

April 15/85- This is a interview by Michael Near with Ernest Benner at his home on the Bowen Road.

M.N: Mr. Benner where were you born ?

E.B: I was born in the village of Bridgeburg.

M.N: Thats now the north end of Fort Erie ?

E.B: Now the north end of Fort Erie and our home-stead was on Dufferin Street were at present today is Dufferin Motors is our old home-stead, the old BellArd Theatre was across the road from us, which was run by the Ziff family, in them days it was silent pictures and Eda Ziff played the piano.

M.N: Did your Dad come from Fort Erie ?

E.B: Yes, my Father was born in Bridgeburg. Bridgeburg, not Fort Erie. My Dad was born in Bridgeburg, he worked with my Grandfather Ern Benner, teaming, digging cellars.

M.N: They were called teamsters ?

E.B: Yes my Dad and Grand-dad and many more around Bridgeburg in those days did the big projects-the two big projects they did was dig the cellar for Pratt and Lambert Paint and Varnish Company up there on Mack St. and the Arner Company which used to be the old Jell-o Company were they made Jell-o and those cellars were all dug and scraped with horses.

M.N: The horses were a lot more popular then ?

E.B: Oh yes, there was lots of horses then in Bridgeburg them days, Charlie Vahaye had a horse, a promient family in Bridgeburg Dicky White was the butcher shop on Jarvis St., he had a horse and a Democrat, he delivered groceries with it and Harvey Connolly used to deliver groceries.

M.N: Whats a Democrat ?

E.B: A buggy like mine, a two seated buggy, down on Courtwright St. John Distro had a grocery store he also delivered with a horse and Peanuts Benner drove the horse.

M.N: Was that any relation to you ?

E.B: Yes, first cousin.

M.N: When did you first start at the Coal Company ?

E.B: I started in the coal after school I suppose I'd be about 12 or 13 years old, come home from school and go down and bag coal. Thats the only job I ever worked at, I worked at Horton Steel for two months, other than that the only other job I had was at home.

M.N: You delivered coal ?

E.B: Yes, I delivered coal for years and years, with trucks after the horses went out. When the snow storm of 44, thats the winter Ellen was born, I delivered coal with the horses for two weeks In the winter of 38 I delivered milk for the Fort Erie Dairy in the winter time, I was on the farm and went and helped them out.

M.N: Big change since you were a kid ?

E.B: Ho ho theres more changes then you can believe, its pitiful the way Fort Erie is today.

M.N: In what way ?

E.B: Well number one Fort Erie was a Rail Road town and when we was kids I could of got a job any place, there was all kinds of work in Fort Erie. It was a Rail Road town, you talk to your Dad, shovel ing snow in the winter on the Rail Road , you could get a job any place, now its all mechanized theres no work, look at your Rail Road, look at the section gang all done by hand, now its machine.

M.N: I would like to ask you some specifics. Do you remember Prohibition ?

E.B: No, not that much.

M.N: Do you remember anything going on, at that time ?

E.B: I remember when they was rum running at the foot of Dufferin St. there was boats coming in and out when I was a kid, at that time we didn't know any better kids would dive down and get bottles of what ever it was, whiskey, wine, beer, I don't know what it was I was just a kid like little Mike.

M.N: Was there a lot of guys involved.....

E.B: Oh yes, there was a lot of guys involved in smuggling, this river was alive from here to Chipawa.

M.N: Was there any bad incidents-shoot outs ?

E.B: Not that I recall.

M.N: Okay will skip over to the Depression- hard times in the Fort Erie area ?

E.B: Yes, it was hard times, I could tell you so much it would make your head spin. There was just no work, us kids in our family - I went out to the farm to work with Uncle Orville Sherk, but half of Fort Erie caddied, do anything to get a dollar, kids would go to the Erie Downs Golf Course and caddy. In the Depression- it was just there was no work. Engineers, conductors, and brakemen and so on the Rail Road lost there jobs.

Old Perc Embry I'll never forget for one, he ended up as janitor at the High School, till this thing got over-Cecil Winimute-oh my Uncle Braun Parker and Avery and Eddie and all those guys do anything, this is when Grand-pa Benner had teams, teamsters you only got \$50 a day.

M.N: Was there any welfare or social assistance then ?

