

This is Shelley Richer interviewing Mr. Ronald Grimmell at the library on September 3rd, 1985.

**S.R:** Hello Mr. Grimmell, and how are you today?

**R.G:** I'm just fine.

**S.R:** What is your date of birth?

**R.G:** January 26, 1913.

**S.R:** Where were you born?

**R.G:** I was born in the town of Bridgeburg.

**S.R:** So you've lived in the area all your life then?

**R.G:** Yes, I've lived here all my life except for four years when I lived in Neranda, Quebec.

**S.R:** Were your family originally from Bridgeburg?

**R.G:** No, my family originated in Buffalo, New York.

**S.R:** Could you tell me a bit about the history of your family? What brought them to Fort Erie, their reasons, and what they did here?

**R.G:** Well, my father was a sheet metal man in Buffalo, and through a mutual friend that he had met in Buffalo, he found out that a man by the name of Joel Smith was looking for a sheet metal man to install hot-air furnaces. So dad came over here in 1908 to work for Joel Smith, who was a plumber. His place was located on Jarvis Street.

**S.R:** Where on Jarvis Street would that be?

**R.G:** That would be, oh, Joel Smith's place was...I'd say, right about where the Post Office is now. Dad worked for him for about three years until 1911, and then he married my mother, Jessie Alice Stumpf. Then he brought her over to Bridgeburg. They lived at the corner of Central and Jarvis. The building now...well it wasn't the same building...the building that was there where Glenn's Insurance is now. They lived there about a year or two. Then he...a man by the name of Mr. Sizer from Buffalo, who was a pharmacist, and having quite a bit of money, he invested in property in Fort Erie on Bowen Road. Now on this property he built a bunch of huge houses, of which dad bought one at 213 Bowen.

**S.R:** Did he ever mention the price?

**R.G:** He mentioned a price. I think he said about \$3,000...\$3,000 or \$3,500, something like that. Now, this is a three storey house. It has a

downstairs, upstairs, and a huge attic. You could actually have an apartment up there, a great big place. It would cost you a fortune to heat. But anyway, I brought mother over...in the back of this house he built a barn, and he also had a shop built there. In the barn he had a horse, he had a buggy, and he had some chickens. In the shop, why-he had his sheet metal tools, and carried on a sheet metal and also plumbing business. How he got around, he did most of his by foot, his travelling by foot. He had a big...I can remember he had a metal box. Oh, it would be about 3' long, and maybe 18" in diameter. He would fill this up with tools and go out on a job... swing this across his shoulders. This is the way he would do the work with his tools. If he had any deliveries to make...most of the meat of his material come in by train and they'd deliver the bathtubs and toilets and basins and whatever to the...wherever dad wanted them, you know. They put them right on the job for him. So, he worked at this for, oh, 'til about 1916 I believe it was, yeah, 1916. There was a man living up the street who was a foreman down at the shipyards where they were building ocean going steamers, and they built four in total.

**S.R:** What would his name be?

**R.G:** I can't remember what his name was. Whether it was Barnett, say Barnett. Mr. Barnett saw dad working out in the back in his little shop and he liked his work. He said, "Well Chester" he said, "Why don't you apply for a job at the Shipyard?" He said, "They need a sheet metal man". He said, "They can't get anybody down there that's satisfactory". And he said, "I don't know how many men they've fired", but he says, "You go down and apply for the job". So dad went down, he applied for the job, and he and another man built the duct work, the funnels, and any of the sheet metal work that had to be done on that boat. This job lasted 'til, oh, around 1920, and they built the last boat. I can remember it coming up the river and dad had mother and the four of us boys out on the front porch up on the second landing. There was no houses across the street from where we lived. We could look right down the river and we saw this big boat coming up the river being towed by tugs with the whistle blowing.

**S.R:** How did it get past the bridges? Well, there was only one bridge then.

**R.G:** There was a swing bridge. There was two swing bridges. There was one over the canal like, on the Black Rock side, then there was another one out on the river. The boat was too big to take up the canal, they had to take it up the river. So, they swung the bridge open and the tugs pulled the freighter through. So, that was quite a thrill for us to see. It's something to remember. I was about four years old I imagine. Well then, when I was six, he decided the house was too big for my mother to look after...there were four children.

**S.R:** That would be a really big house then if it was too big with four kids.

**R.G:** I was four and Earl was three, and then the twins were...they'd just been born. They were just babies. So there was four children and this huge place to look after and she couldn't handle it, she had to have help. She had a woman coming in by day to help her. Well, dad figured, well what...I've got to have a smaller place...what to do. So, he bought a lot over on Highland Avenue, 204, and he put a foundation under there, cinder blocks, and they laid the basement floor, and got the thing already. They they moved the barn over on rollers, pulled by two teams of horses, and they rolled this bar over to the...they had to go up a little hill...and over to 204, and then over to put the barn onto this foundation. Well, he did most of the blockwork himself, and the carpenter work, and did the...of course he could do the plumbing and the heating, and had that all done. He had a fellow by the name of Charlie Davis do the finishing. All the woodwork inside is done in white birch, which Charlie Davis installed for him. Then he had the electrical work done by a fellow by the name of Art Nolan. Well Art Nolan, he said, "Chet" he said, "What kind of electrical...what kind of wiring do you want in this place?". He said, "Put the very best in". So, believe it or not, that place was built when I was six years old, no, I was younger, I was about five. He built it when I was about five, that was 67 years ago, and just two years ago I had the place rewired. So it lasted that long.

**S.R:** That's really good.

**R.G:** It's a wonder we didn't have a fire. But anyway, he built dad this shop out at the back, by a man by the name of Chester Taylor, and he started the plumbing and heating, sheet metal business in the back. He worked by himself for awhile. Well, then he hired a man by the name of Charles Tubb who had had some experience in plumbing and pipe fitting. He bought an old car...I think it was a Buick...an old Buick, from a fellow by the name of Climenhage. Now, Climenhage had a garage right down next to the Post Office, where the Post Office is now, right next, just above it coming up Jarvis Street. So, anyway, they finally got this old car going and he drove it home. We were all tickled to death to see this car coming in, and the driveway was just mud. Anyway, he made it into a truck and that's how he carted his material around, his bathtubs and so on. So, that was the start, and he went so that he...he worked it up until he had eight men working for him.

**S.R:** You had mentioned James Frazer before. Who was he?

**R.G:** James Frazer was a railroad man. He was the one who bought dad's place on Bowen Road. I missed his railroad experience, but it doesn't matter. He finally, when the Depression came, he had to get rid of, he had to lay off...keep laying off men as things went down.

**S.R:** As times got tougher?

**R.G:** Things got tougher. In 1930 he built a small garage, service station, at 1 Courtwright. He had a Shell franchise, and operated there for a while. Then about 19...after the war...1946. He bought the place across the street which was owned by Herbert Guess. Then this place he wanted to use for doing garage work. He had started a front-end alignment business at 1 Courtwright and he found the place wasn't big enough, so he bought this place across the street...much against my mother's...she was worried sick having all the debts of that place. So anyway, we finally got a Chrysler franchise. We were selling Chrysler cars there until 1953 when he died. My brother Jerry was the manager. Jerry had been a car mechanic, or was a car mechanic, and Jerry operated the place for him. Well, then when he died, mother continued on with Jerry running the place. Jerry ran it for about two or three years then things got tough...had a depression...Diefenbaker years.



**S.R:** The what years?

**R.G:** Diefenbaker. Don't you remember him...in 1959?

**S.R:** Oh, he's a politician right?

**R.G:** Yeah. But anyway, things were tough and he gave up the business. So in the meantime, we had people living in...there was an apartment upstairs...we had people living upstairs. They more or less helped pay the taxes and the heating. In the meantime, we had people rent the place for one thing or another. One time we had Edge Ford Motors, a used car dealer. They were in there for two or three years selling used cars. And in the meantime, we were still trying to sell the place. Well, eventually we sold it to Dave Spear, who is now occupying the place.

**S.R:** When your dad was still doing his plumbing, do you recall any of the big places around that he did?

**R.G:** Yes, the...he worked on the Yeo Block, he did the Post Office, plumbing and heating, and he also worked on the Briggs Block, which is there, right up by, next to the Glenny, Glenny's Insurance on Jarvis Street.

