

Beverly Branton interviewing Mr. Alva Jansen, on May 2, 1985. The interview is being held at Crescent Park Lodge on Hagey Street, Fort Erie, Ontario.

**B.B.:** Good morning, Mr. Jansen.

**A.J.:** Good day.

**B.B.:** Would you give me the date of your birth please?

**A.J.:** January 5, 1901.

**B.B.:** And your place of birth?

**A.J.:** School section number 6, Fort Erie.

**B.B.:** Where is that located?

**A.J.:** Up by the quarries.

**B.B.:** Up by where?

**A.J.:** The quarries, on quarry...you know.

**B.B.:** Windmill Point?

**A.J.:** Between Windmill Point and the Bowen Road. Walker's Quarry, down there, near there.

**B.B.:** Were you born on a farm?

**A.J.:** Ya.

**B.B.:** Where was, where exactly was the farm located?

**A.J.:** That's exactly where it was located, school section number 6.

**B.B.:** How long did you live on the farm for?

**A.J.:** Well, 'til after I was married. After I was married I moved to Stevensville, the city of Stevensville.

**B.B.:** Were there many farms out in that area?

**A.J.:** It was all farms. ..all farms.

**B.B.:** What type of farming?

**A.J.:** All kinds...all kinds of farming, cows and pigs and eggs and chickens, regular farm.

**B.B.:** How has that changed...from now?

**A.J.:** Well, then in some ways it hasn't changed. In some ways it's carried on like that. Dairy farm and so on and so forth. Not as, more residential stuff, more than there was at that time.

**B.B.:** Do you remember what the roads were like out in that area?

**A.J.:** Well, at that time most of them were just clay, mud!

**B.B.:** How would you travel them?

**A.J.:** The best way you could.

**B.B.:** Which was?

**A.J.:** Horse and wagon. And there was cars, some, old timers. But the horse and wagon was the surest way other than the wet season.

**B.B.:** Do you remember when the quarry was in operation?

**A.J.:** Sure, that hasn't been too many years ago when that was going, sure. That was pretty much all quarry property right straight through that section to the lake. It was rock you know it goes down underground, quarries scattered here and there right through to the lake.

**B.B.:** Did it employ quite a few men?

**A.J.:** Not too many, it just kind of one horse...

**B.B.:** One...?

**A.J.:** One horse to fares. For those times it did employ but now it wouldn't amount to much. But in those times it did employ quite a few. And now it wouldn't amount to much with the population the way it is now.

**B.B.:** Who did they sell the gravel..stone, from the quarry to?

**A.J.:** On the road, on the road. A lot of work, a lot of work was made up by the township themselves. They shipped a lot of stone to the states, from the other quarries near the lake, mostly big stone, big rock.

**B.B.:** How would they ship it?

**A.J.:** By the railroad, from the quarry out to the lake and by a boat down.

**B.B.:** Do you remember the name of the railway?

**A.J.:** It was just one they put in themselves to transport the stone from the quarry to the lake. No I don't remember what they...but I remember they had the little train there that transported from the quarry to the boat and then it was shipped across the lake. For retaining walls and one thing and another.

**B.B.:** For retaining walls?

**A.J.:** Ya, and for one thing and another, wherever big stone would be used. But that's quite awhile ago.

**B.B.:** What other families lived in that area?

**A.J.:** Oh, there was a lot of them at different times. The Lees and Burgers... a lot of different families..Schoffields, Atwoods, Millers all in that area.

**B.B.:** Who ran the quarry out there?

**A.J.:** R.A. Law. And I don't know why he gave up there and then he moved out above Port Colborne. But he owned the quarry out there, in this same district for a long time, moved stone...right all in that same stretch of rock there.

**B.B.:** And then when you got married, you said you moved to Stevensville...

**A.J.:** Shortly after.

**B.B.:** What are your first recollections of Stevensville...when you first moved there?

**A.J.:** Well, there was a lot of work to do, cutting wood and so on and so forth. If you wanted to keep warm in the winter you would have to cut some wood. But it picked up after awhile, work began to get a little more plentiful than what it was. We always lived good, we never starved to death but some of them got pretty close to it sometimes but...

**B.B.:** What was your trade?

**A.J.:** Carpenter. Ya, for quite a few years.

**B.B.:** Where did you work...who did you work for?

**A.J.:** Well, as I said, I worked for Timms, a lot of war time work, in Welland. But most of my work I did on my own. If somebody wanted some work done I went and done it. That was the most of...