E.B: Yes, what they would do in our case, being in the coal business if you had no money and no heat you went to the town hall. The town hall was run by two people, Bill Tate was the clerk and Doug Sage was his secretary and they did more then all they got down there today, I'll tell you. You would get a voucher for a ton of coal bring it over to my Dad or the office and they hang it on a hook. This was one of many, then every month my Dad would send the bill into the Town, and he would get his money for the coal, the town paid everything and the same with groceries, you got a voucher for groceries and you took it to Carrolls Store, Carrolls was on Jarvis St. then or the Dominion Store-this is the way they did it-but you worked for it, down there on the corner of- were Bill Fickels is to-day- I can remember as a kid going through there to the office and the works office was right along side of it, it was as big as this house here. That was the office and everything - Bert Sampson and Doug Finlason was town foreman, Roy Renshaw started just as a kid, sweeping and shoveling.

M.N: What was the difference between Bridgeburg and Fort Erie ?

E.B: Well Bridgeburg and Fort Erie had the same thing- Bridgeburg was in this end of town, Fort Erie was at the other end and I can't tell you much about the other end, I remember old Lou Douglas he was Reeve of the other end and old Bill Milton was Judge. Bill Holly- when they incorporated Bill Holly was mayor the best mayor Fort Erie ever had or Bridgeburg ever had. It was

E.B: -tough, they bought your coal, they bought your food, they never see you go hungry and I remember going to school- if you broke glasses, the kids didn't have no money, the Lions Club, they furnished glasses.

M.N: When do you think they pulled out of the Depression ?

E.B: I couldn't say Mike, they called it the dirty thirties, what was it 3 years, 4 years, I forget.

M.N: Did the war help ?

E.B: Well you see we were quite away from the war, but we never went, when was the first time, I went, when was the first, I was in the second draft. By that time things were booming, Fleet was going strong and they kept adding on to Fleet, Redford Construction did a lot of work at Fleet, I mean Benner Coal Company in them days sold a pile of cement and everything else. Theres so many changes Mike. When everybody says you'd hate to go back to the old days- its brutal whats these kids going to do, this is what gets me, I mean everyone can't be a doctor or lawyer, what are they going to do? The computers ? In them days they plowed snow, my Dad and Grand-dad and everybody else down there, they plowed snow with horses on the sidewalk- your old man- they did this all winter long.

M.N: Can you tell me about the ferry ? Do you remember if it operated in the winter time ?

E.B: Yes, I think it did on decent days when there wasn't to much ice. I'll tell you who you want to talk to about that ferry- Scotty Miller, you know Yummy Miller- you ask Yummy Miller, he will refer you he lives right down there on Phips St.- his wife- Scotty worked on the ferry, to bad Pete Thompson wasn't here-Christ- Pete could tell you more- oh man- but there all gone now but I remember when young Scotty Miller worked on the ferry. And I know Sunday afternoons a bunch of us would walk up to the ferry dock, get the boat across, cost you a nickel to go over, we walked up ferry hill, it cost you a nickel to go to the Victoria show you got a bag of popcorn for a nickel-man! you had a field day for a quarter.

M.N: What was the south-end like ? What was down there ?

Just like it is to-day, I was never in the south-end really that much, Bill

E.B: _Holly was the main stay there, he had a hardware store, Frank Hapgood had the grocery store, Eddie Seaton had the brokers and insurance office.

The train ran to Erie Beach from the ferry dock right straight through, that ferry would come over loaded with people, that was a big deal and those two hotels was there .

M.N: Which hotels were those ?

E.B: The Anglo-American, the Queens was run by the Hawkins family, the Queens Hotel was there- the King Edward but ~~that~~ that was big business.

M.N: What do you call that train that ran from?

E.B: I couldn't tell you Mike, the train went from the ferry dock out to Erie Beach, what they called it I couldn't tell you, but as I was telling you, if you could call Mrs. Ray Plato, tell her you were talking to me and she'll maybe talk with you, give you some dope on that thing.

M.N: What do you call that train that ran out from....?

E.B: I couldn't tell you Mike, the train went from the ferry dock out to Erie Beach, what they called it I couldn't tell you, but as I was telling you, if you could call Mrs. Ray Plato, tell her you were talking to me and she'll maybe talk with you, give you some dope on that thing.