**S.R:** This Yeo's Block, is that where they have a craft and wool store, and the jewellery store?

**R.G:** Yeah.

**S.R:** You had mentioned Howard Thompson to me before. Who is he?

**R.G:** Oh, well that started in my history. I started school when I was six years old. They were rebuilding the school on Phipps Street, the Rose Seaton School. There was only a couple rooms there and they wanted to put more rooms on it. It was becoming too small because the Town was growing. There was at least 500 people in the Town, so they had to have more room. So they decided to put four rooms on the back of this school. In the meantime they had to find places for the kids to go to school while they were doing the work. So we went to school in the basement of the Disciple Church, which is right where Don Dean's garage is now, right on the corner. We went to school in the basement there. Our teacher was Miss Robb. She's probably dead now. She'd be in her 90s I imagine. But anyway, we went there for one year and then they opened up the school, and we went to school on Phipps Street there until 1927. I had the honour, my last year at Rose Seaton, to have Miss Seaton

as my school teacher.

**S.R:** That's what changed the name from Phipps Street to Rose Seaton School?

**R.G:** Yeah, that was in Rose Seaton School. Then I graduated from there, and from there I went over to Wintemute Street High School, which is now the Secondary...Senior...

**S.R:** Senior Elementary.

**R.G:** ...Senior Elementary School. We went to school there one year, in 1927, while they were building the new high school. Then we went down to the high school that had everything of course, the swimming pool, the gym, the big assembly hall. I went there for five years, cleared my grade 13, but I didn't go on to college because I felt I wouldn't get all my subjects. I was 19 years old. So, one of the biggest mistakes I made in my life was not to continue to get the ...as many subjects as I needed to get my senior matriculation. But anyway, after working for my dad in the service station, and I was there for about one year, and I got married...no, I was there... I think I was there longer than that. I was there 'til 1934, and I went to Toronto, and I worked for Shell for two years in Toronto in their service stations. Then I came back to Fort Erie and worked for my dad until 1940 when I got married. I married a girl by the name of Muriel Walker from Toronto. We lived at Hogg's residence which is on the Boulevard. That was our first place of residence. We lived there for about a year 'til I finally got a job at Fleet. This was during the War years. We were able to afford a little wartime house up on Aberdeen Court and we moved up there. So we were there all during the War, at 7 Aberdeen Court. Then after the War there was no work, and I am waiting for a job and wondering what to do. I worked for my dad for awhile. That didn't seem to work out because we were too much alike and we'd have some great fights and so on.

**S.R:** While the War was on you worked at Fleet. What jobs did you do?

**R.G:** Oh, the jobs at Fleet. I started out on the Fleet Finch and the Model 16, assembling Fleet Finches for, oh, about a year and a half I would say, and then they made...a fellow by the name of Dick Young, who was an engineer at Fleet, designed the Model 60, which was a...oh,

about the same as Harvard, the Harvard Trainer. He was going to compete with the Harvard Trainer, and we were going to build this plane at Fleet. So I transferred over to the Model 60. They were kind of...the Fleet Finch was kind of...we'd reached our limit on that in orders. They were still building a few of them. I installed the motors on the Model 60 with two other fellows.

S.R: Do you remember the foreman's names?

R.G: Yes, the foreman. The day foreman was Harry Sawyer, and the night foreman was Stan Hagans, and Elliot was the foreman of the Fleet Finch.

S.R: And Jack Edgeworth?

R.G: Jack Edgeworth, he was the leadhand, and George Wallace was the leadhand.

S.R: Do you recall your wages?

R.G: I was working for about 60¢ an hour. That was about...the only people that made more money than we did were the machinists. They were making 90¢, which was an unheard of wage in those days.

S.R: When you started out, was that when you were only making 35¢?

R.G: When I first started at Fleet I was making 35¢ an hour, worked 10 hours a day for 6 days a week...60 hours a week. We worked three months at 35¢ an hour, and then we were raised to...you were on probation for the first three months. Then if you passed probation they raised your wages up to 50¢ an hour.

S.R: Did they have a union then?

R.G: Yeah, they had a company union then. It was run by the company. I was one of the stewards. It was really a joke you know. They couldn't stand up to the company for anything.

S.R: It was just in there for say and for looks?

R.G: Yeah, just for looks. But Fleet at that time was working under...they couldn't lose money. The more money they spent, the more they made. They were working under cost percent. So that...all the money they spent, their profit was 10% of that. So, they ended up with quite a few million, you know, in the end when the war was over.

S.R: What about female employees? When a lot of men went away to war, who worked?

R.G: At the time I was there, there was about 28 hundred people working,

and I'd say that about 80% of them were women. The men were definitely in the minority. The women, they worked for just about the same wages as the men.

S.R: Oh, they paid them a little bit less?

R.G: They might of, I can't remember now. I can't remember that for sure. I'd have to talk to one of the girls that worked there, if there's any around yet. But anyway, the girls stayed at this hostel down on Central Avenue, which is where St. Michaels Catholic Church is now. There was about 600-800 of them living there. Of course, they were on two shifts so they could handle a lot of women, you know. They'd get their board and their...bed and board there.

S.R: You worked there 'til 1945?

R.G: In 1945 the War was over. I came back, I came back to the gasoline business and I worked there for a year. Then I heard about this job up North through a lady who lived next door to us who had a brother up there. I heard there was lots of work up in Noranda, Quebec and there wasn't that much around Fort Erie at the time. I applied to different places and I couldn't get in. So anyway, I went to work up there for Girard-MacLean, and I was there four years. Well, after four years...I was doing sheet metal work, flashing, air-conditioning, installing the hot-air furnaces, you name it, all kinds of sheet metal work. So...making air-conditioning for the mines, that was a big item. The mines were really buzzing at that time there. They were really busy.

S.R: What mines?

R.G: Oh, Noranda...

S.R: What did they mine?

R.G: Gold. I even worked on the Dalvour. They had sent me down to Dalvour to work down there on the mines.

S.R: You mentioned Lenny Moyer, Chick Jack and Kay's, who were they?

R.G: Oh yeah, Lenny Moyer, he and I, went up...when we first went North, Lenny Moyer didn't have a job, and he was a brother-in-law of the lady who lived next door. So, her brother told Lenny to come up to work up there. So, Lenny didn't have a car, and I drove them up. That's how I came to go up there. Lenny didn't get a job, unluckily, but I didn't either, at the time. I think we worked one day for Noranda



Mines, just doing labour work. Then, we came back home, money was running out and we came back home. I had gone to see Girard-MacLean, and they said that there would be work. They were getting very busy and they might have a job for me later on. So, I just got home and I got a phone call, Girard-MacLean wanted me to come back, they had a job waiting for me. So, I went back there and I worked for four years. At that time the place was just so busy you wouldn't believe. The mines were all going full tilt. You couldn't get an apartment. We lived in one room for a year.

S.R: Did you have any kids yet?

R.G: We had one girl and she was three when we went up there. She spoke no French at all. She started playing with French kids and in less than a year she could speak perfect French. The lady next door thought it was a big joke. She was a dentists wife, and she'd get Francis over there...she just liked to listen to Francis talking French with an English accent. My wife would meet one of my buddies... they were all French, the guys I worked with.

S.R: Did you understand French or did they speak English?

R.G: I knew a little high school French, but a very little. So I said, "You guys have got to teach me how to speak French." He said, "No way, we want to learn English so we can go over to Ontario where the big money is". So anyway, Muriel, my wife, would go downtown with Francis my daughter, she'd meet one of the French guys wives, and they couldn't speak any English so Francis was the interpreter.

S.R: She would only be four if she was three when you moved there?

R.G: She was three, and when I left there she was six years old. She had started school. There was an English speaking school there in Noranda. She went to the English school. They were sending me out of town on different jobs, but they'd be just a short distance away. The furthest was Valdour, about 50 miles away, and I'd be home week-ends you know. This went on all one summer. Well, then in the fall that job was finished. So, after about the fourth year they had got a job with the building of...doing the plumbing and the heating of the high school in Ottawa. Well, it was a case of either moving to Ottawa or leaving the family in Noranda. Well, I went to Ottawa which wouldn't have worked out, so we decided to come back to Fort Erie.

We were in touch with a friend of mine from the Falls by the name of Harry Woram. Harry said that there was a man in the Falls who was looking for a sheet metal man. So, I worked for this Norval Chown for one year doing sheet metal work, furnaces and so on, and stove pipes. Business kind of slacked off and he laid me off, so I got a job out at the Cyanamid, and I worked at the Cyanamid for eight years doing sheet metal work, you know. I was out there for eight years and then I was laid off out there. I came back to Fort Erie, sold insurance for two years, the Confederation Life, but that didn't work too good.

