

Diana Matthews interviewing Mrs. Cynthia Buck, at her home, 831 Edgemere Road, Fort Erie. The date is September 8th, 1985.

**D.M:** Hello Mrs. Buck, how are you today?

**C.B:** Fine thank-you, and you?

**D.M:** Fine. Can you give me your date of birth please?

**C.B:** June 19th, 1914.

**D.M:** Were you born in Fort Erie?

**C.B:** No, I was born in the U.S.A.

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

**C.B:** Well, I've been a summer resident since I was a year old, and I've been a landed immigrant since '66. I stay all year 'round.

**D.M:** Have you always come to this house?

**C.B:** Oh, yeah. My dad bought this in 1910.

**D.M:** Was he a Canadian citizen?

**C.B:** No, we are all American.

**D.M:** Did he build the house here?

**C.B:** No, it was built around 1908, I think. We have added some onto it.

**D.M:** What was Fort Erie like when you were a kid?

**C.B:** Well, I spent all my time just up here, and I don't... well, I remember going down to the hardware store in the village to get my learners permit when I was 16! It was Mr. Holly, he had the hardware store.

**D.M:** Where was that, on Jarvis Street?

**C.B:** Oh, no no! You see, that was Bridgeburg years ago, and Fort Erie was just the Niagara Street Park.

**D.M:** What part of Fort Erie was this called then?

**C.B:** This wasn't called Fort Erie at all, this is Waverly Beach.

**D.M:** It was always called Waverly Beach?

**C.B:** Yeah, it never was called Fort Erie until they started this Post office Regional business, as far as I know.

**D.M:** I thought this was called Erie Beach at one time.

**C.B:** Erie Beach is down there. Waverly starts this way from Helena Street. That was the Ellis Road we used to call it years ago. Ellis was a farmer that lived there.

**D.M:** That's Helena Street you are talking about?

**C.B:** Yeah. And this was the lower Kraft Road here, and Crescent Road

was the upper Kraft Road. The Krafts, of course, moved into that brick house on the corner of Crescent and Dominion.

**D.M:** Did you know any of the Krafts?

**C.B:** I didn't, but Martha knew them, the boys. [Mrs. Buck is speaking of her next-door neighbor] They lived, for a while, in a house that Bardol's owned... where you are! [694 Edgemere Road].

**D.M:** Did you know any of the Bardol's?

**C.B:** Oh yes.

**D.M:** Can you tell me about them?

**C.B:** Well, we had a big gang, we used to have fires on the beach and swim at night and all sorts of things.

**D.M:** Did you know Mr. Bardol when he owned Erie Beach?

**C.B:** No, I didn't know the father, I believe he had died.

**D.M:** What were the boys like?

**C.B:** Well, they had a beautiful roadster, creamy yellow color. Oh, that was something else! They were quite exotic for our time. After the Grove closed, we used to go down there, the next year, at night and sweep off the dance floor. We would climb in some way, and we would rollerskate in there.

**D.M:** Did you go to Erie Beach when you were a young girl?

**C.B:** Oh yeah. You would go once in a while.

**D.M:** Tell me about it, what were the rides like?

**C.B:** Well, they had the Blue Streak, that was great, that was a roller coaster right along the shore. Of course they had a really nice Merry-go-round, but I don't know who got that. We always liked it better than Crystal Beach. Actually, they had a zoo down there, and at night we could hear the animals roaring and hooting and hollering.

**D.M:** What animals did they have?

**C.B:** Oh, they had wolves and small animals. One time, they had camels down there, and we rode on these camels. They had seats on them, on the two sides of their humps, and we sat up there sideways, on these camels!

**D.M:** Where did the ferries land that brought the people to Erie Beach?

**C.B:** At the big pier, and then there were custom houses on either side. You got off the boat way out and came in, and just... towards shore, there were two sort of square things that were the custom houses.

