

This is Neil Flindall interviewing Mr. Ken Minor in his apartment, in building C, Apt. 103, 19 High Street, Fort Erie, Ontario, on the 17th day of July 1985.

N.F: Good afternoon; when did you first come to Fort Erie?

K.M: I came to Fort Erie on August eleventh, 1916.

N.F: And where did you come from?

K.M: I came from a farm near Wellandport, Ontario.

N.F: What was your first impression of Fort Erie?

K.M: Well it was...just at that time I thought it was quite wonderful, because it took me away from the farm...although...it was just one step above that...had water, but no sewers or anything...well my working days began here...we came here to work my father and I...at the International Safe Works, down there...where Setter's Sticks are now...at the corner of Murray and Niagara Street...that's what that used to be...and I worked there for a few weeks...and the man who lived across the street from us at that time...he needed a helper...and he worked as a steam fitter over in Niagara Falls, New York, he asked me if I wanted to work with him, so I did...that's the only reason I worked so short a time at International Safe, and I worked this place for almost a year, then I got pneumonia...and I was laid up for a while...well it was my own fault, I was going to catch a streetcar and I got all warmed up and it was the winter time...and I caught the car, and I sat in the back end of the streetcar and well, that was it I was warm and it was draughty and that was enough to do it...I remember that part of it...I worked at, oh, I worked at so many places I can't remember them all, ha, ha, at that time, well then I worked at the shipyard.

N.F: That's the shipyard they call the marina now?

K.M: Yes, that's it...it was the shipyard then, we built four or five...five boats I think there were...four freighters, and a tug...that was the ones made for the war, the First World War, and after that it closed up.

N.F: Did you live down there when you worked there?

K.M: No, I travelled back and forth, you remember Walter Kent...he died a couple of years ago...he was the first one I knew, he and I went

to work down there...and I walked down there in fact, I walked down there to get a job...Bert Sampson, he used to be with the Town, he was the one who hired me...he was the shipyard superintendent, and Walter Kent his father was the superintendent of the electrical part of the ship there you see, and all that...and I got a break with him there...and we were always friends after that for years...and it was just about then that I got married...and he introduced me to my wife...my first wife died...Esther, you knew her too...and for a short time after that I worked down at the...Sir Adam Beck Power Plant...I worked there for not too long, about seven months or so...then I had a chance to go to work at Pratt and Lambert, and I worked at Pratt and Lambert then from 1922 till 1943.

N.F: That's a long time.

K.M: Yes that was a long time.

N.F: What was your first job at Pratt and Lambert?

K.M: My first job...at Pratt and Lambert...well, I worked in the Varnish Department...making varnish...Albert Putney, I don't know if you'd know him or not...he was an old time Fort Erie guy...he was in charge of regular varnish making, and he came from Buffalo...he was the varnish maker at that time...and then I went to Buffalo, to Pratt and Lambert in Buffalo, for three years yes, I went over there and worked for three years and I came back here...Max Waters was...he was the varnish maker here then...at that time...he got sick and then I made the varnish...until I retired.

N.F: Has Pratt and Lambert expanded since you first started?

K.M: Oh yes, they've put an addition on there in 1945 I think...they added that on...oh, and they've added additions around the compound there.

N.F: They have had a good number of employees also?

K.M: Well they didn't have an awful lot...they usually had about thirty to thirty-five...you know, that's one thing about Pratt and Lambert they always, they had few lay offs, if it got slack you know, there was always something for you to do...paint the place up and make it look good, things like that, there was always something

you...except during the depression, but then...they kept... everybody on, you might work every other week or so...but the ones that had been there they would keep.

N.F: Depression had a big effect on Fort Erie?

K.M: Oh yes, although maybe not so much on the railroad, but even the men who worked on the railroad...especially the older men, they could keep their jobs, and worked on the railroad...but it was a hard time for the younger men, trying to find work.

N.F: Did you always live in the south end?

K.M: Always, I never lived anywhere else...I lived right over here on the corner of Stanton and Catherine...when I first came to Fort Erie and then I moved away for a couple of years and then I moved back there again, and I lived there until three years ago.