**S.R:** Now I know why you said you wanted...you said you should have went on with your education.

**R.G:** Yeah, but you know it's funny, after I quit the business the darn phone was ringing off the hook about this insurance..."Well, we'd like to talk to him about a policy"...well, not quite that bad, but I was getting the odd call you know about insurance. So anyway...let's see, where was I...the insurance business. I worked there for two years and then we heard about a job in Buffalo...or no...this other chap and I were talking and he said "Yeah, I'm going to try to get over in Buffalo", he said, "And why don't you try?" And I said, "Well, you know, I should look, my brother lives over there".

**S.R:** Did you have to have a Visa then or did you have to be sponsored?

**R.G:** Yes, I had to be sponsored and a Visa. So, I got in touch with Edward Becker, and Edward, my cousin said "Why sure, I'll sponsor you". So I went ahead with my Visa and I finally got my Visa, and this other chap and I went over the river. We worked for A.M.&A's for...oh, I was only there about six months...I wasn't a salesman. You know where they had me? Up in draperies selling drapes, curtains and stuff like that. I don't know anything about drapes and curtains. So anyway, I heard about this job at the Liberty Bank as a guard, you know, kind of a night watchman deal. So I went over there and applied for the job. It was about three times as much as I was making at A.M.&A's. I believe it was around \$90 a week. Well, that was unheard of back in 1960. That was terrific wages. So, I started to work there and I was there for five years, I worked there for five years. Well then, they kept changing bosses there...like

you know, the super of the maintenance, that's who we worked under. He was miserable, oh brother was he miserable. So finally he fired me. I came back to Fort Erie and I was only back here about...oh, I think I drew about four unemployment cheques over there...then I heard about this job at Fleet, that they were hiring. I went out there and I saw this man that was the personnel director...the man before Hagen...but anyway, he hired me...I got on the assembly. I was working on the assembly and that didn't work out too good, I made a couple of boo-boos, you know...we were talking about those rivets. So anyway, there was about six of us that the foreman had to get rid of. I think they got a little bit slack too, they didn't need us there. They were busy in the sheet metal, so we went down to sheet metal and worked on the hydro-press, a...metal bashers they called us. They'd take the sheet metal...they'd cut the shape and everything...cut it out...then they'd put it on a form, and they brought it through the hydro-press. Well, it come out a rough part. So we had the job of refinishing those parts. We'd get a block out of the crib that was the exact replica of the part we wanted. We put this part that came out of the hydrolicpress, the sheet metal part, on the block, and then formed it to a certain degree and a certain angle and so on. But that was my job for about...how many years was I there? Oh, I was there for about 12 years altogether. I was laid off about three or four times. But anyway, I retired after in 1978. So that's the whole bit on my employment.

**S.R:** Now talking about the community itself, could you go through explaining some of the changes?

**R.G:** Oh yeah, when...other than Bowen Road, the roads were mud. In the summertime it wasn't too bad, but in the wintertime they got awfully sticky, and only horse and wagon could get around. There were very few cars in Fort Erie at that time. But, they'd take and throw cinders in these mudholes you know, try to level them out so people can...for summer...horses and wagons could get through. At that time, it would be about 500-600 people when I was about six. Well, when I...at the Amalgamation of Fort Erie, 1927, the ...it went up to the big total of 1,200, then there was 1,200. In 1927, they decided they were going to have some more roads paved, so

the Williams Dock, they were handling the sand and gravel, you know. They used an awful lot of sand in making asphalt. So this Mac Williams, he was Mayor of Fort Erie at the time, so he got this Godsen Company to come in...it passed through Council...they were going to pave three or four roads in Fort Erie. Well, they started out on Jarvis Street...they paved Jarvis Street. Then I think they paved Phipps Street, and then the Highland Avenue, and then Bowen, and Emerick, Courtwright then Wintemute, you know. This took three or four years before this was all done. It was all done by hand. Like, they'd...you'd come in with a load of this... They didn't have the big machines that they have now. They'd come in with truck loads of this asphalt. They had an asphalt plant. They'd make the asphalt, cart it in trucks, dump it on the road in a big pile, then these men would...had these big rakes you know...and they would spread the stuff out and then they'd go over it with a roller.

**S.R:** You had to do it quick enough before it would cool. Isn't asphalt warm?

**R.G:** Yeah, well the men's feet would have four to five inches of asphalt on them from walking over it. You'd wonder how they could even walk with the weight, and of course the rakes were...they would...they'd have to keep dipping it in something hot. I don't know how they kept them clear. So, what else can I tell you? Oh, the fire, the first fire engine in Fort Erie that I can remember, was hauled by a team of horses. That was back in the '20s. A fellow by the name of Frank Benner had a team of horses, and when they rang the fire bell, which was a...just an ordinary church bell in the steeple, in the Fire Hall.

**S.R:** Where was that?

**R.G:** Right about where the old Fire Hall was. Do you know where that is?

**S.R:** The old Fire Hall was by the Police Station...the Town Hall, across from the Avondale Store.

**R.G:** Yeah, the old Police Station, it was right there, there was a building there. They would ring the bell there...he just lived around the corner on Dufferin Street, he'd bring a team over and he'd hook onto this



wagon and away they'd go to this fire. Well, that lasted until 1927 when they got their first firetruck.

**S.R:** Do you recall any of the Fire Chiefs?

**R.G:** Yeah, oh, wait a minute now...Ule, Bob Ule was one, Robert Nolan. Who else was one? If given some time I could probably come up with some more.

**S.R:** Well, what about this pump that Frank Benner's horses pulled, how did it work actually? Were there motors in it?

**R.G:** Actually, they'd...no, they'd hook onto the fire hydrant. There was no motor on them. They'd just hook onto the fire truck. This is where they'd carry the ladders, hoses, and that's just about all. Then they'd hook onto the fire hydrants and that's where they got the pressure.

**S.R:** What about Police Departments?

**R.G:** The Police Department had one policeman.

**S.R:** Was this just for Bridgeburg or all of Fort Erie?

**R.G:** This was for Bridgeburg. As a child, a kid of say six years 'til I was about 12...no, younger than that...up 'til the time I was about 10, a fellow by the name of Dowd, he was the only Constable in the Town of Bridgeburg. Well, then a man by the name of Griffin, Andrew Griffin, he became the Chief of Fort Erie, and he had two policemen working for him. One was a motorcycle policeman, and they bought him a nice motorcycle, and he used to ride around, up and down the streets. He eventually became Police Chief himself. Then...oh god, what's his name? Cripes, he used to live right up the street from me...Matthews, Chirp Matthews...that's a nickname.

**S.R:** He was eventually Police Chief too, right?

**R.G:** Yeah, he eventually became Chief. He and Griffin ran it for awhile, and they kept hiring more and more. Some of the others were...oh, Tommy Warry, he was one. He's still living, and Walter Kent...one of the old timer's. He just died about a year ago.

**S.R:** What about the sports in Fort Erie?

**R.G:** Very good. About the time I was about 10 years old, they had a baseball team called the Mentholatums. They were sponsored by the Mentholatum Company in Fort Erie. They...this man that ran it, a man by the name of George Stratton, he was the manager. He was a boss at the Mentholatum Company, and he ran the baseball

team. He was the manager. At one time when they were playing Intermediate Baseball, and one year they went all the way to the top and they got beat out in the final game for the championship of Ontario. Leamington beat them out. Well, then they tried senior ball, but they didn't do too well at it. They had a pretty good team but they never got into the play-offs. But, Fort Erie has always had a baseball team, you know, from the time I was just a kid until grown up. Then of course we had to have softball. All the different companies in town would have teams, sponsor a team. The Lions Club had one, I played on the Lions Club one year. The Michigan...New York Central had a team, the Canadian National had a team, Horton, Mentholatum, all these different companies had teams. Then of course they had play-offs at the end of the year.

S.R: Were they Town sponsored?

R.G: No, they were sponsored by the companies. The companies bought all the...they bought the sweaters and the bats and the balls.

S.R: Who bought the trophies and stuff for the play-offs?

R.G: I think the Town did, but I'm not sure of that. I'm not sure of that.

S.R: Was that Fort Erie's big sport, baseball?

R.G: Yeah, that was the big sport, until the arena was built.

S.R: Do you know around when that was built?

R.G: The arena was built in...let's see, about 19...

S.R: There was a cave-in too, do you remember that?

R.G: Yeah, I remember that in '36...1930 I think they built the arena.

S.R: Oh, so it was relatively new when it caved in.