**D.M:** What happened at the beach for special events, say a holiday?

**C.B:** Oh, they always had fireworks down there at night, wonderful fireworks. And then they used to have movies along the lower level there, in front of the Casino. They'd put up a screen, about... a large screen, and they'd show movies down there. This was when movies were sort of new and so forth. We would go down and sit on the grass and watch the movies. They showed wild west movies as far as I can remember.

**D.M:** Tell me some more about the rides that were there, there was one called the Old Mill?

**C.B:** Oh yeah, the Old Mill. That was water, you see? And you got in the boat here, and then it went around and then up a hill like a roller coaster, and then whoosh down into the water. What we used to do, we went around in back, and went in one of the little doors, and get into a boat and have a free ride!

**D.M:** What about the one that you can still see the foundations for, on the beach part, a bunch of cement triangular things?

**C.B:** Oh, that was an airplane ride. It had these airplanes and it swung out around over the water. After the Grove closed, Ed or Bob Bardol, one or the other, they took some of those airplane bodies, and added them to the little pier to make a place for their boat. They had a cabin cruiser, and they moored it in between these things, they made sort of a place to keep their boat. You can still see the remains, maybe it's gone by now.

**D.M:** Which is that?

**C.B:** The little pier down here, the first one.

**D.M:** That's still there.

**C.B:** At one time, there was an outdoor dance floor right outside the Casino... if you are facing the Casino from the walkway, it was on the left. It was made of concrete, and it was pretty hard to dance on, let's face it! So, that didn't do too well.

**D.M:** Wasn't there another ride next to the airplane one, like a tower of some kind?

**C.B:** It was a slide, and you got brushburns, believe me! It was quite a big tower, and you had things like a cocoa mat to sit on, and if you got your leg or anything over, you would get a terrific brushburn from the wood, you see it was all wood.

**D.M:** Is there anything else about Erie Beach that you would like to mention?

**C.B:** Well, they had a nice roller rink and we used to skate there.

**D.M:** Whereabouts was that?

**C.B:** It was back in aways, I can't remember just where it was. And then they had special things in the Grandstand. They had a horse circus once, and I had a horse that could do tricks, he was a highschool horse, and I went down to look at all this, and one of the men said "May I try your horse?" I couldn't make him do all the things, I could make him kneel down and make him say his prayers and stuff, but this man could actually make him dance and everything, which I wasn't trained to do. So, the man that owned the circus wanted to buy the horse. Well, I wouldn't part with my Bob for anything. Then he wanted me to join the circus so the horse would come along! Here I was, I think I was 14 or 15 or something! Oh dear, that was something else.

**D.M:** When you lived down here as a child, where would you go to do your grocery shopping, was there a store close by?

**C.B:** Yeah, Rungs was right down at the corner.

**D.M:** Where Taco the Town is?

**C.B:** Yeah, that was Rung's store for years and years, and then it turned into Harry Hetherington. You see, there was no Dominion Road at all.

**D.M:** What road would you have taken to get to Fort Erie?

**C.B:** We had to go down Albany Road. I have been driving on that road since I was 10. Oh, you should have seen it! When it was wet, the lower part of the road, towards down near the mall there, was clay, and it would be covered in... there would be two ruts and you had to figure out which rut you were going to take and not get stuck, because somebody might be stuck on the other side, and you had to just keep going, and it was filled with water! But you think that road's bad, it's beautiful compared... and then you couldn't pass where those little bridges are? There's one up this way, and one further down, you couldn't pass on those.

**D.M:** Most of the road were dirt then?

**C.B:** Yeah, no, they weren't paved.

**D.M:** I have one more question about Erie Beach, why did it close?

**C.B:** The Beach closed for two reasons. One was, automobiles became popular, and they would rather drive to Crystal Beach. And also,

the Depression came along. It closed in '30, I think.