N.F: Did you have many neighbours when you first moved in there?

K.M: Well, of course there wasn't as many houses then, as there are now...it was pretty well vacant all around...the old timers of course, Archie Campbell, you'd remember him, and Arnie Waite, Oh, let's see, I can't recall all the names now, and of course on the other side of the street there were no houses there at that time they all came along after...just at that time on Catherine Street, on the north side of Catherine Street and on down it was all maybe just one house...there have been a lot of changes over the years of course...but there are still some houses there that were there at that time, on the south side there weren't any, that was all vacant, yes...and then of course they started building the war time houses, there were one story and two story houses... and they were all built the same.

N.F: That was one of the main ways that Fort Erie's areas did become built up.

K.M: Oh yes, and they built all those wooden houses so when the war was over they wouldn't have any problems, and they could take them down...that was the object of all those houses up there in the commons...the way it turned out they rented the houses and then...all the houses...were bought...and of course...after that

none of them were ever torn down.

N.F: But they were all supposed to be torn down?

K.M: That's why they were built...all those houses out of wood that way so they would be easier to tear down...that's why they were that type of house...they had two types...a one story and a two story...and that's the way they were all built.

N.F: What did you think of amalgamation?

K.M: Well, at that time...I don't know...I felt at that time that it probably wasn't right, you know, because...Fort Erie was Fort Erie, and Bridgeburg was Bridgeburg, Amagari was Amagari... but I do think it was best in the long run...but I don't think Regional Government helped any...even at that time Fort Erie was Fort Erie, and of course the name will always stay that way, but you know the public never did have much to say about it.

N.F: Did you have a vote at the time of amalgamation, to say whether you wanted it or not?

K.M: No...or yes there was.

N.F: Was it a popular vote, were a lot of people either for or against it?

K.M: Well the old timers, who had lived here for a long time, I don't think they were for it...and it was a close vote...it was only... it was very, very, close, I forget just how close it was...Bridgeburg had a larger population than Fort Erie...and it was a close vote I remember...but it was carried anyway...and now we have it, so I don't know, so many things have happened, so many changes, big ones and little ones, and the little ones you don't notice as they go by...I can remember you...really young, and your cousin Johnny.

N.F: When you first came to Fort Erie what would there be for entertainment?

K.M: Well there was a picture show here...in the north end...the Bellard theatre, the Ziff family, ran it...down on Dufferin Street...and then there was one built down here in 1942 or 1943 (in the south end)...it was the Bellard down there...Bellard, the name, was taken from the first initial of all the family...Bellard, that's where that came from...and in 1942 I think they built the other one.

N.F: What was it's name, do you remember a name for it?

K.M: I forget, I just can't recall right now...that was Barney Ziff that was down there...but I can't remember a name...that's a long time ago...then after that they turned it into a bowling alley...there sure have been a lot of changes around here...you remember Al Barber in the south end...and Al Ferguson was the barber down there.

N.F: When did you first start with the fire company?

K.M: Oh, that would be in 1928..

N.F: That is quite a while ago.

K.M: Yes that's quite a while ago now...I'm about the oldest living member of that company now.

N.F: Where would the company have been at that time?

K.M: Oh, it was right down on Queen Street, right next to what is the Legion now...it was a square building made out of cement blocks, and that was before my time...the members of the company at that time, they sold cement blocks and built that building, they went around and sold blocks for that building...and that's how they built it...selling blocks around town, and all that.

N.F: I've never heard that story.

K.M: Oh, yes and that was before I belonged...and that was what you called an honest to goodness Volunteer Fire Company, well it was in my time too, but that was when they used to pull it around themselves, and then they had horses and that and they used to haul everything all the way to a fire...and then they got the Bickell Truck...that was just before I joined...must have been in 1927, I guess that was...a bad part of it with a fire truck was in the winter time you know, it just couldn't go up the hill...that was...lots of times pretty hard to get up the hill...that would be pretty deep snow and it would be blowing pretty good...and they always said at that time...if you ever build a fire hall, it won't be below the hill...it will be above the hill...so that's how come it came to be where it is...you can't always come up the hill...but you can always come down the hill...so when it came time to build a new fire hall...at any rate that was the reason it was built up on the hill...you can come down, but you can't come up.