R.G: Yeah, they called it the Peace Bridge Arena. It was a...it had an odd roof. It was called a Llamala roof, the first one in Canada. It was a criss-cross method of putting 2" by 16"s I'd say they were...maybe thicker than 2". Let's say 4" by 16"s, all the way across the roof. The roof was curved, and then covered of course with wood and whatever...tar paper or whatever they used in those days on top of that. And they had...inside they had turnbuckles, and they...this thing would work, you know, with the heat in summer it would expand, and then it would shrink, and you'd have to take the turnbuckles up, you know, to keep it tight. So the reason that when it collapsed after a terrific snow storm in 1936. We had about 30" of snow on

the level, a real wet snow. The snow built up on top of the arena and nobody had shovelled it off, and nobody tightened up the turnbuckle. The Buffalo Bisons had just finished practicing. They were only out of there about 20 minutes, and down came the roof.

**S.R:** That was close then.

**R.G:** Yep, and the fellow who sharpened the skates, he was off to the side part of the arena...skate sharpening you know. He used to keep all the Buffalo hockey players skates sharpened. He'd sharpen your skates and mine too. He heard the crack, there was a big crack, and he started to run. He just made it outside, he and his son. Their car was parked right in front, and the building went right over top on their car...smashed the car down.

**S.R:** Do you know what their names were?

**R.G:** Gosh, what was it? I went to school with the guy. He was only about that high, short, but could he ever skate and play hockey. He'd only be about 5'1".

**S.R:** That is short for a man.

**R.G:** What else can I tell you?

**S.R:** Could you describe what Fort Erie had to offer in the line of stores?

**R.G:** In stores? Yes, there was Hannis Groceteria, a little grocery store on Central Avenue. It's an apartment building now. It's between Phipps Street and Emerick, about halfway, on the east side. That was built by the Hannis'. We used to buy our groceries there. They had the cheese you know, in one of these big long pieces, and you'd go in for a pound of cheese and they'd cut it out for you, and they'd weigh out the coffee for you, a pound of coffee...well, do you want it ground? How do you want it ground, coarse, you know, fine or what?...pickles in the pickle barrel.

**S.R:** You couldn't pick out your own food. You gave them your list then and they'd package everything up.

**R.G:** Oh yeah,yeah, they did the waiting, there was no self-serve. The first self-serve was A&P about 1927. That was the first self serve store on Jarvis Street. That's where Brunton is now. Some other stores...a fellow by the name of Mullett, he had a small grocery, but mostly fresh fruits and vegetables...Walter Mullett. VaHey, he was the hardware store. You've heard that name before. Then

we had...they sold hardware. That was a hardware store...until Holsworth's came. Holsworth was now where...on Jarvis Street where the present hardware store is.

**S.R:** Babcock's...it's Elrick's Hardware?

**R.G:** Elrick's...I couldn't think of the name.

**S.R:** Do you recall any other stores in the area?

**R.G:** Yes, a drygoods store by the name of John T. James, which was located where the Masonic building is now, at the corner of Jarvis and Central.

**S.R:** Is that above the bank there, or beside the bank on Jarvis Street?

**R.G:** No, it's right across from the Town Hall. No, just across...like, if you're going up Jarvis, the Town Hall's here and you just cut straight across, it's right on the corner.

**S.R:** I thought the Fort Erie Credit Union was there, or is the Masonic Hall upstairs?

**R.G:** Yeah, the Masonic, yeah. The Masons own it. They own the building.

**S.R:** Oh, so the Credit Union just rents from them.

**R.G:** They just rent it from them.

**S.R:** John T. James...do you remember any others?

**R.G:** Yes, and...he was a Methodist, and he could...there's quite a history with him that he could get up and preach just as well as a minister could. They said he was a lay preacher. Down the street, down about where Bruntons is now, was White's Meatmarket...Dick White...Richard White, and he had a meatmarket there. He would deliver meat, he had a horse and wagon. You'd phone your order in and he'd deliver your meat.

**S.R:** Did he just get it then from local farmers around?

**R.G:** Oh yes, yeah. I imagine that's where it came from, because there was no...I don't think Canada Packers had anything to do with him, you know. It was all done...probably he made his own sausage and everything, right there in the butchershop. He was one of the old original butchers in Fort Erie. Another fellow by the name of Willick, he was up, right near the top of Jarvis Street, right about where Ruskin's Store was. Right where Bernie Ruskin was.

**S.R:** Around the bakery somewhere?

**R.G:** Yeah, they had an appliance store. He also had a meatmarket,



but he didn't have any delivery. You just go in and buy meat.

There was sawdust on the floor. He had a regular old meatmarket.

**S.R:** Why sawdust on the floor?

**R.G:** To soak up the blood!

**S.R:** Oh, okay.

**R.G:** I don't know. I don't know, really.

**S.R:** They used to do it in the saloons too, so I was just curious why.

**R.G:** Oh, it's a cleanser like. I used to use it for sweeping you know, sweeping the cellar.

**S.R:** Oh, it helped to pick stuff up?

**R.G:** Oh gosh, did it ever. That's one of the greatest things there is for cleaning up dust and that, to hold the dust down. Just dampen it a bit and throw it on the floor and then sweep it with one of those push brooms.

**S.R:** Any other stores that you can recall?

**R.G:** We had a couple Chinese Restaurants on the...on Jarvis Street. It would be on the bottom. It would be right near Klauck Street, on Jarvis, on the corner.

**S.R:** Was that later owned by Skippy Wong?

**R.G:** No, the Skippy Wong was right across and he was on the corner of Jarvis and Klauck Street and he was there for years and years.

**S.R:** Is that the place that had the sign that had the little red hen? Something used to move on it or something.

**R.G:** No, I don't think it was ever called the Little Red Hen. That was just Skippy's. There was a restaurant called the Little Red Hen, but it was only four or five years ago. Anyway, what I wanted to tell you about the Chinese restaurant was, next door to it there was a huge hole there. It would be, oh, about 100 feet long by, oh 100, going toward the next street, toward Dufferin Street. It would be, oh, about 30 feet deep. I don't know what had been there. I can't remember just what was there before, but there was a hole and when it would rain the water would collect at the bottom. In the wintertime it would freeze, so the kids would be out on it. We'd take our sleds and slide down that hill out onto the ice, you know, at the bottom.

**S.R:** Speaking of holes, here at the library the park goes down, it's

almost like it was dug out. Is that natural or was it dug out for something?

R.G: No, it was dug out, yeah.

S.R: Do you know what for?

R.G: Well yeah, the Oakes did that.

S.R: Oakes?

R.G: J.Oakes, yeah.

S.R: Why was it dug out or what did he use the dirt for?

R.G: I don't know what happened to the dirt, but he dug that all out to make a... Harry Oakes dug it out to help the Town of Fort Erie. He was a great... oh, what's the word... philanthropist? What is the word where a fellow does good, you know, for... I can't think of that. But anyway, he decided he was going to help Fort Erie so he built Oakes Park. You know, where you play ball. And he dug out that place down there and that was for the kids. He was going to put swings, and I guess there are swings there now, slides and everything.

S.R: And the baseball diamond?

R.G: And the baseball diamond. He did all that, and he also built the Rio Vista. He was going to have an 18 hole golf course out there. He finished nine holes, which is there now, and that's all. I joined right after he finished it. It was just like a cow pasture. The greens were...oh, your lawns would be better than the greens. Well anyway, that's where we used to play. It was 50¢ a round back in the Depression days. We had a lot of fun, we weren't trying to be Arnold Palmers, but we really enjoyed ourselves. But, as I say, he was going to... really, he was going to build nine holes right where the course is now there, at the top of Bowen Road and Crooks Street, and then on the other side of Bowen Road... old Bowen Road goes right straight through there. It's still a mud road, you know. On the other side he was going to have the other nine, but he never completed it. He died before... I think he went to the Bahamas, Harry Oakes did, before he had a chance to complete it.

S.R: We were talking about stores, are there any else that you'd like to mention before we move on?

**R.G:** Oh Cornell's, Cornell's Drugstore... I've got to mention that.  
The old original...

**S.R:** And that was by the Town Hall?

**R.G:** Right. That's where the offices of the Town Hall are now, right now. That's the old Cornell's. It was called Land's, actually.  
No, Land was the original owner and he was a pharmacist, and Erle Cornell used to work for him. He'd come down in the summertime... he was going to university, and he'd work his summer's there with Land. Then when Land... when Erle finished his course in pharmacy, he came and worked for Land, and then when Land retired he took it over. So, that's about all I can tell you about that. Oh, Land was, he was related to Lindbergh, you know the flier, a cousin to Charles Lindbergh.