M.N: Were you ever out to Erie Beach when it was open ?

E.B: Oh yes, I was just a little kid .

M.N: Was it nice ?

E.B: Oh yes, it was really nice but as I say it was run and controlled by the Bardol family and they owned all that property, Harry Heatherton had a store there, oh yes, we did business with the Bardols for years.

M.N: The Bardols had control of it - were they Canadians ?

E.B: No they were Americans.

M.N: What about Crystal Beach ?

E.B: Well we never got out to Crystal Beach very much Mike, it was a long way up there but it was going strong but they both did good, evidently. That boat came from Buffalo.

M.N: The Canadiana ?

E.B: Yes, the Canadiana came from there to Crystal Beach and they done a big business.

E.B: If you could talk to some of the old custom officers down town if theres any old ones, like Perc Sexsmith is gone now and Johnny Rider, they all worked that boat. At Crystal Beach they had the customs and immigration there.

M.N: They had customs and immigration at Crystal Beach ?

E.B: Oh yes, right at the Beach, they did it at the ferry dock too. Charlie Muir ran it down there.

M.N: Do you remember anything about the building of the Peace Bridge ?

E.B: Oh a little, lets see I was about 8 years old, I heard my Dad talk about it, they drawed cement in there they poured those piers and everything. The cement came in cloth bags, they dropped bag and all in, that was a big big deal for Fort Erie the Peace Bridge was, I was just a kid, I remember them building it.

M.N: How many people were in that area of Bridgeburg, Fort Erie, and Amigari, roughly ?

E.B: Maybe 3 to 4,000, I guess- like I told you get into those files down there, I wanted to go down there, Grand-Pa Benner was- served on council, I think it was 1890 just before 1900, you could get all that stuff, oodles of stuff.

M.N: Were did you go to school in Fort Erie ?

E.B: Phipp Street School .

M.N: That was Bridgeburg ?

E.B: That was Bridgeburg.

M.N: Was that a big school ?

E.B: Yes.

M.N: Did it take in all that area of town ?

E.B: Phipp St. went from Bowen Road in Fort Erie to Courtwright St. well then after a few years as the population grew, I remember my brother Zeke and Gordy, see we lived on the North side of Jarvis St. they had to go to Winimute School but I never did, I started at Phipp St..

M.N: What did you do as a kid ?

E.B: Skating, hockey, playing ball, swim in that river.

M.N: The river a lot cleaner then ?

E.B: Oh yes, it was clean as a whip.

M.N: Fish ?

E.B: Lots of fish at the foot of Dufferin St., you see they had the air-plane dock - sea-planes used to come in there.

E.B: An airplane dock just down from the gravel dock.

M.N: When did this airplane used to come in there ?

E.B: Oh Christ, I don't know when- why they landed in there I don't know, but they did used to be sea-planes that came in there, you know pontoon planes, they land on the water, but there was all kinds of fishing in the water, lots of pike and bass in the spring of the year, you take in there under the Peace Bridge they used to call it the old mill race, all kinds of fish up there.

M.N: Whats the old mill race ?

E.B: That was the name of it, when they built the Bridge that done away with it, you know when you go under the Peace Bridge, well that was all water, thats were we used to fish.

M.N: That was natural ?

E.B: That was natural then they put the bridge in.

M.N: So when did the town start to grow ?

E.B: Well you could definitely say in the war years, Fleet got going, Horton Steel, all them people worked around the clock.

M.N: The Rail Road was going strong ?

E.B: The Rail Road was going steady, they was hiring men like crazy -they couldn't get men.

M.N: Do you think the schools were better then, when you were a kid ?

E.B: I would say so- definitely, because you had the 3-r's remember- reading, writing, and arithmitic, look at it to-day you got these guys coming out of college and can't spell there own name but our set-up is altogether different, ~~ex~~perience don't mean nothing you got to have that piece of paper, which is all wrong Mike, I mean I'm from a wealthy family and your from a poor family, your people can't put you through college and you come out with a piece of paper and you don't know nothing about nothing, I've worked at trucking and teaming and you name it, I got the exsperence, but I'd be knocked out-mine you- look at the wages that's being paid to-day, I mean I started working down there shoveling coal, we got 20¢ a hour and you worked your way up. I got married in 1942 and I was making 25\$ a week, bought a house, and all our furniture, we was doing fine on \$25.00 a week, now that \$25.00 has to be \$325.00 or you don't exist, I mean interest in those days was 3 or 4 %, look at what it is to-day 16-18. A pair of shoes, the best shoes I ever had - Sunny Shoes- I never paid more then \$3.30 at Father and Son Shoes.