N.F: When you joined was it a big company?

K.M: Oh no, it was only...thirty I think...there aren't many with more members, in them have thirty-five, of course, you have got all those exempts.

N.F: Yes that's true too.

K.M: Although they don't go to the fires...they still do a lot of work for the fire company itself.

N.F: How big an area would that fire company have covered?

K.M: At that time...the old town, the Town of Fort Erie...well then afterwards it did go out as far as Buffalo Road...yes...that was before number three...East Bertie...yes we used to go out to Buffalo Road, also Crescent Park...up there we had more grass fires than anything else, there were hardly no homes up there...a lot of grass fires in those days.

N.F: You would cover the lakeshore along there too?

K.M: Yes...and when we had a fire we would go up to the tower on Lakeshore and Buffalo Roads, that's where we got our water...and then of course the East Bertie Fire Hall was built...they built that themselves the East Bertie Fire Hall belongs to East Bertie...they won that now even...that East Bertie Fire Hall belongs to East Bertie, it doesn't belong to the Town...yes when I was in the company we always had a good time...of course you worked hard too...use to go out to the parades...over on the states' side, and all over...way outside Buffalo, and of course they were volunteers too, at that time, adn they'd come over here too...of course Jack Kellar, he's been a member for a long time, and Freddy Henderson, he's been there a long while too, and some of the other ones, there's quite a few gone now, it's been quite a while.

N.F: It couldn't have been easy fighting fires back then, especially in winter time, and in bad conditions.

K.M: Oh, it was awful...the fire hose was like a piece of iron...heavy and you couldn't bend it...this new hose is so pliable and you can handle it so good, the new fire equipment makes it so much easier, than what we used to do, it was very hard to fight a fire...bo out in that cold and everthing was so hard to handle, but when you stop to think of it you still had a good time.even though there were the bad points.

N.F: You were really doing something worthwhile too.

K.M: Oh yes, it gives you a good feeling that way, you remember Art Nolan he was chief when we went up to the new fire hall...he was a good man I know, a good fire fighter, he used to drink a little, but he was always a good fire fighter...Harold Rook, and Fred Henderson he was chief for quite a while, a long while, I'll tell you another one who used to be in the company, and that is Jonas Nigh, and his brother Albert Nigh, there have been changes, Jake Barnhart... I don't know if you'd remember him or not...he went out just about the time that I went in...he was a big, tall man, it's hard to try to remember all of them, Lou Douglas, he was one of the older ones, because he was a founding member, and he was a politician...he and Albert Nigh and Lou Douglas and they were both in the fire company...when they built the arena, Lou Douglas was the reeve at the time.

N.F: Did you know Dr. Douglas?

K.M: Yes, didn't go to him a lot, but I went to him a few times, and, Dr. Chalmers, he was down on the lower Boulevard, he was my Doctor, and when I had pneumonia that time he used to walk up and see me, I was really very sick then, they didn't have the different drugs then, and he was quite the doctor, so you know at that time I was pretty sick, it was the sort of thing that people did die from at that time...he was a good doctor.

N.F: That was before the hospital?

K.M: Oh, yes.

N.F: What would you do for a broken bone or something serious like that?

K.M: Well you went to Niagara Falls to go to the hospital, I never went to any hospitals really...Dr. Derbyshire...Dr. Derby, he was a good doctor and I liked him, I knew him better than any other, of course this was a little later on you see.

N.F: Was he down around Princess Street then?

K.M: Yes, well he was at the corner of Queen and Archange...he was there and then he was on the corner of Goderich and Queen...and

moved to where he stayed at Princess and Goderich, and that's where he retired...that's quite a while ago...he was the last to give service like that.

N.F: The building of the hospital must have been a big thing when it was done.