**B.B.:** Do you remember the area being built up...growing?

**A.J.:** Oh ya...ya. When I first started working back of Fonthill, I can count the houses on one hand, along both sides of the road between Welland and Fonthill, and look at it now, built up solid. But when I first started working out in that area you could count them all on one hand. Oh, ya and awful difference.

**B.B.:** What about in the Stevensville area...?

**A.J.:** Well, it's not so big but it's...well it's grown and grown and...but not as fast as Ridgeway.

**B.B.:** Why did Ridgeway grow so fast?

**A.J.:** Well, there near the lake and Crystal Beach.

**B.B.:** Were you ever at Crystal Beach?

**A.J.:** I worked there four years.

**B.B.:** Doing what?

**A.J.:** On maintenance until the Beach opened...

**B.B.:** Oh, tell me about that...what you remembered about the Park?

**A.J.:** Well, I was on one rollercoaster there after the season opened, operating on it, giving people what they wanted...fast ride and so on. Four years I worked there. That was before carpenter work got as plentiful as it did get and I went away from the Beach.

**B.B.:** Was Crystal Beach quite the popular place?

**A.J.:** Oh yeah, it still is. What's left of it.

**B.B.:** Has it changed a lot over the years?

**A.J.:** Oh, yeah. It gets gubbier all the time. I think anyway.

**B.B.:** What did it use to look like?

**A.J.:** Well, portions of it looked nice and portions of it looked the same as it does now. And they had some nice buildings out there. The old boat use to dock there. You wouldn't remember that. Oh, ya a passenger boat from Buffalo. It took two or three trips a day. We use to, when we were operating, and it was a dull day, not much doing, there were three of us on the ride, one of us could take the day and go to Buffalo and whatever we wanted to do...quite a few days I went to Buffalo on the boat just for more or less a ride, you know....and you'd get caught in a good stiff wind and you'd get sick, sea sick you know and that wasn't so nice, wasn't so nice.

**B.B.:** What type of rides were in the Park, when you use to work there.

**A.J.:** Well, practically the same that there is now. Coasters and merry-go-rounds and of course, there are some new ones that I know nothing about. But I guess all those old rides are still there in operation.

**B.B.:** Were you ever at Erie Beach Amusement Park?

**A.J.:** Yep, yep I remember that when it was still going.

**B.B.:** Describe that to me.

**A.J.:** Well, I couldn't describe it much as that as Crystal. It was gone a long time before Crystal give up. I remembered it up to a point but I wouldn't try to describe it, I'd only be lying about it. But it was a quite a prominent place too. The boats would come in there from Buffalo you know. I can remember when the ferry run from Buffalo to there. But I don't remember the Park as well as Crystal when it was going, or gone really when Crystal was really going.

**B.B.:** Why do you think Erie Beach closed up?

**A.J.:** Well, I think it was the competition with two right close together. I think that was...they didn't make enough money, that was about the size of it.

**B.B.:** Were you ever at the dance hall in Erie Beach?

**A.J.:** Ya, ya.

**B.B.:** Was that very popular?

**A.J.:** It was, at the time the Beach was rolling, ya. Ya, at the time the Beach was running. But it never got as popular as Crystal, I don't think.

**B.B.:** Did you go to Crystal Dance Hall often?

**A.J.:** No, not often. I was no dancer. I was more a worker. But I was up there..oh, we did work in the hall as far as that goes.

**B.B.:** What did the hall look like?

**A.J.:** It was really nice. It was really nice. They had it decorated nice. If I'm not mistaken they took a portion of that for skating, skating rink, if I'm not mistaken. They had humpity-bumps there at one time.

**B.B.:** Humpity-bumps...what..?

**A.J.:** You don't know what that was. You'd walk up along a flight of stairs and then come down on your seat on a blanket coming down all the way to the bottom.

**B.B.:** Where did they have this?

**A.J.:** In Crystal Beach. You'd climb up quite a long flight of steps to get to the top to ride down the humpity-bumps, there built like that, a slide, and that's why you'd come down a bumpity, bumpity, bumpity until you hit the bottom. Usually you was lying down when you hit the bottom. And that was before your time, too.

**B.B.:** What would you do for entertainment around this area?

**A.J.:** Well, that was about it, Crystal Beach, and Erie Beach, down the road, and generally your own, what you could. That was about it summertime. Wintertime, sure there was sleigh rides and so on, horse and sleighs, and freeze your feet.