**D.M:** What happened to the stuff at the Beach when it closed, did it go to Crystal Beach?

**C.B:** I don't know what happened to it.

**D.M:** Besides Erie Beach, what did you do for fun when you were a kid?

**C.B:** We swam, we used to go up to the quarries. We would go to Sherkston Quarry, and Windmill. But every day, we would walk up to Crescent Beach to go swimming, because we had nothing but rocks, so everyday, we walked up to Crescent Beach to go swimming.

**D.M:** There's a nice sand beach here now, where did it come from, was it brought in?

**C.B:** I have no idea! It's come from somewhere, and there's more than four feet of it, because down on the beach there was a sliding rock which was about 4 feet high, it was a boulder and you slid off it. Now, it's completely covered, you can't even see the top of it anymore. There was another big boulder near it and another rock over on this side. All these rocks are gone. I'd give anything to go back to rock, and then we wouldn't have all these people!

**D.M:** Have you ever been a member of a church in Fort Erie?

**C.B:** I go to St. Pauls Anglican, up on the river, the church up on the hill.

**D.M:** Do you know any of the history of the church?

**C.B:** It was built of stones from the Old Fort.

**D.M:** When was it built?

**C.B:** Gosh, I don't know, I had a postcard of that at one time. Yeah, it was built of stones from the Old Fort. The Old Fort was just a... mounds of grass and stuff, they had taken the stones long before and built the church.

**D.M:** What happened when they went to rebuild the Old Fort?

**C.B:** They got new stuff!

**D.M:** You're kidding?

**C.B:** No, I'm not.

**D.M:** Do you remember seeing the Old Fort being reconstructed?

**C.B:** I don't remember watching it, but I know when they got it done, we went through it, everybody went down to see it. We used to play around there before it was reconstructed. There was great big mounds of earth, it's grass by this time.

**D.M:** What about the construction of the Peace Bridge?

**C.B:** Oh, yeah, we saw that, but the worst of it was, we had to be out west when that was dedicated by the Prince of Wales, it was 1927. My aunt passed away and we had to go to Washington, so we missed it, but my neighbour Mr. Webber, next door, was the first man over it after it was finished, before it was dedicated, you know, people could use it. He got the first ride over the Bridge.

**D.M:** Did it make a big difference as to the number of people that came over from Buffalo?

**C.B:** Oh, I'm sure it did, yeah.

**D.M:** Did the ferryboats still run after that?

**C.B:** Oh, yeah. What happened was, it was Depression then... after that, and I would go to work on the Bridge in the morning, and then I would come home on the ferry for 10¢, 'cause I had a Hupmobile, and they charged by wheelbase on the bridge which was what they used to do on the ferry. Well, it made sense on the ferry because a big car took up more room than a little one, it didn't make much sense on the Bridge. It was 35¢ instead of a quarter on the Bridge, so I would come home on the ferry for 10¢.

**D.M:** Did you work in Buffalo?

**C.B:** Yeah.

**D.M:** When you were a kid, how did you get around in town, did your parents have a car?

**C.B:** Well, we had cars, so we used cars, but when we were moved over by the farmer, he had a team and a big wagon. That's the way you moved over. It was the farmer that had the wagon.

**D.M:** You would move over for the summer?

**C.B:** Yeah, and then in the fall, you had to do the same thing back home again. It was quite... I mean it was quite a process... moving over.

**D.M:** Were there a lot of cars in Fort Erie when you were a kid?

**C.B:** There were a lot of horses and wagons. Everingham used to sell bread, he had a truck... a little what do you call them... a cart, with a horse.

**D.M:** Did you have any deliveries here such as milk or mail or anything?

**C.B:** Well, originally we'd get milk from somebody that lived just over the railroad track, and eventually I refused to drink it... it tasted so terrible! I was lucky, because it wasn't properly pasteurized. So, Dad had a carrier, and he would bring the milk over, and then

of course later on, we got it delivered for years and years. We had milk deliveries and then we had... Miss McKenna would come around with her truck with produce, corn and all that kind of thing. That was great, she would come down the street, and we would go out in back and get things like that. I was hardly ever in the village myself, because mother would do the marketing, or dad would bring things over from town. I was just here playing!

