

Diana Matthews interviewing Mrs. Gladys Barnhart in her home at 173 Battery Street, Fort Erie. May 22nd 1985.

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

G.B: Very well, thank-you.

D.M: Were you born in Fort Erie?

G.B: No, I was born in Michigan, in Detroit.

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

G.B: 45-47 years.

D.M: How old were you when you moved here?

G.B: I must have been around 24. I married my husband and it was through marriage that I came to Fort Erie, but I'm really from Buffalo, and of course I spent many wonderful years here with my good husband and of course Fort Erie is my home.

D.M: What was your first impression of Fort Erie when you got here?

G.B: Well, of course living in Buffalo, you know, we used to go to Erie Beach, so we just used the ferry, paid a nickel and came over and then we could either walk up or you know. So that I really I didn't get too acquainted with the town. I did meet a cashier that we used to come over and see, and my mother as well. It was very small, it was Fort Erie and Bridgeburg, and we used to think it was fun to pay a nickel on the ferry, walk all the way to the North End and go to a show in another town! Then come back to Fort Erie, that was another town, and then to Buffalo. We had fun that way. My mother said one of these days the Customs and Immigration are going to get after you, they will wonder why you are going over there so much! However, they brought us back and forth. It was smaller then and of course up around Erie Beach and all, there was so many American cottages, people that came for the summer. It was almost a summer resort. Other than the railroads, then of course Fleet came in and the industry started and they amalgamated the two towns and it became one larger city.

D.M: What was Jarvis Street like then?

G.B: Really, a number of stores, but as I say, like with us going to that show on Dufferin, we wouldn't be going up into the shopping district because we didn't have that much. By the time we came here to live, there was the A.&P. and Loblaws and alot of stores had come into town, so it was growing. Then Rossman's came in and many stores like that.

D.M: What about the South End, was it the same as it is now?

G.B: Pretty much. I would say quite the same, except where the Imperial Bank is, there was a home, and Agrette's had a little store where the Kar-Mel shop is, but it wasn't really all that large, you really went to Jarvis Street to shop.

D.M: I understand you worked at Erie Beach.

G.B: Yes.

D.M: What type of work did you do there?

G.B: Well, the first year they gave me selling ice cream cones at a little stand and then the next year, because I was 14, I could go cashiering which was what I wanted to do. So, of course, with all the big band names coming in, I wanted to be down in the park, instead of that they put me right out at the end selling all the tickets for the boats and the trains and of course the concession tickets. Everybody went whizzing by you to get into the park, but coming home, I was quite busy because everybody wanted either tickets for maybe a last ice cream cone at the stand that was there and definitely your transportation tickets 'cause they didn't take any cash on the boat or the train.

D.M: You had to buy tickets to get everything?

G.B: Yes.

D.M: Tickets were the money in the park?

G.B: Yes, everything you wanted to ride, it would be, maybe, one ticket two tickets, three tickets or whatever. The tickets were five cents each, and sometimes people would stop and buy 4 or 5 dollars worth and they would have their tickets for all the rides. I think even for the games you paid tickets. There was no cash handled among any of the stands and that, but I can recall that there were many cashiers.

D.M: What type of games were there, like on a midway?

G.B: Yes. They called it the midway.

D.M: Can you remember some of the games?

G.B: Oh.... there was definitely the fish pond for all the kids and then there was the human fish, she put a show on. She was in a tank and she'd eat a banana and do different things underwater. There was curtains all the way around and we always figured it was an illusion, that she couldn't possibly... it always left people wondering whether she was really underwater or whether it was an illusion, you know, the way they had it set up. And then of course there was the bowling alley and a dart game. Not too many really... then

they had some kind of a game, I don't know what they called it, it was a Japanese man that ran it, and of course his prizes were all pieces of china, a little vase or something like that.

D.M: They gave away prizes at the games?

G.B: Right.

D.M: What about the Dance Hall, did you go in there very much?

G.B: Well, every time I got a chance to, as I mentioned, they had big band names... of course we had an hour for lunch and an hour for dinner and then we had 15 minute breaks. The washrooms were all at the Dance Hall and by the time you got through all that crowd on your 15 minute break and stood in line, you were lucky to get back in time. Especially me, because I was at the very end of the park. Then I had to wait until everybody was off, pretty well situated, then I... the night watchman carried... because I had a great big can plus my cash box, so I used to run ahead of him and get my cash box in there so I could get back and get the last train down to the ferry to go home. So, as I say, that was pretty much the system then.

D.M: What was in the Dance Hall, was it just for dancing?