M.N: Did you ever go to Buffalo and shop ?

E.B: Oh yes, shopped in Buffalo all the time, we always bought overalls- all our winter clothes- Sears Roebuck was a wonderful big store- like in my days, the lower terrace they called it, that was all the hardware stores, all the big ones. My Dad and Grand-dad, in those days would go over and buy and what little duty you had to pay on it.

M.N: A lot of people shopped over in?

E.B: Oh yes, a lot of people shopped in Buffalo.

M.N: In my research I've found an area called Victoria, down by the International Bridge, do you remember Victoria ?

E.B: No, but they tell me that Bridgeburg was called Victoria, you go and search in that library. Bert Miller was the old historian, he's got a daughter alive, Mrs. Mary Sauder, she lives down on the Blvd. she did, whether she's got any of them old papers, there was a whole write up in the Fort Erie paper about 10 years ago all about Victoria and the name of Jarvis St.-its all in there.

M.N: Do you remember when Jarvis Street had mud on it ?

E.B: Yes, I remember when they paved Jarvis St., the only reason I remember, when they came to a drive way , were your drive way went in they poured concrete aprons you would call them we were just kids and the foreman gave us a nail, I'll never forget it, we put our names and date in the concrete.

M.N: Do you remember the date of that ?

E.B: No, I remember when they paved the streets in Fort Erie because Godson Construction Company from Toronto did all the work and my brother Howard he was water boy for the construction company all he did was carry a pail of water and give the labourers a drink.

M.N: Do you remember any of the business down on Jarvis St?

E.B: Oh Mike Purpura had the barber shop, he was a prominent barber, and you go down Jarvis St. there was - Briggs- the Briggs building old Mr. Briggs had a big business, I'll never forget out in front of his store, right on the sidewalk of Jarvis St. sat a gasoline pump one of those old hand pumpers, they had the glass thing and they held 10 gallons, and gasoline in them days was about 20-22 cents a gallon and you go down from-Briggs had the paint, wallpaper, fishing tackle, bicycles, he had everything, he did a big business. Next to Briggs was Patton and Dotty it was a clothing store in Fort Erie.

E.B: Then you went down and the Superior Store and the Dominion Store. Frank Willik had a butcher shop there-Mitch had a hardware store there, Tommy Holbick worked in the hardware store and Heckmans Barber Shop was there and La Hays grocery store was there- and Ernie and Alice Mitchels Barber Shop was there, Dicky White's Butcher Shop, thats before they built the A&P, Paul Pong had a laundry in there, Everts had the Dairy, Magdallena Moringstar had the Fort Erie Photo Studio, Robins had a Shoe Store there, Lonsbury had the Drug Store, Kieth Butler had the Barber Shop, Ziggy Klien had the Pool Room, Charters Bakery was down in there to, the Bank of Montreal was in there- I remember when they built the Bank of Montreal on the south side of Jarvis St. they had the cops, a big to do, they took the vault and the money from one side of the street to the other.

M.N: Who was the cop then ? Andy Griffiths ?

E.B: I remember Andy and Chirp, Walter Kitt was a cop, but before Andy Griffiths - ain't that a bugger- I'm slipping, he lived up in the Barney Long house on Dufferin St., Hyat was his name, some such thing as that- he was a cop.

Well then down on Jarvis St. ther was a Chinese Resturant it had a big rooster out in front with lights on, it just looked as if its head was going all the time and Eddie Johnson had the Review Paper, which hired a lot of people, old John Atwood had the Atwoods Store down there, he was Reeve of the town, he was the undertaker, he was the furniture maker, he had her. The old Post Office stood there- old Billy Hogg ?- Billy Braum ? - your going a long way back- and Gord Roberts had the eye-Rungs Garage was in the back and there was the Superior Store and the Royal Bank old G.R. Steele ran the Royal Bank. There was 2 or 3 stores up in there but I forget who was all there. I remember Tom Nags had the Barber Shop up on the top end of Jarvis St., he had a big wooden veranda wooden side-walk, people would go there and sit- my Dad went to the barber shop every Saturday with out fail, thats were the old timers met and shot the breeze.