**S.R:** So, did anybody ever come to visit him?

**R.G:** Charles Lindbergh's mothers name was Land.

**S.R:** Did Lindbergh ever come to Fort Erie?

**R.G:** No, not here, no.

**S.R:** I was just wondering if Fort Erie had a famous person come to visit.

**R.G:** Dick Rohmer was the only one we ever had.

**S.R:** Dick who?

**R.G:** Rohmer, the author, he's written about six books.

**S.R:** Oh, and he's visited Fort Erie?

**R.G:** He used to live here.

**S.R:** Where?

**R.G:** Gee, I don't remember where they lived. But, his father was in the oil business... gasoline. He used to import gasoline from Buffalo and he had a number of service stations up in Hamilton. That's Dick Rohmer's father, Ernie Rohmer... Ernest Rohmer. He'd import this gasoline from Buffalo. They'd bring it in by boatload in Buffalo and store it there. A fellow by the name of Hambleton would bring it in. He imported this gasoline from Texas or wherever, in the States, and he had a number of service stations in Buffalo. Well, Rohmer went over and made a deal with him to buy gas from him. He had two big trucks, and cart the gas over... bring it over. He stored it at our... we had a 20,000 gallon tank, and

he used to store it in this 20,000 gallon tank, then the trucks would take it from there up to Hamilton to the service stations. So young Dick, he went to school there, Fort Erie High School, and went to college. Then about that time the War broke out and he joined the Air Force. He finally ended up as a Wing Commander. He still is a Brigadier General in the Air Force, in the Reserves.

S.R: When he was writing...

R.G: He wrote all about Canada, you know, different phases in Canada life.

S.R: Did he do it while he lived in Fort Erie?

R.G: No, no, after he got out of the Air Force he come back to Toronto. And I believe he... he also took... he was a lawyer. He finished his university course and went to Osgood Hall and became a lawyer. Well, then he started to write these stories, and he became so successful that the law was just like a second occupation for him, you know... profession. You see, his writing was his #1 profession. He isn't doing very much now, he's probably, oh, 65 years old. He and I used to go swimming together.

S.R: Down in the river?

R.G: He wouldn't even know me now, of course.

S.R: What about Fort Erie and it's amalgamation? What could you tell me about that?

R.G: Well, there was Fort Erie South and Bridgeburg and they wanted to get together. They thought they could... instead of having two different Councils...

S.R: What about the West End, Amigari?

R.G: And Amigari, only that wasn't that big. Amigari consisted of Jennet Street, Russell Street, and you know, just that part up there around the Racetrack, that was Amigari. That was like the West End, what is the West End of Fort Erie now. But, they had no Council or anything, they went along with us, with the Bridgeburg Council. Then when Fort Erie amalgamated with Bridgeburg, why-Amigari came in with it too. So it all come... you know, all one.

S.R: Do you remember when this took place?

R.G: It was... when was that? It was the early '30s, say 1932.

S.R: So it was during the start of the Depression?



S.R: Did you have to grow vegetable gardens then?

R.G: Yeah, we had a little garden, yes.

S.R: What did you do for entertainment, like if you were on a date?

R.G: Oh, the show.

S.R: What show?

R.G: Right across from the... Don Deans. I don't know who is in there now. That was the old Bellard, what they called the old Bellard Theatre, which was built by the Ziffs, the Ziff family. The Ziffs built this, and everybody in the family worked. When they first started, it was silent pictures. The one girl played the piano for the pictures. The old lady, the mother, she sold tickets. The dad, he was on the floor taking the ticket stubs. One of the other daughters was the usher... I think they had two in there, ushers. The show held about 450 people. And then Barney, the oldest boythe operator. He operated the camera.

S.R: Was it full? You said it held about 450 people. Did 450 people used to go?

R.G: Oh, did they ever. That place was jammed, especially on week-ends. Not so much during the week, but during, say, Friday and Saturday nights.

S.R: Because it was a nice cheap entertainment?

R.G: ... 25¢.

S.R: Nice and cheap compared to now.

R.G: What does it cost now? Around \$5.50, isn't it?

S.R: Can you recall doing other things for entertainment?

R.G: Oh, swimming. Our swimming hole was down at... right at the end of Central Avenue where Central runs into the Boulevard, there's a place called the rock. Yeah, now there's a huge rock there about six feet in diameter, red in colour. Now, this was before they put that weir out at Niagara Falls. The water was quite shallow and this rock would sit right up, you know, in the water. There might be three or four inches of water on it. Sometimes when you had a heavier rain it would get about that deep. I can remember as a little kid about five or six, diving off the rock. I learned to swim there with an innertube... and the rest of the kids. The men from the railroad... some of the fathers of the kids that were going down

**R.G:** Yeah, it was during the Depression that they amalgamated. They thought they could run the Town a lot cheaper by combining, you know, instead of having two road gangs working... one road line gang looking after the water and sewers, you know... two of everything. They thought it was a lot cheaper to just have the one.

**S.R:** What about the Depression? What are your memories on the Depression?

**R.G:** The Depression was tough.

**S.R:** How tough?

**R.G:** In town, very, very tough. Houses... well, you couldn't give a house away... you couldn't sell a house. You could buy a brick house for \$2,500 and a frame house went for about \$1,500. Most of the people who were living there were paying very little rent. They were on the Town, and they were getting the dole. They'd get so much a week and then the Town would buy coal, or... most of them had coal furnaces, and they'd supply them with, say, a ton of coal a month to keep the houses warm, and then gave them a certain amount of money. Well, for that money they'd have to go out on what they called the road gang. You could see a bunch of them going down, and they'd shovel sidewalks, and cut weeds, and do any of that type of work, you know, that the Town required. For that they received... I don't know, \$10-\$15 a week... very, very low.

**S.R:** Just enough so you got by.

**R.G:** Just enough to carry them through. But, oh, you'd see them coming down the street and they'd be laughing and singing.

**S.R:** Was it very common to have to go on the dole?

**R.G:** We'd have been on it... yes, it was. They laid off people of the railroad, and you couldn't get a job anywhere. Horton laid a bunch of people off, Fleet laid a bunch off.

**S.R:** What kept your family from going on it?

**R.G:** Our family... that gas station I told you about, at the corner of Courtwright. That was just barely enough and then with my dad's plumbing... you know, he'd get the odd job plumbing and make a few dollars there... and my mother was a real good operator. Cripes, she'd run that house on about \$7 a week, and there was four of us boys. We didn't have any of the luxuries, I can tell you that, but we ate good. We were never hungry.

there swimming, built a diving platform. We used to use the diving platform, come out of the water and lay on the shore there or on the road.

S.R: On the road?

R.G: Yeah, and have the Yankees yelling at us... "Get off the road you kids. Do you want to get killed? What's wrong with you?" Well, you'd come out and you'd be shivering you know, it's cold, and the road would be hot... it was asphalt. You'd lay on the road. When the cars come we'd jump back. But they didn't... the speed limit on the Boulevard was only 25 m.p.h. in those days. I don't think half on the cars were going 20 m.p.h., you know, just taking it real easy. The road was quite narrow.

S.R: Oh, it's not as wide as it is now?

R.G: Oh, no, no. Part of it was brick, built of bricks, a brick road.

S.R: Was that very common?

R.G: It was then, yeah. In Buffalo, Buffalo had quite a lot of brick roads. It wasn't cobblestone, it was bricks. I can remember...

S.R: Would you go bump, bump, bump, all the way?

R.G: Well no, they were quite smooth, although the tires would make quite a noise, you know, running over the...you know...

S.R: The gaps?

R.G: The gaps in the... And right from where Williams live... the Williams homestead is, at the foot of Bowen Road there... right down to the South End, that was all brick.

S.R: When did they pave that?

R.G: Ah, about the time that this Godson... when he started paving in 19... I think it was '27 I said, or '30... when they had him come to town and he started paving Jarvis Street and the other streets in town, he paved the Boulevard too. He put asphalt on top of the brick.

S.R: Did the Niagara Parks own it then? Was there such a thing as the Niagara Parks Commission?

R.G: No, no they didn't. I mean, we all thought it was part of Fort Erie, you know.

S.R: So there was no Niagara Parks Commission?

R.G: No, I don't believe there was. If there was, it was just more or

or less concentrated around Niagara Falls there. But there... we never saw trucks the way you see them now, you know, coming up and picking up papers. You'd go... drive along that river... the beautiful view that the river... the roadway at the side of the road, covered with newspapers, cigarettes, just garbage and everything you can imagine.

S.R: Now it's all well cut and everything's all nice and clean.

R.G: Oh yes, there's a truck going up there all the time picking up... you'd throw anything out the window and they're right there to pick it up.

S.R: Did you ever visit the Bertie Fair?