G.B: Well, it was a... they had like these verandahs with park benches and you could go and sit if you got too warm dancing. But generally people would stand around. Then you could go upstairs where there were more benches and that and you could sit there and watch them dance and listen to the music. My mother loved to go there and sit. Other than that you had to go to the stand for refreshments.

D.M: I thought there was a bowling alley in the dance hall.

G.B: Downstairs there was another bowling alley. And also a checking room, if you had your picnic basket and you didn't want to carry it, you could check it.

D.M: What were the swimming pools like?

G.B: Well, I only got in once or twice because I was working long hours, but yes, it was very nice and of course very clean, the water was always clean.

D.M: How many pools were there?

G.B: Well, there was the big pool, it was on the right hand side of the Dance Hall, that was the big one, then there was the babyhole, what we called the babyhole, it was just a little bit of water. Then right next to that one was an open air Dance Hall with a great

big band shell, and they used to have dances there too. Open air dancing they used to call it. During the summertime, I'm not sure if they had one in the Dance Hall and one out there, I think they just alternated, I don't think they had two dance bands because they were too close together.

D.M: Do you remember any of the bands that came to play there?

G.B: Can't bring any of them to my mind.

D.M: You said you worked long hours, how many hours a day did you work?

G.B: Well, 12 hours. You had to be to work by 12, and then of course you closed your stand at 11:30, but by the time you... we didn't have frigidaires in those days and you had to pack the ice all around the things you know, and that took another half an hour, and if you were going to ride that train, you only took 20 minutes to do it. The men used to pick up our ticket boxes as we called them, because I sold tickets for whatever they wanted, if they wanted a 5¢ ice cream cone or a 10¢ one. So that way they paid me, there was no cash.

D.M: How much would you have made for working 12 hours?

G.B: 10 dollars.

D.M: 10 dollars for 12 hours?

G.B: No, for 6 days. They let me have Sunday off on that one because I think the rides could not operate on Sunday's. Of course you just had more or less picnickers, that way you wouldn't be quite as busy as when the rides were open.

D.M: Was that a lot of money then?

G.B: Oh, When I went back to school, I think I had 90 dollars in the bank, I saved it all, and I felt very rich.

D.M: What type of things did they sell in the park, did they have stands?

G.B: Oh, like Mr. Weir, he had a great big stand and they were famous for their clam chowder, and they had hot dogs and hamburgers and desserts, pies and things. I guess mostly sandwiches. Then there was the Rockeman's that was way out where I was working, near the train where the depot was. They had a big restaurant and they served breakfasts and things like that. There was the big hotel that burned down and they had all full course meals, and you didn't have to be a guest to dine there, just as long as you were... well, there were no shorts and slacks, so everyone was able to go in.

D.M: Did it cost anything to get into the park?

G.B: No, admission was free.

D.M: Were there souvenir stands?

G.B: I believe there was one, not too big, not too many souvenirs.

D.M: Can you remember any of the rides?

G.B: Oh yes. Of course I was riding those because my uncle was the master mechanic there and he used to take me around and I used to get all free rides. They added several... the Heyday was very new.

D.M: What was that?

G.B: Well, it was something like what you call crack-the-whip, you know what I mean, only there were double cars and they'd swing you around rather than just the single car. It was just a little larger crack-the-whip, that's all, but it was modernized a little bit.

D.M: What about the Old Mill, what was that?

G.B: Oh, that was great too, that was at the end of the park, you went on these boats... I don't think we went through a tunnel, but you'd go up on a ramp and you'd splash down and people would be standing there and they'd get soaking wet and they'd holler. Then the time office was right next to that, I had a picture of that with my husband standing in front of it.

D.M: What was the Blue Streak?

G.B: Well, the Blue Streak was quite daring, but nothing in comparison to what we have today.

D.M: Was it a roller coaster?

G.B: Yes. You went up on a high peak and then you went down and oh! Then you went down to the end of the park and back, we thought they were pretty steep.

D.M: Did anybody ever get hurt on them?

G.B: Yes, one man fell off, he stood up. When you went around... you know... it jerked around to get up speed to go... and he stood up and I don't know, he just went out.

D.M: Was he killed?

G.B: Oh yes. He was a sailor in from York, they came in on a boat from Scotland and this one fellow had an aunt or something living in Buffalo and since they had shore leave, these 6 boys were guests and they decided to go to Erie Beach for a good time so they all came over. After the accident, apparently they were on shore leave but they weren't to leave the country or New York State, so they were really all in trouble, but I guess people were not thinking of

Erie Beach being out of the country, why, they just came through. They still had to go through immigration, but anyways, I understand the park wasn't responsible because they had signs all around-do not stand up, but he did.

