

This is Charlotte Nielsen interviewing Mrs. Jessie Hooper at 219 High Street, Fort Erie on April 15, 1985.

C.N. Mrs. Hooper when were you born?

J.H. January the fifth nineteen five.

C.N. Where was this? In Fort Erie?

J.H. Fort Erie the west end of Fort Erie.

C.N. Were you born in a hospital or a house?

J.H. No. There were no hospitals in Fort Erie at that time. Born at home.

C.N. Was ... Did you have... Did a doctor come?

J.H. Yes, a doctor and my mother's sister.

C.N. O.K. Could you tell us something about your parents?

J.H. Well, my mother was born in Fort Erie and her mother had come from Peterborough and my father was born Niagara-on-the-Lake and his family had come from England.

C.N. How did your parents meet?

J.H. Well, they ... My father moved to Fort Erie and he was in one end of Fort Erie and my mother in the other end of Fort Erie and I guess by horse and buggy in those days and I imagine they met through church.

C.N. And what church was that?

J.H. Church of England.

C.N. Whereabouts was that in Fort Erie?

J.H. On Niagara Boulevard.

C.N. Same place that it is now?

J.H. Yes, the oldest church in Fort Erie.

C.N. Could you tell us something about that church?

J.H. Yes it was built from the stones from the old fort and it were burnt down and then it was rebuilt and the minister used to come by horse and buggy here to Fort Erie and well it was the only church for awhile in Fort Erie and then I think the Catholic was the second one, the Roman Catholic Church.

C.N. Were your parents Anglicans or ...

J.H. Yes.

C.N. They were.

J.H. Yes.

- C.N.** Why did the minister come by horse and buggy? Did he not live near by?
- J.H.** Well, this was a village, you know, and there was, there was no minister in town and he came ... I just don't know where he came from but that's how they came by horse and buggy and had a service here in Fort Erie and the first church was a wooden structure and then it was built up from stones from the old fort, the second one.
- C.N.** Now did you just go to church or did you go to Sunday school?
- J.H.** I went to Sunday school. Yes. And then they built a parish hall right near the church, not far from the church and I had walked ... I had to walk from the west end down to the boulevard which was quite a distance when we were real small. And then we went from Sunday school to church, home to dinner and back to ... And we went to ... back to church at night.
- C.N.** What kind of clothes did you wear to church? Did you get all dress up?
- J.H.** Oh yes. Oh indeed! And you had a Sunday dress and a dress for school: And yes you didn't go like they go nowadays.
- C.N.** O.K. Where did you get your clothes from, in those days, when you were a child?
- J.H.** I think, my aunt made most of them. She was a dressmaker, my father's sister. And I think she made most of our clothes or else they came from Eaton's, by order, you know, by mail.
- C.N.** Did your father's sister live in Fort Erie?
- J.H.** Yes. Yes.
- C.N.** Was she a professional dressmaker?
- J.H.** Yes.
- C.N.** Did she have a business here?
- J.H.** No, in her home.
- C.N.** I see. Now, how did your aunt go about making clothing? What type of machine did she use?
- J.H.** As far as I know it was a singer sewing machine, just a treadle sewing machine. And, well, I guess electric were not invented then, I don't know.
- C.N.** All right. Your aunt was your father's sister. Tell me about your father's family. Why they came to Fort Erie and how many people were in the family.

J.H. I really don't know why he came to Fort Erie. He was born in England in the first place and then came to Canada and came to Niagara-on-the-Lake. He was a landscape gardener and then he worked ... He came to Fort Erie and he was street commissioner in Fort Erie. And they had three boys and one girl. My father was the third boy.

C.N. What was his name?

J.H. James Albert Lascomb.

C.N. And what did his brothers and sisters do?

J.H. His sister was the dressmaker and his brothers worked in the railroad as my father did. My father had his right hand, his fingers on his right hand, off when he was a young boy on the railroad.