R.G: Yes I did.

S.R: Could you tell me what you remember about it?

R.G: Yes, they used to have... they'd have horse races, like pacers and trotters. And the farmers... a lot of the farmers had horses, you know, that they raced, and they'd have contests going amongst themselves. There wouldn't be any betting or anything, and they'd get prizes... the winners. There would be a lot of needlepoint, knitting, and quilt work there, all kinds of vegetables, flowers, you name it and they had it there.

S.R: Was it all for show or did people buy things too?

R.G: Oh, they bought things, yeah, people bought things.

S.R: So it wasn't all just for show and for prizes?

R.G: No, not just for show. I never saw anybody buying anything, but you could buy it if you wanted to.

S.R: Is that all you'd care to mention about the Bertie Fair?

R.G: Oh, they used to have a Merry-Go-Round, and they'd have a few little rides, and then they had races for the school kids there. They'd start at the five and six year olds and go right up to the men.

S.R: Oh, running races and stuff?

R.G: Yeah, out on a track. What else can I tell you? Oh yes, the dancing at night. They danced out in front of the grandstand there, and they'd have Clarence Berger's Orchestra.

S.R: How long was this Fair opened then, every year?

R.G: Ah, the Fair would be open about, just about a week altogether... and everybody went. They came from miles around, all around the district.



**S.R:** Do you know why it finished?

**R.G:** Well, I guess they just outgrew it, you know, the races started coming in, and you know, with the... there was more racing going on there, and they just didn't bother anymore. So, anybody that had anything to show, why-they'd take it to Welland, to the Welland Fair. I don't know if that's still going on now, is it?

**S.R:** I haven't got a clue.

**S.R:** What about Erie Beach for entertainment? Erie Beach and Crystal Beach?

**R.G:** Oh, Erie Beach had a Dance Hall, a very nice Dance Hall. They used to go in there and dance and they danced to real good orchestras.

**S.R:** Such as?

**R.G:** Oh, I don't know. I can't remember... see, I was pretty young. I was 17 when they closed it, and they had been going downhill for, oh, about six or seven years.

**S.R:** So, when you were 10, you were too young to dance?

**R.G:** I was too young, and Mr. Bardol died. That's the owner. The kids were running it. When the kids got a hold of it they were fighting among themselves. It just zoomed down. But, they had rides of all kinds there. They had a Ferris Wheel, and they had a Merry-Go-Round, and the airplanes would go out over the water, you know. They had a ride like that where you'd swing right out over the water. That was fun to go on. And, what else did they have? Oh, all kinds of games, you know the way the midway is.

**S.R:** How did you get there?

**R.G:** They had a little train. There was a train that would meet the ferry in the South End at the ferry dock there. The people would get on this little jitney train. It was just a small engine and then small cars, and it would run right up to Erie Beach, right along the lake there.

**S.R:** Did it have a name?

**R.G:** I can't remember one. I think they called it the Erie Railway, or the Erie Beach Railway. That ran for years until Mr. Bardol died. But, they had a real good Dance Hall where the dancing was really enjoyed. You could dance upstairs or downstairs. They had two floors, and two orchestras.

S.R: Oh, I didn't know that.

R.G: Yeah, yeah.

S.R: How did it work? Did you have to pay to get in, or so much a dance?

R.G: You bought tickets at the Dance Hall. That's how you got in.

S.R: Oh, so it was so much a dance then?

R.G: I think they paid so much a dance, yeah, if I remember right. You'd get a ticket for every dance.

S.R: Did you ever go swimming there?

R.G: Yes, they had... at one time, they had the biggest outdoor pool in North America. You could still see it if you wanted to go down there sometime. You could still see the outlines of that pool. It was the biggest outdoor pool in North America. And they had... I can remember one Sunday going, when I was about 11 years old, and dad took us up and... took the family up there. And they had the champion swimmer of the United States there, and divers of all kinds, men and women.

S.R: Because it was such a well-known pool?

R.G: Oh yeah, a well-known pool. And then they had a boat that would go across the lake and pick up people from Buffalo, right at the Buffalo Harbour, and that was running back and forth. Now, I don't remember the name of that boat, but... it used to be called the Erie Beach Boat.

S.R: What about the Americana and the Canadiana? Were they at Crystal Beach then?

R.G: They were at Crystal Beach, yeah.

S.R: Did you ever go on those?

R.G: Yes, many times. We used to go across... especially, we used to go when they had the the moonlight rides. Every Sunday night they had what they called the moonlight ride. You would go over to Buffalo and down to the Harbour, and you'd get the boat there. It would take you up the lake, and the orchestra would be playing and you'd be dancing on the boat. They had a bar on the boat, and we'd get drinks.

S.R: So, it was a good entertainment then, for young couples?

R.G: Oh, it was great, until the black people started, they discovered. When the blacks got on the boat they got mixed up with the whites...

a white element in Buffalo, and the Poles and the Italians, and there was a great... oh, they had some real wingdingers of fights.

**S.R:** On the boats?

**R.G:** Oh yeah. The last fight they had, one guy just about got killed, he got knifed or something. That finished it... no more rides.

**S.R:** Do you remember approximately what year that was?

**R.G:** Well, that would be in the '30s, I'd say, about 1935-36.

**S.R:** Could you describe Crystal Beach for me?

**R.G:** Well, Crystal Beach is bigger than... is much bigger than Erie Beach. They had more rides and more things to do. It was a much better run beach than Erie Beach. It had a beautiful place to swim there, you know, all sand. But Erie Beach didn't have that, they had, just rocks.

**S.R:** That's why they built the pool then, right?

**R.G:** That's why they had the pool. A lot of people used to go up there to swim. They had bathhouses where you could change your clothes, and a beautiful Dance Hall.

**S.R:** How would you compare the two, Erie Beach and Crystal Beach?

**R.G:** Oh, they're... the Dance Hall in Crystal Beach is far superior. It's a beautiful big dance hall with... it was open on all sides, and on a summer evening... I can still see it... this band would be playing there at the bandstand at the back of the Hall. They had some of the big bands, you know, like Harry James and... Harry James. I think Glenn Miller was here one time... who else?... Guy Lombardo. These were all guest bands. Then they had their own regular band from Buffalo.

**S.R:** Do you remember the band's name?

**R.G:** I'm trying to think of it. The fellow just died about nine years ago. It was run by a man from Buffalo, most of them were Americans... the musicians. The breeze would be floating in there, you know, from the... and you could hear these rides going and the music... and they'd always have a singer, a man and a woman singing... and a beautiful hardwood floor, and a great big... In the centre of the floor, strung from the ceiling, was this huge light... small glass. I don't know what they call it, but there's a name for it. Glass... small pieces of glass... made up of little pieces of glass, big and round.

S.R: Oh, the crystal ball thing?

R.G: The big crystal ball, yeah, and they'd have a light shining on that.

S.R: So everything else sparkled around it then?

R.G: Everything was just, you know... it would be coloured, like coloured lights as it went around. It would revolve, and these coloured lights from the reflection, you know, from the light on the crystal.

S.R: Is there anything else you'd like to mention about Crystal Beach?

R.G: Oh, up at Bay Beach, that would be about a half a mile above Crystal Beach, they had a very small dance hall there. When they played we'd go from one to the other. They had a boardwalk right along the beach, and you'd walk up there and see what was going on there. It was a little bit cheaper to dance there. We had fun.

S.R: They didn't have all the other stuff?

R.G: Oh no, nowhere... you couldn't compare the two. But the only thing that I can remember about the Beach is the beautiful swimming there, the sand you know, the sandy beach. That and the Dance Hall.

S.R: What were the most common ways from getting from Buffalo to Fort Erie, or from Fort Erie to Buffalo?

R.G: Well, by ferry to start with.

S.R: And that was at the South End?

R.G: Yeah, the South End.

S.R: And the North End had the Dummy?

R.G: It had the Dummy.

S.R: Could you please tell me your recollections on those?

R.G: Well, the Dummy, I can remember going when I was just a little guy, and my mother would take me over to Black Rock. There was no shoe stores in Fort Erie. She'd take me over there and buy me shoes. I'd wear an old pair of shoes over and then I had the new pair coming back.

S.R: Did the Customs charge very much?

R.G: No, they didn't.

S.R: But every penny helped, right?

R.G: Well, they never... they did it themselves. So, this Dummy ran about once every hour. I think it ran like, say it left Fort Erie, or Bridgeburg on the hour, and then it came back on the half hour

from Buffalo... from Black Rock back to Fort Erie.

S.R: So it made a trip... every half hour it left a port?