M.N: This was right in Bridgeburg ?

E.B: Right down at Heckmans Barber Shop- my Dad- Angus brothers they had Angus Groceries on Central Ave., Bill Hana, Bill Cavana Doc Streets and Doc Mitchell.

E.B: Bill Heckman would never get home Saturday night, they didn't close up to 12:30-1:00 oclock, shooting the breeze down there oh that was a big due.

M.N: Did you used to go to dances ?

E.B: Oh yes, we used to have beautiful dances down there, all kinds of dances.

M.N: What kind of music ?

E.B: Different people would play, no such thing as juke boxes then, you had someone on the violin, the guitar, the piano.

M.N: All people from town ?

E.B: Oh yes, lots of Waltzes, you know, square dancing was big but I remember - must have been the Rebecas it was the ladies organization of the Odd Fellows, they would hold dances and my Mother was on the lunch commitee, I remember us kids would go upstairs, with cakes- we had a great time.

M.N: Was there a lot more lodges then- mens clubs ?

E.B: Well not more, there was the Masonic Lodge, the Odd Fellows, the Orange Lodge- that I remember the Kinsmen Club, the Lions Club, the Junior Chamber of Commerce which was really going strong then, Dutch Jackson was president, I used to go down to it. But them was all good organizations and they did a lot of good for old Bridgeburg, I'll tell you.

M.N: What did they do ?

E.B: Helping people out, you know.

M.N: Did they build a lot of stuff, or just donate money ?

E.B: They did a lot of donations, helping out, the Kinsmen Club for instance years ago- maybe in the forties, they supplied all the hockey, they had kids playing like they do now, from six or seven years old and up and they footed the bill for it, the Kinsmen Club they bought those kids everything, they did really good.

M.N: You mentioned hockey, the Fort Erie arena during the great snow storm collapsed, that was 37 or 39 , was that as bad as the snow storm of 1977 ?

E.B: Oh I would say yes, did the 77 take much down ?

M.N: I think it caused a fair amount of damage .

E.B: The arena was the big damage in Fort Erie at the time, but they never had the equipment like they do now- snow plows- I remember Bill Renshaw drove the army truck, as long as you didn't break down you was fine.

E.B: But you take like us guys drawing coal, or milk with the horses when the teaming was going, you had good sleighing all winter long, now with the salt and calcium you couldn't sleigh if you had to.

M.N: You think the team was better for that type of weather? Slower ?

E.B: Oh yes, you where a lot slower, but you were tuned to the times. To-day its hurry hurry, just look at me this morning with the team I could of did that in 2 hours but I was all morning with the team. Working men took a lot of pride in there work but not to-day, to-day its production, hurry up.

M.N: You think things were a lot more quality then ?

E.B: Yes sir.

M.N: When did you notice the difference when coal shifted over to electricity and gas ?

E.B: Oh I would guess about 45 to 50 some where in there, gas started to come in strong then and then they pushed oil but oil never got the foot hold that gas did but it was a lot more money but people was tired of carrying ashes evidently, the cheapest coal we sold was \$12.00 a ton that was for number 1 hard coal.

M.N: How long would a ton of coal last?

E.B: A ton of coal would run a normal house a month, 30 days, give or take, how much you had cold weather and wind, but once the people got the gas, and wages started going up why everybody went to it, the coal business went right down

M.N: Where did you get your coal ?

E.B: Our coal came from Scranton, Pennsylvania.

M.N: That would be brought in by train ?

E.B: Oh yes, we shipped everything by rail, we used to ship stoker coal stoker coal was promient then, the hospital, the green houses, the bigger stores well then Archie MacGlashon he started- down there on the foot of Jarvis Street we called it the gravel dock, they shipped gravel, pea gravel, why as kids for sling shots they were dandy, and then they - during the war they shipped in scrap cars in there, you don't remember that, they unloaded scrap there.....

M.N: What did they do with the scrap ?

E.B: Shipped it to Hamilton I guess. Well then Archie went into the coal business, he went into the stoker business, why he took all the stoker business in Fort Erie we couldn't compete with water rates.