**B.B.:** Where did you go to school?

**A.J.:** Number 6 school. That was in the section where I was born and raised.

**B.B.:** Who was your teacher?

**A.J.:** There was so many of them, I don't...George Ratham was one. He was about the best teacher I ever went to.

**B.B.:** What grade would that have been?

**A.J.:** All grades, would it have been 9, 8, ya, all them grades. Oh, ya there was a lot of different teachers. But Gord, I remember him well, he was a good teacher. If you done what you were suppose to do you got along fine, if you didn't do what you were suppose to you done it anyway. Ya, he was a good teacher.

**B.B.:** What would your day consist of at school?

**A.J.:** Reading, writing, and arithmetic, geography and some history, what we could learn of.

**B.B.:** Do you remember what time your school day started?

**A.J.:** Nine o'clock.

**B.B.:** And what time did it end?

**A.J.:** Four. One hour for lunch and fifteen minutes for, or an hour for noon hour, fifteen minutes afternoon time.

**B.B.:** Did you go to school through the summer months?

**A.J.:** Yep.

**B.B.:** All year round?

**A.J.:** Yep. Of course, I had to give up school pretty early. My mother died and it was more or less school over for me. Dad and I kept back for a long time.

**B.B.:** Kept...?

**A.J.:** Kept back. You know what I mean by back, lived alone. I don't know how many years we lived alone, quite awhile.

**B.B.:** Did you ever ride the Peg Leg Railroad?

**A.J.:** I never rode it but I saw it lots of times.

**B.B.:** Where did it run from?

**A.J.:** Where did it stop...it started out in Ridgeway and I can't tell you where it ended up, off hand.

**B.B.:** What did it look like?

**A.J.:** It just looked like a row of fence down the line there and a row of posts, with this rail on top...that was it.

**B.B.:** Did many people ride it?

**A.J.:** Oh, a lot of people rode it sure at that time.

**B.B.:** Why did they stop the service?

**A.J.:** Oh, there was other stuff took over, better stuff. There was trains from Fort Erie to Erie Beach and so on.

**B.B.:** Did you go into Fort Erie often?

**A.J.:** Quite often, quite often. Fort Erie was our shopping spot.

**B.B.:** Where did you go shopping?

**A.J.:** Well, mother and dad had an egg and butter route down there.

**B.B.:** Oh, tell me about that, where it ran?

**A.J.:** They made their own butter at home. And they just had a route of customers that they kept in butter and eggs, down on Gilmore Road and so on. And they'd do their shopping down there while they were doing their pedalling. Oh, yeah I was down there often with

them when I was pedalling their butter. Well, that was their living at that time.

**B.B.:** Who were their customers?

**A.J.:** I don't know. You got me there. There was one guy, one family by the name of Smith's, but I couldn't tell ya, I couldn't tell ya...

**B.B.:** Do you remember what roads they use to take?

**A.J.:** ...there was a Smith on Gilmore and George Lifer was on Gilmore Road.

**B.B.:** From Gilmore where would they go? What route would they take?

**A.J.:** Well they'd go right down to the river. They'd end up at the drink.

**B.B.:** Then where would they go shopping? Where were the shopping stores?

**A.J.:** Well where all the shopping in Fort Erie is now.

**B.B.:** In the south end of Fort Erie?

**A.J.:** South end, north end. It was mostly in the north end, old Bridgeburg. But all that along there was more or less shopping. You don't remember it?

**B.B.:** Would that have been Jarvis Street?

**A.J.:** No, Jarvis Street runs the same direction as Gilmore does, doesn't it?

**B.B.:** Yes, so the shopping was on the Boulevard?

**A.J.:** On the Boulevard, right.

**B.B.:** Right from the south end to the north end?

**A.J.:** There was a little weak spot in between.

**B.B.:** What type of stores were there?

**A.J.:** Oh, they had everything but not as fancy as they do now but had everything, sure.

**B.B.:** Were the stores located on the river front or across the street?

**A.J.:** Mostly on this side of the river front.

**B.B.:** So the homes that are there now were all stores?

**A.J.:** Ya, zero of them, ya. There was a few stores, few stores on the river side but most of them were opposite the riverside.

**B.B.:** The river side now is owned by Niagara Parks Commission...

**A.J.:** I 'magine so, I 'magine so.

**B.B.:** Do you remember when Niagara Parks bought that land?

**A.J.:** No, nope, no...I don't remember when the old ferry boat <sup>landing</sup> closed its doors in Fort Erie. You don't remember the ferry boat do you? That was before the bridge.