R.G: Yeah.

S.R: You had mentioned an accident on the Dummy?

R.G: Oh yes. Back in about 18... I think it was about 1895 or 1898...

S.R: Did your father tell you this?

R.G: Well, it was a well known fact, you know. My dad wouldn't remember it because he was born in 1886, but maybe his mother told him about it, I don't know. But anyway, this Dummy was going across, and whether there was fog or what, the motorman that was running the Dummy didn't realize that the bridge had swung open, and he went right off the... over the edge, and I don't know how many people lost their lives. It is probably still down there at the bottom.

S.R: What about the ferry travel?

R.G: Ferry.... they had four ferries. They started out with the New Orleans, and it was just a normal ferry with a propellor at the back. Then business got so good that they bought the New Town, and the Jamaica, because they couldn't handle a lot of traffic that was coming over. It was the only way of getting over, you see, outside of the boats... the Crystal Beach boat and the Erie Beach boat. People wanted to bring their cars over here because... you know, to travel, to see relatives, go on picnics. We had a much better place over here for picnics, as you yourself know.

S.R: It's still that way.

R.G: Yeah, it's still that way. They never did fix up their parkway.

S.R: And the fourth ferry's name was?

R.G: The fourth ferry's name was City of Toledo, which was much larger than the New Town and Jamaica, and carried a total of about 120 cars. All that they would do... they had the Jamaica, say, on the Canadian side, and the New Town on the other side, the American side, and in the middle would be this City of Toledo. Well, the City of Toledo... let's say it just loaded up from the American side. The City of Toledo would wait until the Jamaica got filled on the Fort Erie side. As soon as he pulled away from the dock, he ducked in.

S.R: It was like an assembly line almost.



**R.G:** Oh, it was tricky the way they did it. And then the other boat would go down the river, and he'd wait for the New Town to get off the American... out of the American docking facility, and then he'd duck in there, unload his load and then come up. That's the only way they had to do it. They had no Peace Bridge at the time. It's the only way that the cars had of getting over.

**S.R:** Once the Peace Bridge was open, did the ferry business stay there at all?

**R.G:** Oh yeah, yeah, they kept... I think they kept one ferry... I think they had the New Town and the New Orleans. Then the business dropped off so bad that they just had the one, and they kept the New Orleans.

**S.R:** That was the first one right?

**R.G:** Yeah, that was the first ferry that they had. Then finally it got... they were losing money right and left, and the Fix brothers... they're the ones that owned the ferries in Buffalo... and they closed down the operation. I think you also had the story in the paper about the ferry going down the river in the ice. Do you want that story?

**S.R:** Sure.

**R.G:** Alright, I'll tell you about it. In the wintertime the only ferry they could run... that's when all of them run... was the New Orleans, because it had the propellor at the back. The others were all side-wheelers. The ice coming down the river would just tear these side-wheelers right out, you know, the damage would be too great so they used the New Orleans. So, this one time, my dad was working at the service station... this is in another winter... and he was working at the service station down, right at the foot of the bridge, where the bridge comes off the river there and onto the land. He was looking out across the river and all of a sudden he sees this ferry coming down. Well, what had happened, the ferry got caught in the ice and he couldn't make it through to get over to Fort Erie, and the ice carried it down. The guy in the car said, "Gee Chet", he said, "That ferry's going to hit the bridge". (The International Bridge) And it hit the bridge, and it tipped, almost tipped over, and they just took the cabin right off. But luckily the Captain saw it coming, and he yelled for all the passengers to get below. Nobody was hurt.

**S.R:** Is that the International Bridge?

**R.G:** It was the International Bridge that they hit. Well, then they had what they call the International Tug, which was owned by the Bridge Company, just to stop things like this... in case any of the ferries... if anything ever happened and they started going down the river, to protect their bridge. So, it went out and it got the New Orleans and hauled it back up the river to the dock up at... the dock on the American side.

**S.R:** So, then after that if you wanted to go to Buffalo you had to use the Dummy, for a while, right?

**R.G:** There was no Dummy then. This was... I was up north then. This was... I guess it was in the '40s.

**S.R:** Oh, so the Peace Bridge was open then already.

**R.G:** Yeah.

**S.R:** Could you tell me about the Peace Bridge opening, when it was, and what you remember about it?

**R.G:** In 1927. King Edward VIII came over and his brother George, who was later, you know, George VI. They came over to open the Bridge. The American... I'm trying to think who the American authority was. It wasn't a President, it was somebody very near him, a Vice President I think, of the United States, he was there when they opened the Bridge in 1927.

**S.R:** The King, was he just the Prince at the time, or was he the King?

**R.G:** No, they were both Princes at the time.

**S.R:** So, that's where they got the Prince of Wales?

**R.G:** Yes. He was the Prince of Wales, and I think George was the Duke of York. They were there. I wasn't there because we just happened to have a family reunion that day, so we had to go to the family reunion... we missed the opening. Oh, it was a big day in Fort Erie. They met right at the middle of the Bridge, and they cut the ribbon and... you know the way they do it.

**S.R:** Is there anything else that you can remember about it?

**R.G:** No, that's all.

**S.R:** What about the smuggling that went on during Prohibition?

**R.G:** Oh, the smuggling. Well, they started out... when they passed the 18th Amendment in the States, they closed all the bars and they

couldn't sell any more beer over there... so, they had to have beer. The only way they could get it is to import it from Canada... but, how to get it over? So, the only way they could get it over was by boat. A lot of these enterprising young guys, why-they opened up operations all the way along the river. It started right at the foot of Highland Avenue, and it went right up to the ferry dock. There was bootleggers all the way along there. They all had fleets of boats, row boats, which would carry, oh, 50-60 cases of beer, and you got \$100 for taking a rowboat over. Also, they had launches, and finally it ended up that one fellow had a tugboat, which would carry 1,200 cases of beer. He only had that for two years, I guess, before they... it went wet over in the States again, you know, they brought their beer back in. But, he made quite a few trips with that 1,200 cases. He ended up a millionaire. There was one bootlegger who owned a fleet of rowboats and launches, and finally, he thought in order to get a greater amount of beer across the river he would use a tug. So he bought a gasoline powered tug, which held about 1,200 cases of beer. He'd run that across the river at night, after dark, unload it and then come back. Well, he ran that for about two years until they recalled the 18th Amendment in the States, and they had beer again. There was another man... he bought one of the boats that was in the Miss America Races, the Gold Cup Races in Detroit. It was called the Miss America, I believe. This boat would do... oh, maybe 75 miles an hour. And he said, "Well, the Coast Guard won't catch me with this". And he'd dart over, he'd be over there in about a minute, unload his boat and come back again. He could make numerous runs in an evening. The Coast Guard boat was pretty fast, and it had a one pounder up on the deck.

**S.R:** What's that?

**R.G:** A one pound cannon. So, this one night, he was chasing this one fellow, who's dead now... he was a real character... he was driving this launch which was pretty fast. He said the darn thing was catching up to him, and here it was the Coast Guard right behind him. He was standing inside the cabin at the wheel of this boat and all of a sudden he heard something go by his head. This Coast Guard

had shot off his cannon, and the ball had gone right through it. I saw the boat... right through it and through the back window, and out through the windshield. It was only about a foot from his head.

**S.R:** Did very many people get hurt during this?

**R.G:** Oh, there was the odd person that disappeared, and stuff like that. But what would happen... if you went to take a load... say you went by rowboat, it's the slowest... and it had whiskey... about 50 cases of whiskey on board...that's where they made the big money... and you saw that the Coast Guard was coming, well, what you'd do, you'd just throw everything overboard as fast as you could. There was usually one or two men in the boat, usually two, and they'd heave this stuff over, and then row for the Canadian shore. Well, they had nothing, they had nothing on them.

**S.R:** So they couldn't do anything.

**R.G:** There was lots of whiskey at the bottom there.

**S.R:** Did people dive trying to find it?

**R.G:** Oh yes. This one fellow in town, he was quite a diver, and he worked on the railroad, and his sport was swimming. So, he'd start up, start about the International Bridge, he'd swim out and he'd start to dive. He'd have a clothespin on his nose and have his ears plugged up, goggles... down he'd go... and he'd have a pair of swimming trunks. He'd locate these boats. Some of the boats were sunk, and the guys have swam to shore. Sometimes there was boatloads right there. And he'd tear open these cases. This is darn good liquor, you know, that had been aged for about 15-20 years before he got to it. So, he'd shove the bottles in his shorts, in his swimming trunks, and he'd swim to shore. He'd hide these bottles along the edge and then he'd walk back at night after everything was dark and things had quietened down, he'd go down with his car and pick up the whiskey. He had enough whiskey for his friends and himself.