K.M: Oh, yes and that was old Dr. Douglas who left the money for that building...the hospital wasn't supposed to be built there, you know, at that place...that wasn't where it was supposed to be, it was supposed to be up on that hill...that's where it should have been built...the corner of Archange and Bertie right on the hill there... well then I don't know...what happened, something, and they changed it, and they built it where it is now...you don't know if it would have been better where it is or where it should have been, where they intended to have it...but however that is where it was built... and of course they have more area where it is now...and the hospital has had a lot of additions, and it's hard to look into the future... and it's still privately run.

N.F: Do you remember the Peace Bridge being built?

K.M: Oh, yes, and the opening sure, I even remember going across it before it was finished.

N.F: What was it like?

K.M: Well it was quite an undertaking...standing back and looking at it I don't think it has changed much...not the bridge itself, but the approaches and the buildings...those parts have changed quite a bit, up around the bridge a lot of the streets have changed, a lot fewer houses...practically all of them are gone, and now they are going to take some away from the other side to make way for more building.

N.F: Did you go to Erie Beach much?

K.M: Well yes, Erie Beach, that was a nice, Erie Beach was a nice place, we used to go there a lot, we used to ride the train from the ferry dock up to Erie Beach...it was a big novelty in it's way...and that little train you know, up along the lakeshore you know...I worked up on that Erie Beach Railroad for a couple of days...well you know every year where the tracks went along the lakeshore they

get washed out...in the winter time you know, and they would have to go back each year and put the tracks in place...I remember I worked there, helping to put those tracks back...one or two days I worked, every year they used to do that...Erie Beach was a nice place, much nicer than Crystal Beach at that time you know, that was a nice walk through the beach itself...they had a promenade right through there...the train would stop at the one end, and you could walk to the other end and they had a lot of good rides...a big field there, where you could play ball...that is the only lacrosse game I've ever seen, it was played right there by some Indians...they had brought them in to play there...it was one of the toughest games I've ever seen...it was an interesting game...they were just running around like...just those raquets...they didn't show any mercy...quite the game...they played ball there, you know hard ball...back then it may have been softball too...we had some great ball teams back then...see the Mentholatum Team... that was in the 1920's...1925 or 1926...that's when they had one fine team...they really had a good team, they were the Champions of all Ontario...I can remember going to Hamilton, the Fort Erie Mentholatum's and the team from Brantford...they were in the playoffs in that game and Howe was the catcher and Jack Williamson, the pitcher...all those boys were unbelievable, Charlie Hennessey he was center fielder, and Charlie Hunt, an outfielder...not many who are alive today...many an evening I'd go and watch a good game of baseball like that, and it was good baseball.

N.F: Where did they play their games?

K.M: They played on the ball diamond down at the foot of Bowen Road... it isn't there any more, right there on the eastern corner...if they hit a foul ball...it could go on the river...cause them a lot of problems, they'd loose a lot of balls that way, it was a heck of a good diamond, but those balls...away they would go...then they built the park up on Central and the other one down on Bowen...and now they don't have no ball games...they've got the girl's team...if they're still playing...and I don't know why they don't advertise the ball games... I used to go over there to watch them...but now you don't hear

anything about it...Fort Erie used to be a good ball team town...you have to have the backing...and the advertising you know...to get the people interested, well see the Mentholatum Company...I can't recall who ran the company back then...Stratton, he was the head of it...and that's where they got all their money for it...that's where they got their backing...I can't remember his first name, Stratton, he was the big guy...and of course I'll tell you another thing at that time, was the...Fort Erie had some good ball teams...from the railroad...different parts of the railroad, oh, each department, they all had their own section and their own teams...yes, and they had a lot of good ball teams...and naturally they played a lot of ball, in those days...and they had some good ball players to start with...they took the best out of those teams and moved them over...that's how most of those teams got started...and of course then they had their advertising and that was how they got people to go...and oh a lot of people used to go...and now you don't hear about them...you don't ever see anything in the papers either...to make a success out of it you have to advertise.

(Can you tell me anything about the arena?)