**B.B.:** Do you remember when the bridge was opened?

**A.J.:** Oh, yeah.

**B.B.:** Were you at the ceremony?

**A.J.:** I don't believe it but I went across, the old ferry boat hundreds of times from Fort Erie to Buffalo. You'd get out in the river there and get caught in the ice, from the ice going down the river in the spring, take you down the overhead bridge there and you'd wonder if they were going to get it stopped before they hit the bridge. I can remember that, the ice catching it and taking it down the river.

**B.B.:** When you were on the ferry?

**A.J.:** Ya. Oh ya it was a lot of fun at those times. Different fun than they have now of course. Cheaper fun than they have now.

**B.B.:** Do you remember when Bridgeburg and old Fort Erie became one... became Fort Erie?

**A.J.:** Ya. When they all went Fort Erie. Ya sure. I don't know what year or nothing like that, sure.

**B.B.:** Before it became all one do you remember if they had a Mayor for Bridgeburg and a Mayor for Fort Erie.

**A.J.:** I couldn't tell ya. I couldn't tell ya. I imagine they would. If they had a mayor for one they'd have to have for both I would think.

**B.B.:** What made them join together?

**A.J.:** Well I suppose they were crowding one another, so they went and joined together, the only thing I can figure out. Ya, I can remember Fort Erie up as far as, you know where Jacksons use to have the store in Amigari. That was right on the corner of Gilmore and Central Avenue.

**B.B.:** That was in the west end of Fort Erie?

**A.J.:** Ya.

**B.B.:** What type of store was it?

**A.J.:** Groceries. Folks use to do a lot of shopping there when they were down in Fort Erie pedalling their produce out, why they'd stop there where the store use to be.

**B.B.:** What were the roads like in town?

**A.J.:** Well later on it was just rough stone. When it started it was just like out in the country, mud, clay roads. But as time went by the begin to stone the roads, first of them would be pretty rough but theykept improving them. But no, there was no good roads. There was no good roads.

**B.B.:** Do you remember when Fleet came to Fort Erie?

**A.J.:** Oh yeah, ya. Miller's use to have a milk route, they had a dairy farm up the Bowen Road, and they use to pedal their milk in Fort Erie. Oh they had thirty, thirty-five cows, something like that. And then they bottle it all up, well it was metal containers first off, about two gallons to a container and then they'd pour you out a quart, then pour another fellow out a quart, that was first off. Then they got down to eventually the bottled. But they done that for quite a few years, all around Fort Erie. I remember the butcher there one time..you don't know much about butchers either..cleaning hogs and getting them ready. You'd get barrels, set a barrel here and fill it two-thirds full of scalding water and then have a rope or take a block above the barrel to raise this hog up and down after it was killed, bled in there so they'd get the hair off. Fred, that's the one boy, something went wrong with the block up there and he stood on a box up on the edge of this barrel and golly if he didn't slip off and fall into this scalding water with rubber boots on. Well he was out of the picture for awhile so they called me and wanted to know if I'd come down and help them milk for awhile 'til he got on his feet again. So I went down. They knew, I knew how to milk and I went down there and the first night I milked thirteen and the next morning I could hardly get my hands opened. I got them opened because I had to milk while he was laid up but thirteen cows gave a lot of milk. I'd sit there like that for a length of time, by golly that was hard on hands. I remember that, that's been a long time ago.

**B.B.:** Was there a hospital at that time?

**A.J.:** No, nope. The first hospital I know of I had the appendics, Doc Buehl took me to Buffalo, himself.

**B.B.:** How would you get across?

**A.J.:** The ferry boat, car, old Ford Roadster. He took me over to the General Hospital. He said: "If you go today I'll be responsible for you, if you don't go today I won't be." "Well I guess we better go today then." Doc took me to Buffalo.

**B.B.:** Do you remember when the hospital opened?

**A.J.:** No.

**B.B.:** What were your thoughts when Stevensville and Fort Erie and Crystal Beach became all Greater Fort Erie.

**A.J.:** Oh, we couldn't see much difference. We didn't look for much difference.

No, we never looked for difference.

**B.B.:** Did the war years affect Fort Erie?

**A.J.:** Well it affected a lot of the young people those that were of age. I was too young for the first war and too old for the second one, that is for draft...but there was a lot that did get caught in the draft.

**B.B.:** That's when Fleet came to town, is that right?

**A.J.:** I think so. Ya, I remember when Fleet started, when they started putting the foundation in, but nothing in particular.