**S.R:** What about gambling? You had mentioned before about a gambling house.

**R.G:** Well, this gambling place, it was an old warehouse about... just about across from Built... what is it? You know, on upper Courtwright there, right...



**S.R:** Buildall?

**R.G:** Buildall, just across from Buildall. It had been a factory, and they had closed it up... taken it back to Buffalo or whatever... so this is during the Depression. So this guy got the idea that he'd open up a bookmaking joint there. He fixed it all up. He put a board up, he got phones in and everything. You'd go in there and you made your bet... there was a wicket there. You could bet 50¢, 25¢, \$1, \$2, whatever you wanted. And then you'd get the results. He could get the results and put them up on the board. I was in there a couple of times.

**S.R:** Was it very popular for the Canadians or was it Americans?

**R.G:** Oh yeah, very popular. Oh no, no Americans, mostly Canadians.

**S.R:** Were there very many of these places in town?

**R.G:** Well, I know of two. There was another one. You know when my dad had the garage? There was one down there.

**S.R:** And that was at the bottom of Courtwright?

**R.G:** The bottom of Courtwright in that garage. That was a big operation too.

**S.R:** Is that when you guys were renting it?

**R.G:** No, no, this was before we were ever near the place. This was long before. See, dad didn't buy that until '46.

**S.R:** You had mentioned that there used to be an industry across from Buildall...?

**R.G:** Yes, I can't remember whether it was... it seemed to me that it was Liquid Veneer, which was a polish, a furniture polish they manufactured there. There old place on Lewis Street, it burned down, so they moved the operation over onto Courtwright there. He only operated for a few years and then closed up and took it back to Buffalo. Most of these... all the industries came from Buffalo. The Arner Company, that's an American company, it closed up and went back. And Jello, they sold out to General Foods.

**S.R:** Where did Jello used to be?

**R.G:** Jello was right at the corner of Lewis and the Boulevard. That great big apartment buiding.

**S.R:** So, where the Arner was, first it was Jello?

**R.G:** Yeah, the Arner, that was called the Jello. That was run by a man



by the name of Woodward. He was a very good friend of my fathers.

**S.R:** Do you recall any other industries?

**R.G:** Other industries at the time?

**S.R:** Ones that aren't here anymore.

**R.G:** Oh yes, Toddy.

**S.R:** What was that and where was it located?

**R.G:** The Toddy Company was... you know where the station is now, the railroad station, well, if you just stood at the railroad station and walked straight across... the great big building. Do you know where the Markel Electric was? Do you remember when they closed the Markel?

**S.R:** What railroad station?

**R.G:** The only railroad station we have in Fort Erie.

**S.R:** I only know the C.N., if you go down Wood Street...

**R.G:** We used to cut across to go to the high school, right by the railroad station. Just... do you know where Williams Go ld is?

**S.R:** Right on the corner of Jennet and Wintemute, in that area?

**R.G:** You stand at Williams Go ld, you walk toward the railroad track, well, that's the station. If you keep going right straight across the tracks, and you'd run into this big building, and that was the Toddy Company, which was simular to... although it was a hot drink, and it was really good. It's a shame that it ever went out of business, because it was better than any chocolate drink that I ever had, and it was delicious. They were open for... oh, I'd say about ten years. Well then they closed up. Now, I don't know if they went back to Buffalo or they went broke or just what happened. I can't remember. And then Markel Electric took over that. You'd probably... have you heard anything about Markel? Markel made small, small appliances, toasters, fans, you know, electirc fans. I think they made air-condisitoners too, at one time, all these things. That was opened for about 15 years, and then closed up and went back to the States. So that's as many... I can't think of anymore. Oh, wait a minute, yes I can... Hart & Cooley. Hart & Cooley was up on Wood Street. Now Wood Street is just up... you go up Gilmore... you come to the railroad tracks there, you know where the railroad tracks are?

S.R: Yes, right where the G.T.R. is.

R.G: You make a right turn just after the railroad tracks.

S.R: On Dunlop Street.

R.G: Yeah, you know that?

S.R: I live on Dunlop Street.

R.G: Well, you knew Hart & Cooley then?

S.R: Yes.

R.G: I worked there one time for... oh, just for that time, 'til I could get back to Fleet. They were in the air-conditioning, registers, and all kinds of heating things.

S.R: Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you can recall?

R.G: Yes, the street dances we had every summer. These street dances took place right on Central Avenue, right by the Town Hall. Clarence Berger used to build the stand for the orchestra, right in the street. They'd throw cornmeal on the street, and then the people would dance.

S.R: You had mentioned Clarence Berger before...?

R.G: Yes, he was our... he played at all the dances.

S.R: Oh, he was the orchestra?

R.G: He was the orchestra man in Fort Erie. He lived up on Upper Courtwright.

S.R: Who was the first political representative from the area that you can remember?

R.G: Bill Willson, William F. Willson from Ridgeway, Ontario.

S.R: What was his job?

R.G: He was a member of Parliament in... a member of Provincial Parliament.

S.R: M.P.P.?

R.G: M.P.P., and a very good representative, a plain speaker, a very good man. Everybody liked him. I believe he was a Conservative.

S.R: Do you recall any good he did?

R.G: I can't remember anything he brought to Fort Erie. I can remember dad saying though, that, you know, Bill's a real good man. If you wanted anything done, you know... like, if you were having trouble getting different things done, you'd just go to him and he'd see that it got done. But... he was the first one. Then the big one that we had, he didn't live in Fort Erie, he was from the Falls. That was Houck, William Houck. He was the Energy Minister, he was the

head of the Niagara Hydro, he was the... what do you call them?... the Commissioner... the Commissioner of Hydro in the Falls there, yeah. That was a pretty big job... another fine speaker. He was American born and came to Canada with his father, and they built a farm down on the... this huge farm as you drive along the River Road. It's up for sale now. It has a great big barn.

**S.R:** Is it around Black Creek?

**R.G:** Yeah, around in there, you'll see it on the left... a big house and this huge barn and a lot of fields around. There was three brothers, Bill, Jack, and Chris. Chris Houck, he was a minister, and Jack and Bill ran the farm.

**S.R:** And Jack was the Captain of the Mentholatum Baseball team?

**R.G:** He was one of the Captains, yeah, and the third baseman. They ran this farm and they were all educated at Cornell, so they called the farm Llenroc. It's Cornell spelled backwards... Llenroc Farms. They were very big in dairy herds, you know, he had these registered stocks. They really made a lot of money on it.

**S.R:** Why would they call it Cornell spelled backwards?

**R.G:** Oh, I guess... just a... I don't know why.

**S.R:** Were they friends with the Cornells, or anything like that?

**R.G:** Oh, I imagine he knew them. I met the Houcks when I was running for Parliament one time... Boy's Parliament.

**S.R:** Boy's Parliament, is that something here in Fort Erie?

**R.G:** Yeah, and the whole district and all of Ontario.

**S.R:** What does Boy's Parliament do?

**R.G:** It came from the Tuxis, where the youth of the Christian... it is a society of Christian youngsters. They range anywhere from 16, right down to about 12. You started out as a Trail Ranger when you were 12, and then you got to be about 14 or 15, you became a Tuxis. What Tuxis means, is training for service, you and I on either side and no-one but Christ between us. The X is Christ. So I ran for Parliament, and that's how I got to know the Houcks. I went down there and spoke at their church... they voted for me.

**S.R:** Where was this Parliament held, in the church? Is it something to do with the churches?

**R.G:** With all the churches in the district, like Port Colborne, Ridgeway,

Fort Erie. We had an election. This fellow by the name of Doc... I can't remember his name, last name. Anyway, we ran against each other... had an election and I was elected and went to Toronto for a week, like, in our Christmans Holidays, you know, we were both going to school. I was 18.

**S.R:** Where was the headquarters for this?

**R.G:** The headquarters is in Toronto. It's kind of phased out now.

**S.R:** I never heard of it at all.

**R.G:** It's something... Oh, I don't think half the people in Fort Erie know... have never heard of it, just the ones that were connected with it. It was a good thing, you know, it kept the kids off the street. We'd meet once a week down at the church. I belonged to the Central Avenue United Chruch. We'd play basketball, have meetings, have a little get-together... like a Christian get-together, you know, and have talks. It was really good. Everybody really enjoyed it. It was something to do in the Depression.

**S.R:** Thank you for the interview Mr. Grimmell.

**R.G:** Well, thank you for interviewing me.