D.M: That was on the Blue Streak?

G.B: Yes.

D.M: Do you remember any of the other rides?

G.B: Oh yes, I can remember them all, the Tumblebug, the Merry-go-round...

D.M: What was the Tumblebug?

G.B: It was sort of a thing that went up and down too, but it kinda jerked. I don't know, it gave you a ride of some kind, I can remember it quite well but I don't remember riding it too many times, of course when you are working 12 hours a day, you're not going to get many free rides. There were quite a few nice rides in there.

D.M: What ride was where the cement triangular things are out near the water?

G.B: Oh yes, my mother would never let me ride that! Even when I was young and went to Erie Beach.

D.M: What was it called?

G.B: I can't remember . There was also the slide that went around and then this one here... well there were chairs and you swung around. I don't know whether Crystal Beach had one or not. You went out over the water and it was so full of rocks that if one of those chains ever gave away... my mother said it was dangerous so she would never let me ride it so I never did get a chance to... and then it was like off that walk and everybody was so rushed to get to the Dance Hall that I think the ride really... as I remember, I think the last year or so, they didn't even operate it because I don't think people got down there to ride it. Maybe many people had the same thought as my mother, it was too dangerous! Instead of being chairs, they were little boat shaped things, I think two people sat in them, one in the front and one in the back.

D.M: The Americans coming from Buffalo to Erie Beach, did they have to go through Immigration?

G.B: Oh yes. They'd come in on the boat and the boat office was there. An American officer and American Customs, same as Canadian, they had two sets of officers. When they went through, they went through the American side to go to Buffalo because there was no

Immigration at Buffalo, and then the same thing was at the ferry...

Oh no, I have to correct myself, when you went, the American officer was on the American side, because the boat docked right at the foot of Ferry Street.

D.M: Did many of the people that lived in Fort Erie visit Erie Beach, or was it mainly Americans?

G.B: Well I presume some of them did, but where the boats and trains came in, they would be loaded on certain days and you couldn't hardly walk, so I would say they had to depend mostly on Buffalo and surrounding towns, but I'm quite sure there were a lot of Canadians going up on their holidays, because we were busy on the Canadian holidays as well as the American.

D.M: Were there special celebrations at the park on holidays?

G.B: I don't recall that there were. I just remember, as I mentioned, they started putting in... I don't know whether it was the last two years or the last year... giving... putting on shows out on the grass. They had one show that the girls were diving from quite a height, you know, swan diving and all those different things and the one girl... the horse wasn't very large and he used to go up on the ramp, of course he didn't go all the way up, he went just so far, and he would jump and she would be on his back and they'd jump into the big pool.

D.M: Was that the Diving Horses?

G.B: Yes.

D.M: You said your uncle worked at the park, what did he do?

G.B: He worked all year round. If a ride would get into trouble or wasn't just right, he would have to fix it, he used to go over the rides every morning. All winter long he broke down all the motors and replaced anything that was worn and things like that. And also he took care of the zoo animals.

D.M: There was a zoo?

G.B: Oh yes, we had a small zoo. There was a bear and monkeys of course and goats and snakes... I'm not too sure about snakes. He used to feed them and take care of them and the little bear was tame and he'd walk around the machine shop with my uncle!!

D.M: Your uncle, what was his name?

G.B: William Whiteside.

D.M: When did the park open for the summer?

G.B: It would open for the Canadian holiday, 24th of May at that time

and they closed Labour Day.

D.M: What happened during the winter, was it kept up?

G.B: Well, people had ways of protecting their stands from the winter, and then the rides would be all covered up. I don't think our Merry-go-round was built in. I think the one up at Crystal Beach has doors... there must have been a big tarp... I would be gone, and when they opened up, they were all running.

D.M: I was told that the big swimming pool was used as a skating rink in the winter.

G.B: Quite possible. Mr. Bardol, he was very good about things like that, and I would think they did. Living in Buffalo, we had to go roller skating, there was no rinks, we had no arenas in them days.

D.M: Did you know Mr. Bardol?

G.B: No, no I didn't, because I think he died either the year or two before I worked, but I knew his wife, she was pretty well... cross, I guess you'd say. She would inspect that park and if you weren't just doing everything right... I wasn't there, but they said that one day in June, well, you know, some of the kids were still in school, so the crowds didn't get over quite like they did in the summer months, and they had all these ice cream stands and the girls kept them all polished, they had soda fountains and things like that and of course, naturally you could run out of work... she just came along and fired everybody, closed up all the stands. That's how... I mean she was irrational like that, there was no reason why the girls... if the girls were wasting their time and didn't have the cleaning done, you could see, but they had them all polished up. But apparently there was sort of a... and as I say, they threatened me-you're 13! Don't let anybody in this park know you're 14, if you do, you get fired. It was against the law to hire me, but times were good and it was hard to get people to work for two months or three months. They had to depend alot on the school children, like high school children and things like that. Times were good, and people wouldn't waste their time on a job like that.