**D.M:** The houses along the beach here, were they all summer cottages for people, or were there many year-round residents?

**C.B:** No, we didn't have any water and we didn't have a sewer. The water... Lon Ellis had a pumping station down at the foot of Pierce there, and when he thought it was warm enough in the spring, we would hear the pump going and we knew we were gonna get some water, because the pipes were all above ground. If you came over earlier, you just went out in the water, and dipped in some water and brought your drinking water over.

**D.M:** You drank the water out of the lake?

**C.B:** We drank... yeah, when Ellis piped it in.

**D.M:** I meant before he piped it in.

**C.B:** No, we would bring our drinking water over with us.

**D.M:** Was it filtered when he pumped it out of the lake?

**C.B:** Well, I'll tell you, if you wanted a cold bath, and you ran a cold bath, sometimes you might find a dead minnow in the tub! It had a lot of sand in it and so forth. I don't think it was filtered. Many of the houses had their own pumps, and they just put their pipes out into the lake. But here, Ellis took care of it, and we were all hooked up to his system.

**D.M:** When did you get sewers here?

**C.B:** Gee, that wasn't too long ago. That was in the fifties. We all had septic tanks, mine was out in front here. Everybody had to have a septic tank. We loved the beach and we would put up with alot to come to the beach.

**D.M:** What about electricity, I guess most houses didn't have heat?

**C.B:** Oh, no. We had a little gas thing upstairs I remember... I went to a school that didn't start until later, so we used to stay over and we had a gas heater upstairs in the hall to keep warm, and we used the fireplace.

**D.M:** Was it mostly Americans that lived in these cottages here?

**C.B:** It was all Americans, the Canadians apparently didn't... there weren't many Canadians, they were all down in the village. They worked on the railroad and they had absolutely no use for this place. So, Americans built up all... about 40 miles up, that's how it got to be all Americans.

**D.M:** Is it still mainly Americans that own these places?

**C.B:** Oh, yeah.

**D.M:** Are there many year-round residents?

**C.B:** Yeah, more and more of them. We have some Canadian residents too, that are year-round. There's one up in the middle of the Jewish people, and there was another one, but he just sold. Mr. Hammond. He had appliance stores in Welland and somewhere else, and he closed the one in Welland and sold the house last year. He was here quite a number of years. That house had a furnace in it, that was Mr. Mazel's house, the first of the Jewish houses, it was a well built brick house.

**D.M:** You were mentioning a Jewish community around here?

**C.B:** Yes, they bought the Rose farm in about 1924. The barn had been moved, it was a great big barn, it had box stalls for about 7 or 8 horses, and Mr. Burton where I used to keep my horse, bought that barn, and moved it up to his property, which is on Kraft Road, just this side of the railroad track. They built a number of nice houses up there between Kraft Road and... well, I don't know how to explain it, but anyways, they built 10 or 12 houses there and some of the original people are still around.

**D.M:** It was all Jewish people?

**C.B:** At the time. The Jewish people bought the whole track of land, and they were interrelated, quite a number of them. Down here, the other way, where you see houses that look new... we had a firebug here years ago. One fire took seven houses, some on the front and some on the back. There is three little cottages down here on Edgemere, well, that used to be one big house until it burned, then the house next to it burned, Mr. Wilkes's house, then it burned up many many of his... he built replicas of the lake freighters and different boats, which were on exhibit at the Historical Society in Buffalo, but he had a number of them at home, and alot of things were lost in that fire.



**D.M:** Did they ever catch who did it?

**C.B:** Well, it was somebody that used to... we called him the runner.

He used to run up and down the back road, long before jogging was popular. I don't know whether they ever caught him, but after the runner disappeared, we didn't have any more fires. I don't know whether he was caught or not, but they were pretty certain that that was who it was.

