for the better! Honestly! I shouldn't say that because

I'm here in my little corner here, but the things that you hear that's going on all the time, it's all over. People aren't the way they used to be I don't think. They're not as friendly, they're not as courteous, they don't know enough to say thank-you. I don't know, people are different. I think so. Do you know people are just so by themselves, if I can't live like my neighbor next door, why there's gonna be a way I'm gonna get it! They want to be..... live up like the Jone'ses. We're getting too many foreigners coming into the countries, Canada and the United States, one is as bad as the other

D.M: In the 1920's, was there alot of cars then?

E.S: Oh, yeah, people that would come over from Buffalo and you know, everybody that..... Well, practically all of these people..... now this house next door, when I came over here, it was a pre-fabricated house and well, the lady that lived in there then, she didn't have a car, but she came..... she was a Canadian but she worked for baby specialists, doctors. And she always had a good case, she worked in Buffalo, but she used this for her headquarters, and then finally she sold this and then there was some people that bought it from Buffalo and they had a car, or in fact a couple of cars because tha family was growing and so outside of that all of the people that had lived on this street have all had cars.

D.M: Was there any horses and buggies around?

E.S: Oh, no, I've never seen that!

D.M: Well, thanks for talking to me Elsie, thanks very much.

E.S: You're welcome.

SUPPLEMENT TO INTERVIEW

[After the conclusion of our interview, Elsie talked some more about Erie Beach, so I have included it here.]

D.M: What about the Erie Beach Hotel, was it there?

E.S: Oh, the Erie Beach Hotel, it was just a building and they rented rooms out and they had a dining room, but I don't even remember whether they had a liquor license. It was on the waterfront, at this end and practically opposite where the grocery store is.

D.M: Did they have entertainment there?

E.S: No, no entertainment or anything. They rented rooms out and a couple of times on Sundays, Lou and I used to go and have our dinner there, but outside of that I don't even remember whether they had a liquor license or not.

D.M: Where in the park did they have entertainment, at the dance hall?

E.S: That's the only place.

D.M: There was music and a bowling alley, right?

E.S: Yeah. It was a nice park. Anybody will tell you that. Nice park. And it's too bad that they had to close it. Believe me.

D.M: Were you here when it closed?

E.S: Oh yes.

D.M: It was on Labour Day, wasn't it?

E.S: Yes, end of the year in '29, 1929.

D.M: Were you working there when it closed?

E.S: Yeah.

D.M: So you lost your job?

E.S: Yup.

D.M: That was during the Depression, wasn't it?

E.S: Well, maybe that's what closed it.

D.M: What did you do after you lost your job?

E.S: I stayed home here.

D.M: Your husband worked?

E.S: Yeah.