**B.B.:** Did that employ a lot of people in the area, as much as it does now?

**A.J.:** Oh yeah, well I imagine. Well I wouldn't say as much as it does now because everything is so much bigger now than it was at that time.

**B.B.:** What were most...or some of the people in town employed in?

**A.J.:** Anything they could get to do. They weren't as particular as they are now a days. Now if there was a ditch to dig the majority of them would go out and dig it. Where now if it doesn't have a white shirt and collar and tie, well they don't want the job. That's a fact! Go down town there, one of those places, and tell them you want a load of coal, loaded or unloaded and see how many you can get to do it. That was the difference between then and now. Then we were glad to do it, glad to do it.

.....Ya, I was up on that airport in Maitland and another one above Welland. Worked on hangers and that.

**B.B.:** How did the Depression affect this area?

**A.J.:** Well, like it did any other I guess. Hit it pretty hard. There was a lot of people going hungry. That a..I was going to say that wouldn't admit it. That was pretty hard on everyone.

**B.B.:** Do you remember the Prohibition Days?

**A.J.:** Ya, not too much but I remember, one thing or another. But I never was never one for drink so it didn't bother me any. Water or coffee was all I lived with.

**B.B.:** Did it seem to affect Fort Erie?

**A.J.:** Oh, I don't think so. I don't know. It always does to a certain point but I don't think...

**B.B.:** What else do you remember about the Greater Fort Erie area as you look back...some of the changes that we've gone through?

**A.J.:** Well I remember the old lime kiln where they use to burn lime.

That was up on number 6 school road where the quarries are. There was kiln there well I was going to say like that but I suppose ten feet square and it was just built up wall, four walls about that thick and let it all open down to the fire hearth on the bottom, then they'd build a runway with a horse and two wheel cart up the runway to the top of that thing, that was let's say twelve feet high...take the horse and cart to top of that, turn the horse around, back up to that pit and dump it. And that limestone went down in onto the fire. That's how they made their lime. I could show you where that was yet if I was up there. Yep, it must have been twelve feet across and there was a runway built up from the ground to the top, I'd go up with this horse and cart and turn him around so he'd back in to the open side, dump it in there. I don't know what would happen if the horse would have kept on backing up. You'd a got warmed up a lot. But no, that was quite a thing in that time.

**B.B.:** Where would they distribute the lime to?

**A.J.:** Wherever lime was needed. Wherever lime was needed.

**B.B.:** What other businesses like that were involved in the area that might not be around now.

**A.J.:** I don't...there was saw mills, there was saw mills.

**B.B.:** Where were they located?

**A.J.:** There was one right there in Stevensville. Sawed timber and lumber, John Parson. Sawed a lot of timber. And Morningstars that was another one. They had quite a big mill too.

**B.B.:** Can you think of any other factories or businesses that were here?

**A.J.:** No, not that amounts to much.

**B.B.:** What about any...was there talk of..you know how there's different dreams or goals for Fort Erie of what might improve Fort Erie, was there any thoughts of that?

**A.J.:** I don't remember of anything that was thought of so big for Fort Erie at that time. At that time I don't remember anything that was thought of so big, you know, of course you're always looking ahead.

**B.B.:** There was a lot of years that they planned the Peace Bridge to come about...

**A.J.:** Oh, yeah, yeah. That was quite a little while on the go, quite a little while on the go. And that was pretty well all horse s that did the work around there when that was built, horses and dump wagons.

**B.B.:** The horses were the manpower pulling the dump wagons.

**A.J.:** Ya, more so than trucks. Now it would be all trucks.

**B.B.:** Was it a construction company that would have...

**A.J.:** Well I would imagine it would have been construction companies that would be let out to certain portions, that would be let out to certain outfits. I don't remember that, how they divided the help.

**B.B.:** Do you remember when the Queen E. was constructed?

**A.J.:** Yep. Portions of it anyway, ya.

**B.B.:** What portions?

**A.J.:** Well, anywhere from Fort Erie to Niagara Falls. I don't remember anything exciting about it anymore than it being built.

**B.B.:** Did it give better access out of Fort Erie?

**A.J.:** Oh, sure, sure. It gave a lot of work too.

**B.B.:** To the local men.?

**A.J.:** Ya, sure. As I say again, horses and wagons and trucks, yep. Has that thing pretty well done talking yet?

**B.B.:** Can you remember anything else Mr. Jansen, as you look back, that you want to...?

**A.J.:** Not in particular, not in particular.

**B.B.:** Okay, well you gave some interesting information and I thank you.

**A.J.:** Well if it's any good to you I, you're welcome to it.