K.M: About the arena...hockey teams we had a few of those...amateur and professional...that was good hockey...just as good as you see on television, or anywhere now...we had some good players come out of Fort Erie ...Fort Erie did have teams, but then the professional team came over from Buffalo, and played their games here, that's when they built that earlier arena...and the players some of them came from around Kitchener...and a few were from Fort Erie too, like Babe Beaugardis...and many others...played really good hockey too...and we had fine amateur teams here too...that's like the night before the arena went down...they had played Hamilton...and the place was packed...and it was fortunate it didn't happen that night...a lot of people could have been killed, if they'd have been in there...it really went down...of course if they had looked after it properly that shouldn't have happened...kept those trusses up and tight...I mean it was supposed to be built like that, was designed that way...if they...those trusses had been kept tight...it never would have

fallen down, because it was built like that, with those trusses, but evidently they didn't do that, and the slack, in the way they were formed, that allowed it to fall down...it caused quite a sensation, and that was really a beautiful arena, it might have still been here, possibly...it was an expensive lesson learned, not to take care of things...just taking care of those trusses, it wasn't much of a job but it just wasn't done...you take all that weight on that roof, from the heavy snow...and down she went.

N.F: Do you remember any large fires, or difficult fires?

K.M: Well there was the old Erie Beach Hotel, that was one, that was a big one, it wasn't a windy night but a big fire, and then there was...let's see now...oh, a fire in the north end...an old business, used to be on Courtwright Street there, it entirely burned down, and there was snow on the ground, deep, deep snow on the ground, and putting water on it...the water got all soaked up into the snow, and that was about the toughest, hardest fire I ever saw, you just couldn't get into it...it was miserable...and they had one down on Forsythe Street, where they had the arena, the boxing arena, at one time...that was quite a long time back, wasn't it...oh, they had boxing...before my time...oh, they had championship boxers... Lou Douglas, he had a blacksmith shop...on the corner of Forsythe and Princess Street, no that must be Archange Street, he had a blacksmith shop there...he was an expert smith, yes he'd shoe horses and he was a big guy and strong, a horse...he could almost pick it up and throw on the shoes...yes he was quite a guy.

N.F: He must have been quite an individual.

K.M: Yes, he did a lot of good for Fort Erie, and a lot of the people who live here, and they never even knew about it, I knew about a lot of what he did, but a lot of people never did you know, he had his own way of doing things for people. There are a lot of things that I don't remember.

N.F: You must have seen a lot of changes, in the town itself.

K.M: Oh yes, of course a lot of changes...Fort Erie when it was amalgamated into Fort Erie and they had the town hall, well they had the police station and everything in it, and then later on they changed that

and the police station was moved to the north end, on Jarvis Street there...yes, that was changed, the fire hall used to be on the corner where the town hall is now...then later they built the town hall there and moved the fire station to where it stands now on Jarvis Street, and of course that's where our town hall is now, where that building stands, even this place beside us wasn't here...but it's doing pretty good now...they've got lots of work...that's Harber Manufacturing over there...and Hart and Cooley is gone now...Horton Steel is back to work at least a little...and the Fleet seems to be doing well and now they are going to have an addition of some sort...I see they broke ground earlier this week.

N.F: Fort Erie had never had too many big industries.

K.M: No, they never have, Horton Steel has been pretty big and at one time Hart and Cooley was a good size, and then they just folded up...a lot of people in this area worked there all their lives...and Mentholatum is gone now...they used to make pills and stuff, I was never in that building...and of course the railroad has changed a lot too, it used to be so big and so busy, but it's sure not that way now...and the race track it has changed...I haven't been up there in quite a while...I think the last time I was up there was a Senior Citizen's Day some years ago, and I just couldn't believe the change... it thundered and the lightning, and I've never seen it rain so hard... just got soaked.

N.F: Did you ever go to the Bertie Fair?

K.M: Oh yes, I used to go up there every year...that was...I went first when they used to have the horse races there...oh, I don't remember too much about it, I remember they used to have trotting races there at that time...then they changed that and they had exhibits... stuff like that, a regular fair, it wasn't bad, they used to have pretty good crowds...I wouldn't say everybody used to go...but they had pretty good crowds...it used to be very popular...I'd say on the whole it was very good, yes it was a pretty good fair...they used to have pretty good attendance you know, exhibitors and that...but it is like everything else, it petered out...yes, that's the way all things

go eventually...the new things come along...like when they first opened Fleet...you don't remember when it was first opened...that was when it was first built...it was on the corner, of Gilmore there, and there was another street which used to go across there...that was when it was first built and the Fleet was first started, on the corner, they first built an office there...oh, I don't remember for sure, but the thing was that their first office was there on the corner, oh, it wasn't just there for building airplanes, that came after, in the war, at first they built everything, now it's much bigger and very busy...must be busy with that big parking lot, at both ends of their yard.