**D.M:** What are your memories of the blizzard of 1977?

**C.B:** Well, it was quite a blizzard! The snow came right up to the top of my dining room windows. Then, I had a mound of snow by the tree in the back yard which went up 15 feet, and one by the garage that went up 10 feet. I had to leave shortly after, to go on a trip that I had planned. When you went out of the house you had to go and climb up this thing and put your feet together and sort of slide down the other side! I was snowbound for three days, I couldn't even get out. Down further, the snow just covered the tops of the garages, down there by Ritchie O'Connor's and down that way. Maryjane DeTamble, her car was in the driveway, and it cost her 75 dollars to get it dug out. There was four feet of snow on the top of the car. We were actually walking along almost parallel with the electric wires, and the tops of the garage roofs. It drifted so terribly, the wind was so strong. That was quite an experience.

**D.M:** Do you remember any other bad storms?

**C.B:** Oh, there was one in 1947 or thereabouts... '45, and Rose Avenue was completely... just about 10 feet of snow through the whole thing. Years ago, we used to skate on the lake, it would freeze enough that by January you could skate. Lately, I don't think it has frozen enough to do that. Occasionally you will see children down there playing hockey in there what we call... that's the baby beach out there in front. It would freeze smooth enough, but I would say, in the last 10 years, it's been too... you couldn't skate. I haven't skated out there in a long time.

**D.M:** Wouldn't it be covered with too much snow?

**C.B:** It blows clear. Years and years ago, that was about 1940, we had a party one time, and we went out at night with lanterns and skated way out beyond the reef there, and the ice was clear, you could see down below, it was beautiful.

**D.M:** It would be difficult to do that now, with the pollution in the lake.

**C.B:** Well, something has happened, because it just doesn't seem to freeze the way it used to.

**D.M:** Tell me what you know about the Waverly Hotel, I understand it used to be a doctor's house.

**C.B:** Dr. Pierce, and they used to have Sunday School in there every Sunday, and that's what it was. I don't know exactly when it turned into a tavern.

**D.M:** Was it called the Waverly Hotel or tavern when you were a kid?

**C.B:** I don't remember that it was, no. I don't know when it became a hotel or tavern, I just don't remember.

**D.M:** I heard that Dr. Pierce used that house as a convalescent home for his patients.

**C.B:** He could have, because the other Pierce house is up here on Crescent, Ray Pierce, that's his grandson I suppose, he still owns it. In fact, the Pierce's lived up there, so I don't know, probably it was.

**D.M:** What about the Erie Beach Hotel, do you remember much about that?

**C.B:** Well, it was just a nice summer hotel with a big veranda. That was right there at the corner of Edgemere and Helena, where the bushes are. It burned in the fall of 1935, and my neighbour and I, Elsie Webber, heard these engines. The Buffalo Fire Department came over and had to go down in the lake to pump water to try and put it out, but there was nothing they could do. It was just a wooden structure.

**D.M:** If Erie Beach closed in 1930, and the hotel burned in 1935, what was it for those five years, was it vacant?

**C.B:** Yeah, it was just sitting there, it was bound to burn sooner or later!

**D.M:** Nobody used it for anything?

**C.B:** No, it was just closed up.

**D.M:** Have any idea who started the fire?

**C.B:** No, but it was probably kids.

**D.M:** Why did they tear down the Casino?

**C.B:** Well, these dumb kids would get in there, and go way up on the third floor and lose their footing and fall down, and I think one or two were killed. I couldn't see any reason for taking it down, it looks perfectly dreadful. They had the most awful time trying to get it... when they first knocked it down, it didn't go all the way, and for years it sat there on part of the second floor and

part of the first and it sat kind of crooked. So, I don't know who complained again, maybe some more dumb kids fell off or something, so they came in and they had a terrible time because the walls were so thick. Now, it's just ghastly. It's too bad. It used to look nice from out in the lake.

**D.M:** Thank-you for the interview Mrs. Buck.

**C.B:** Well you are welcome! Come up if you'd like to swim sometime.

**D.M:** Thanks.