C.N. All his fingers?

J.H. He just had a thumb on his right hand.

C.N. How did that happen?

J.H. Coupling cars on the railroad. Someone shuffled the car while he was coupling them. Someone shunted the engine you know and caught his fingers.

C.N. How old was he when this happened?

J.H. Nineteen, before he was married.

C.N. Could you tell us about your mother's family now?

J.H. Well, my mother was one of fourteen and she was the youngest. There was twelve girls and two boys and of course there was no work in Fort Erie so most of them worked in Buffalo.

C.N. Doing what?

J.H. I couldn't tell you. I really don't know. I know they went to Buffalo to work.

C.N. Could you tell me a bit about your mother?

J.H. Well my mother worked in Buffalo and they went across on the ferry every morning to work and they lived quite close to that end of town and then she married my father and her father had died and her mother lived with her when she went housekeeping. And she lived with my mother until she died. And my mother had three girls: Emily, Holly and Jessie.

C.N. What was your mother's name?

J.H. Catherine: Catherine Daggard.

C.N. And tell me a bit about your own childhood.

J.H. Well I was raised in the west end of town, of Fort Erie . And I walked to Phipp Street School which is Rose Seaton School now. And that was quite a distance. And we lived right close to Fort Erie Race Track which was quite something in Fort Erie at that time.

C.N. Did you go to the races?

J.H. No, we never went to the races to the races. We were too young for that but we used to set on the lawn and watch the cars go by because they were quite a thing in them days and they were mostly black and if you seen a coloured car ... We used to sit with a paper and pencil and write down how many coloured car s we seen.

C.N. Were the black cars Fords?

J.H. Old Fords, yes. And during the race time the people from Buffalo used to come over on the ferry boat. And then there was a horse and democrat, they used to call them, that took the people from, from the ferry boat up to the race track with horse and buggy.

C.N. You said with a horse and democrat?

J.H. Yeh, it was a big ... And they had seats on each side like this, you know, and ... And then take them to the race track and they'd bring them back to the ferry at night.

C.N. So you had horse and buggies in your town and cars?

J.H. Well, there wasn't too many cars. They mostly came from Buffalo over on the ferry.

J.H. Could you tell me something about Phipp Street School?

J.H. Yes. Phipp Street School was ... Well of course it was on Phipp Street and they added to it. It was just a public school and the high school was just a continuation school and it was in one room of the public school until they built the high school on Wintemute Street.

C.N. Well that was like maybe the first year high: first and second year high. It might ... I guess it did go as far as third. Is this being ... It went as high as the third grade in high school.

J.H. That would be our grade eleven?

J.H. Uh-hum

- C.N.** Now, by the time you got to high school, was the high school built or did you go to the continuation school?
- J.H.** Yes, the high school ... I went ... Well they built a public school on Wintemute Street and then they had the top floor of that was the high school when I went and then ... Then they built the high school on Tait Avenue off of Wintemute Street.
- C.N.** Were you able to go all the way through high school?
- J.H.** I went to grade ten.
- C.N.** What did you think of your teachers in those days? Did you like them. What were they like?
- J.H.** Well, at Rose Seaton or Phipp Street School as it was then when we were in third grade it was like junior thirds, senior thirds. We had six teachers in six months.
- C.N.** Why?
- J.H.** I don't know. They couldn't keep a teacher. And some of them came from Buffalo. I don't know just why they couldn't keep a teacher.
- C.N.** Did you give your teachers a hard time?
- J.H.** No, no it wasn't the class that ... But there ... We had one teacher, I never will forget her. One boy used to sit in the front seat and write a note and hand it to her and away he'd go.
- C.N.** Away he'd go where?
- J.H.** Don't know. He'd just leave. He'd write himself a note and be dismissed and away he'd go. I didn't know why she didn't see him. The rest of us did.
- C.N.** What did you wear to school?
- J.H.** Well, gingham dresses in the summer and in the winter you had a serge dress, you know, like a sailor suit dress and long black stockings and high shoes and rubbers. There was no over shoes in those days. And it was cold. We had lots of snow. And no snow ploughs. You just walked through it.
- C.N.** So you didn't wear slacks to keep your legs warm?
- J.H.** No just ... Well, we used to wear long underwear and then the black and then the black stockings, you know, and high shoes, lace shoes and rubbers.