E.B: with rail rates so Archie had a good stoker business, he had -he sold stokers, and serviced stokers, we was the best of friends mind you, we was in competition, but good competition.

M.N: Whats a stoker ?

E.B: Well a stoker was a hopper thing, it would hold 5 or 6 hundred pounds of coal and it would last a day or two, you didn't have to attend to it every day.

M.N: Who was the first mayor you ever remember ?

E.B: The first mayor I ever remember was old Mr. Hall, Jim Hall's f ather, ther was him as I remember Bill Atwood was reeve and Al Kirk was deputy reeve what ever they called them and now I 've forgotten who followed down the years who followed Hall there was - I remember - Charlie Price was mayor, Finn Rapochy was mayor, Holly from the south end he was mayor, Herb Guess was mayor.

M.N: Most of these guys conservative ?

E.B: Oh I guess the majority of them were conservative.

M.N: Fort Erie has always been a conservative town hasn't it ?

E.B: Yes.

M.N: Did any of them go on to bigger politics?

E.B: Well I don;t think so, well Jack Teal was mayor for 13 years, I think Gerv Fretz was the only one that went on to..... but election night in Bridgeburg was one of the big nights of the year, I'm telling you, there was more hustle bussel, hustling votes up you know but I remember as a kid, we used to go down to that town hall at night, when the polls closed at night- 8: o'clock or what ever time well by 9 or 9:30 we would have a new mayor and Jack Baker had the corner store over there, papers and candy, well when you got the new mayor no matter who it was took us kids over to Bakers and bought us all candy that was a big big night, thats why you never forgot those politicians.

M.N: The politicians were more out for the people then ?

E.B: Oh yes, but I think on the overall old Bridgeburg was a pretty good spot to live in, you know we were right in that neck of the woods you couldn't go any farther because of the river, there was a lot of commuting back and forth to Buffalo and I know from being in business you take the same business in Bridgeburg or Fort Erie now and the same business in Toronto, the one in Toronto will do a lot better, the transport has to come another hundred miles, were right in the neck, you look at the map.

M.N: There was a lot of hotels down on Courtwright St. do you remember any of those ?

E.B: Well, yes I remember the Barnea House, I remember the Barnea House when Bob Beatty run it, thats a long long time ago and we sold those people coal and that piano we got I bought the piano out of the Barnea House, Bob Beatty piano went to George Seback and his kids took lessons on it and when they was done I bought it from short and now Lois has it and my grandson is taking lessons on it and thats out of the Barnea House, now the old bucket of blood up the street I remember it was Mervison Hotel I guess and I remember when it was Waters Livery Stable everybody that came to town- you'd take your horse and buggy over there and they feed it and put it in the barn just like you see in the movies.

M.N: When did it change over to a hotel ?

E.B: Well it was always a hotel and livery stable.

M.N: It was combined type thing ?

E.B: Yes, I remember old Mr. Carmichael lived out here at the subway and he drove a little horse and buggy to work every day, he was caretaker at the station down there.

M.N: The rail road station ?

E.B: Yes, and he kept his horse in Waters Livery Stable.

M.N: Was the bucket always a tough place?

E.B: The bucket was never a tough place, every one thought it was tough, old Matt Compton said to the gang that came in there that there dollar was just as good as the other ones, you went there and had a good time and everybody knew everybody, and no one got into trouble, you take Jack Fordham and Red Anger when those guys were in there hey day, it was a lot of laughs I'll tell you.

M.N: Where they locals ?

E.B: Oh they were locals and tougher then whalebone .

M.N: Where did they work ?

E.B: Red Anger was the black-smith around town, he was on the race-track- he was one of the best, Jack Fordham was a engineer on the Rail Road well when they got into the sauce they were just like a couple of bulls, I remember one time, our office was just across the street we come down there and cut through the bank, well Red Anger and Fordham are in there all loaded up they picked up a Quebec heater up-it was a thing about so high- they picked it up and carried it outside and put it on the sidewalk.

E.B: Old Matt Compton was pulling his hair out.

M.N: Matt Compton got around quite a bit in town ?