D.M: How many years did you work there?

G.B: Three.

D.M: How many ferries were there going between Erie Beach and Buffalo?

G.B: There were two regularly, but I think on the very busy days, they used the third one. It was the one that went all year around because it was an ice breaker as well. The other boats didn't have steel bottoms.

They couldn't get through the ice. Then the trains ran, both engines ran every day, on a busy day, otherwise, it was just the one train going back, but they had two engines. They'd go every half hour.

D.M: Where did the boat bring you, to the big dock?

G.B: Yes. You know where Louie Ziff's office is down here? Agrette's store? Well, that was all your ferry landing and your boats would load up.

D.M: What about the big dock at the end of Bardol Road, what was that used for?

G.B: Oh! Yes, now I do remember that. That one was where they loaded the boats up. That was the end of the park and that was where they loaded everybody up, and there would be two boats going back and forth all the time. That was where you got on and got off, then you walked that length and you hit the Customs and Immigration, then you were in the park.

D.M: Do you remember the name of any of the ferries or the boats?

G.B: The two boats that came into the beach were called the Ossian Bedell and the something. I think they had one other boat, but I'm not sure whether.... The ferryboats were the New Town or the Newton, Jamaica and I forget what they called the ice-breaker.

D.M: Where did the trains bring you? Where did they start and end?

G.B: As I say, the ferry dock was there and there was the drugstore which is where Louie Ziff is now. Right in back of that was the paper store. He was Madeline Gibson's uncle and he was blind, he sold papers. He was blind, but he could tell you whether he was handling American money or Canadian Money. I had never witnessed it, but they said he could even tell the difference in the bills, I don't know about the denomination... but nobody was going to give you a dollar to buy a paper, what were they, 8 cents or something like that... or a dime, most everybody had change. The train came right in back of that and there were benches and you could sit there and wait for the train and then they'd load the train up.

D.M: Where did it take you, to the other end of the park?

G.B: I don't remember going that far, Al (Reid) said it went as far as that store. There wasn't a store there when we were there the other day, but there used to be Hunt's Store and Mrs. Bardol lived on the other corner. He said it went that far, but when I started working there, it just went... well, I'd say it went to the Orchard, and turned

around and came back. They didn't go through the park when I got there.

D.M: What's the Orchard?

G.B: Well, that was like the Grove... or the picnic tables. All apple trees and different things that people could you know, go there and have their lunch. I think Al called it the Grove, that's the way it started out, just as a picnic place, you probably heard him say that. What did he say, was it 1912 that Mr. Bardol started Erie Beach and putting amusements in it...

D.M: 1910.

G.B: Oh, 1910.

D.M: Why did the park close in 1930?

G.B: Well, I guess it was Depression that helped it and then Mr. Pardee bought it, and Mrs. Bardol was getting older and the boys were going to run the park but apparently they felt like they didn't want it anymore, but I think the crowds were going down. I think Depression helped alot.

D.M: Do you remember when the hotel burned?

G.B: Yes. I was going with my husband at the time and I met him and he came over and he said... he didn't have a car so he borrowed the neighbors next door and it broke down just about in the middle of the street going up, just before you go up the Dominion Road, we had only a volunteer Fire Department, so Buffalo helped them out. So they were bringing these trucks over and the Peace Bridge was built by this time, anyway, they are coming along with their sirens and they're saying Get out of the way! He's gonna hit that car, cause he couldn't move it and it was an old heavy thing. Anyways, I don't know how he got by us, really! He went right by us. They had to depend too, I guess, on pumpers, because as I remember they might have had some water in there, but not up that far. I know they had to depend on Buffalo to help them.

D.M: It burned to the ground?

G.B: Oh, yes. Because it was an old wooden frame. It was only a summer hotel, so it wasn't that... but of course it had walls, but I don't know what kind.

D.M: It didn't burn down for 5 years after the park closed, what was it used for for those 5 years?