N.F: When did the firemen start with their parades?

K.M: When did they start...oh, the Jamboree...they started about, oh I would say 1939 or 1940.

N.F: That far back?

K.M: Oh, yes for a couple of years they used to have them at Roses, then the Erie Lane, for a few years...use to put up a dance floor, made it up at Erie Beach...and use to put it down each year, in the summer time...that was for a few years, and then we changed it...from the west side of the Erie Lane we went over to Bertie and the Boulevard...and then we were there for a few years...and then we went over to the other side of Bertie and the Boulevard...we had it therefor a number of years too...and you know, we did pretty good whit those, we didn't make a lot of money, but we all had a good time...it was the sort of thing that kept on growing...and it was a lot of work...I know that...but it started in 1939...we used to have a volunteer band at that time Mr. Baxter...you know old Mr. Baxter...well he started the bands in Fort Erie...he's the one who started the idea...that's when the station was over on Bertie Street...and he started us having a Band Tatoo, that's what we called it...we had it in the ballpark, had it there for a number of years...I just don't recall how many, I remember we used to have to take along chairs and all the things up there for the Band Tatoo...and it used to last a couple of nights I think it was...then go back down

there and get everything and take it back where you got it...it was a lot of work...that's a long time ago...Mr. Baxter...he was a good musician...he was really good with the music, and with the men, we know that...he had a lot of patience...we used to be around...and the practice was going on and we'd listen to it, you know, and some of the guys would just be starting you know, and all of a sudden you'd hear somebody go off beat you know...and he'd pound on the thing...and he'd start all over again...oh, he had a lot of patience I'll tell you...and he was good, he turned out quite a lot of good players...some of them have moved away...but I think that's why he had such good results, he had patience of Job, buy, and he was a good musician...patience I think that was the reason he was so good because he had the patience to work with it.

N.F: It couldn't have been easy, no.

K.M: Yes, that's why I say he had to have patience to get what he did out of them...and he was a nice man...when I first met him I didn't know much about him, or who he was, and I didn't think much of him...but after I got to know him he was a good, and very nice man...and he had patience, I guess that's what you could say most about him...he had patience...he was musical in England, that's where he came from...he was quite a musician...it's too bad he had to stop...it's too bad someone else hasn't come along...to pick it back up...there aren't many like that. There have been so many people over the years it's impossible to remember them all.

N.F: That's for sure. The firemen made a big contribution in Fort Erie in 1957 for the Centennial Year.

K.M: Oh, yes if it hadn't been for the firemen that year there wouldn't have been any parade.

N.F: That's what I've heard.

K.M: Oh, yes and that was a big parade...and a lot of work...it really turned out good for the Centennial...there has been a lot of parades and a lot of work, but I think that was the best one...it was just so bilg and a good get together...and then we had a lot of companies from over the river too, of course we always do, but that year it was exceptionally good I think...you know, thinking about that when

I first joined the Department, before then, one of the men said to me that they were going over the river to take part in a parade and asked me if I'd like to go along, and of course I said sure...and I went and watched the parade...and after we got back...I don't know if you remember Tom Sumner...he was the chief then...and he asked me if I would like to belong to the fire company...well, I hadn't thought about it before that, and I said, "Maybe I would". to which they said, "Why not"...and that's how I joined the fire company and I think that was 1928.

N.F: You've put in a lot of hours since then.

K.M: Oh, yes...and all the volunteer companies work at it, they always do what they can...and you've got to maintain fire equipment and do all that...I've been there almost since I started at Pratt and Lambert...and I started there in 1922...yes, that's a long time ago, a lot of things have happened.

N.F: Well, I'd like to thank you very much for the interview, you've helped me along quite a bit, and have a good day.