E.B: Matt ran the hotel, Matt and Mary Compton, Sunday was the busy day. Jack Fordham got drunk one time and Matt had a little safe every body had these little home safes, and he got up stairs, somehow, and he picked that safe up and carried it out on the verandah and he dropped it over the end well they called the police and Chirp went down, heres Jack down on the lawn - and he says what are you doing Jack- he says I'm just trying to get W.G.R. Chirp Mathhews is another one to talk to he can tell you more about it. You talk to Chirp or Gutsty Purpura theres not many of the old ones left, they 'll fix you up.

M.N: When did you notice that the town really became a town ?

E.B: You see I was born and raised here and it made a difference when you grew up with the town and every body knew every body. I remember when the Fleet started I don't know I suppose it was Jack Anderson who started the Fleet - I remember Oscar Johnson, P.W. Johnson pumped gas for Gramel they had a Gulf station at the foot of Courtwright Street and Pee Wee quit and went to work at the Fleet, he work up there 6 months and then get laid off, he took up sign painting and he did good, but this is what a lot of them did when they started out there, wll once it started to roll those people had a really good job, look at your uncle Al Ried, there all pensioned off now and I think is one of the best places in Fort Erie to work maybe in the country, I don't know, they got all the benifits. and there busy, there trying to keep it going.

M.N: Was there industries back then that are not now?

E.B: Oh, a lot of small industries that folded up and got out.

M.N: Nothing of any size ?

E.B: Well you take the Mentholatum was big in those days, its closed, the Jell-o Company was big, big big business, I remember when they drawed Jell-o - Ernie Young drove a model T truck, drawed Jell-o up to the Rail Road, they shipped it in cars, and there was the Markel Electricon Lewis St. well when the Jell-o went out the Arner went in, do you remember ? And they hired a lot of people, they did a -pill factory you know but then it folded up and thats all apartments.

M.N: Big difference in the Rail Road ?

E.B: Oh, there is no Rail Road, the New York Central is gone, there was the round house up on the top end of Jarvis, she's gone, Orly Johnson was a hogger there, and old Mr. Galvirth lived next to us, Grandpa Hewell, and Alvin Benner, Ross Brown and all they did was get engines ready, they had a turn table there, you could go and watch the engines turn around and thats all gone. ...well your Dad and Bobby Long, Frenchy-you know all them guys is done-I don't know what the Rail Road is doing, but it sure slipped but you stop and think and talk Rail Road why pay rail rates to ship it into Fort Erie and then you got to unload, say a car of sand or coal or what ever it is, now a big truck can bring it right up to your door.

M.N: Did any one ever think that Fort Erie would expand as much as it has ?

E.B: I often think if my Grandpa Benner could see that Central Ave. Bridge, see everybody had to go around underneath the International Bridge that was a busy place evert thing was coming or going you went to the south end of town you had to go the boulevard I often say if Grandpa Benner could see that bridge, man oh man wouldn't that have saved a lot of steps.

M.N: Do you think the town has grown for the better ?

E.B: Oh yes, its grown for the better, better in a lot of ways.

M.N: What do you think about this Regional Government ?

E.B: Its the worst thing thats happened to anybody, you got no control over nothing, I mean before we had a mayor - were talking Bridgeburg now, you had the mayor and council, out here we had Bertie Township as we was know and you name it we had Fred House, we had Bruce Finch, we had Orn Teal, we had some awfully good men out here and they run the Township and evry thing went along fine, and now your in regional- who do you talk to ? You got a regional council, you got a chairman everything is in the Welland area, I mean right here you could do this and do that, regional council is the worst thing that could happen, I said this right from the drop of the hat.

M.N: Do you think its the loss of the personal contact?

E.B: Oh it definitely is, definitely, I mean take for instance you, you wanted a drain cleaned out or some thing, you called the town ship office in Ridgeway,

E.B: -and either you went up town and they were out they stop by and have a visit for 10 or 15 minutes, say what do you want and they fix it, or this week or next they send some one out, you can't do that now, the thing is so big who do you talk to and all they do is pass the buck, pass the buck.

M.N: So the local service was a lot better then?

E.B: Local service was 10 times better than what we got to-day

M.N: And not as large ?

M.N Who do you think was the best mayor in town ?

E.B: I don't know, I mean when you go back, I guess Bill Holley was one of your better mayors this is years ago, coming up to date your present mayors I would say Jack Teal was one of your better mayors he must of been, the man held office for 10 or 15 years, I don't know how long.