G.B: I wouldn't really know because we didn't come here from Buffalo, and if we did we went to Crystal Beach and that would have been

on the boats. I don't know what they used it for unless they used it for storage or just left it there, whether they sold the furniture, I wouldn't know. By this time, the boys had it and they weren't too interested in carrying... oh no, Mr. Pardee owned it when it burned down. On the other hand I think the Bardols bought it back, I believe they got it back... he had so much invested in it and he shot himself, so I believe it did go back into the hands of the Bardol's.

D.M: What happened to the amusements and everything when it closed?

G.B: Well, they were bought by different companies, now if you go to the Skylon, unless they changed it, the Merry-go-round downstairs is the old Erie Beach Merry-go-round and if you look around, there's a sign there saying that it is the Merry-go-round from the old Erie Beach.

D.M: Where's that?

G.B: The Skylon in Niagara Falls. You go downstairs and there's a Merry-go-round there. Now, I don't know, this was quite a few years ago, maybe it's worn out and they don't have it anymore, I'm not sure. It had a sign around there someplace saying it was the old Erie Beach carousel. Where the other ones went, I don't know. I heard some went here and some went there, but by this time, I was through school and I had a steady job. But I think my uncle really stayed there until some of the things went, but of course he didn't have to worry about his job, because he had his machine shop on Niagara Street in Buffalo, so he didn't have to worry about getting another job or staying on, I don't know just what they did with it. That's the only place that I know... I remember my father saying that somebody else bought something from Toronto and another one... I don't know if they brought it from Pennsylvania or what, took it to Pennsylvania, but that's just what I've heard.

D.M: Why did Erie Beach close and not Crystal Beach?

G.B: Well, I don't know. So many people always thought Erie Beach was nicer than Crystal, but don't forget they had all the sand for swimming and that would be a big attraction. And they had a much larger Dance Hall too, so... whoever bought Crystal Beach seemed to be able to keep it going. Mr. Pardee ... it just seemed to go apart after the Bardol's sold it, it didn't seem to hold up. But anyways, they managed... Also, Crystal Beach is really a town too, if company came, it would be the first place to go, to the beach, Crystal Beach.

But I don't know whether Hall's... no, I don't think Hall's have it any more, somebody else has it. It seems to me, people named Hall used to have it.

D.M: Did you go to Crystal Beach much?

G.B: Well, I think I did more so when I was younger, you know, I was a kid going, but after I started working, then... after I got finished with Erie Beach I was looking for steady work and I was out of school, so this way I didn't get over quite as much.

D.M: You mentioned you knew Mrs. Bardol, were you ever in her house?

G.B: Yes, just once. I had to go up there for something, and I can't recall what it was, but I don't think I got any farther than the kitchen. She was so... I mean her face and everything were just ugly, I don't know!! I hate to say this about her because the whole three sisters... there were the three sisters, Mrs. Mann, and oh, what were the other ones... and they were all so tough... I wish I could remember that one lady's name... but anyway, you just felt fear! Not my uncle of course! But any of us in the park, 'cause she'd go up to the park and she'd stomp through and she'd be.. dark. That's all I can say.

D.M: Do you remember the inside of the house?

G.B: Well, as I say, the kitchen was a very large kitchen, I didn't see the other part. From what I understand it was very nice. The windows are much different than when she lived there. I didn't think it was quite the same. I was a little surprised, the store across the street, now Harry Heatherington, he had that store going for years.

D.M: It's called Taco The Town now, it's a taco stand.

G.B: Oh, is that it? It was a grocery store and Harry Heatherington carried alot of fresh meat. When they had it, it was a grocery store, and then they had china and things like that, English china the people would pick up. I don't know whether they stay open all winter long, but I know Harry Heatherington did. By this time people were buying up the houses, they were selling their cottages and that... and the Fleet coming in. People were selling their cottages and making them into year-round houses.

D.M: I understand the Bardol's owned alot of the houses along the lakeshore.

G.B: They did, yes. I believe those lots are being sold. The Bardol home... It was Bob (Bardol) I think, was it Bob or Edgar (Bardol) that built that house up on that knoll right at Albert Street?

D.M: Bob, I think.

G.B: Because as I remember, there was an old place up there, and somebody

said it used to be a bathhouse, where people changed their clothes. By the time I got going to Erie Beach, the doors and the windows were out. But there were always little cottages along there. In fact, I guess they ran out of them towards the end there. Then it became run down.

D.M: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

G.B: Well, I think I've just about told you everything that I can remember or anything that was outstanding. The rest was just everyday work, people coming and going. Outside of that one fellow falling off the Blue Streak, everything seemed to be quite general... unless alot of things went on that I didn't find out about! But I'm sure I would have heard it.

D.M: Thank-you very much.

G.B: Thank-you. It was very interesting talking to you.