- C.N.** Did you change when you came home from school or wear these clothes all the time?
- J.H.** Oh! We changed when we came home from school. That was our school clothes. Then we would have other clothes that we'd wear when we got home from school. And, you know, they had to ... Well we had clothes for Sunday and clothes for school and then of course me being the youngest of three, three girls, I used to get hand me downs from the good Sunday clothes so that's about all I can tell you about the clothes.
- C.N.** How did you feel about wearing hand me downs?
- J.H.** I didn't mind it at all because I knew the circumstances ... Salaries weren't that much in those days you know and when you were raising three children you were glad of some hand me downs. My father was a railroad man and he worked hard. He worked ten hours a day, Sunday and all.
- C.N.** And your mother worked as well?
- J.H.** No my mother never worked. No. She kept house. And as I say her mother lived with her until she died. She died when I was five months old.
- C.N.** And did you work hard in those days? Did you have a lot of school work to do? Chores?
- J.H.** Yes, when you ... We didn't get home at night till dark because that was quite a ... It was dark when you got home and then you had homework to do after that so you didn't have much time for anything else.
- C.N.** Now, did you have electricity? Did you ...
- J.H.** Later on. We had gas lights and when I was about maybe fifteen before we had electricity in our end of the town.
- C.N.** So did you use your gas lights to do your homework?
- J.H.** Yes, you used gas lights. And in the winter with everyone using the gas it would be low so sometimes you wouldn't have too much light.
- C.N.** And how long would it take you to do your homework?
- J.H.** Well it depended on the teacher. How much she, you know ... Some days, if there were exams towards the end of the week well then that was more homework you know. But we'd have a little bit of math and spelling for homework. I guess that's about all there was.

- C.N.** Did you have time to do other things in the evening besides your homework?
- J.H.** No, no. It took us too long to get home from school.
- C.N.** What about the weekends? What did you do on the weekends?
- J.H.** Well, outside of church there wasn't much else in town. It was just a small village and there wasn't too much activity in Fort Erie.
- C.N.** Well, what would you do on a Saturday then, assuming you stayed home?
- J.H.** Help my mother with the housework. My mother used to make her own bread and bake you know and we would help with the housework while she was baking.
- C.N.** You say you walked home from school and it was dark. Were you afraid at all walking around in the dark?
- J.H.** Well, it was just getting dusk by the time we got home. And there was more children come up that way, you know, so that we weren't alone. I think there was about ... On our street ... We lived on Catherine Street near the race track and I think there was about eight houses on that street and they all had children so that we all came home from school together.
- C.N.** Did most families have children?
- J.H.** Yes.
- C.N.** Now you must have lived through two world wars. Could you tell me how the first world war affected your life?
- J.H.** Well, of course, my father having his hand off, he couldn't go to war so he worked long hours at home you know, on the railroad and having no brothers to go to war it didn't affect our family too much but it did the town because it took all the younger boys in town for the first world war.
- C.N.** Now, how old would you have been at this time?
- J.H.** About twelve. I think, twelve or fourteen, somewhere around there. I can remember Armistice day and we were all at school and when the armistice, when it was signed, why the schools were all out and the whole town was ... Bells were ringing and the ... Everybody was on the street, everyone was on the street rejoicing and it ... The war was over ... So happy that their families were all coming home again.
- C.N.** And what about the recession? Did you feel the recession here in Fort Erie?

- J.H.** Well, that was later , that wasn't till ... I was married by the time that we had a recession and it was pretty tough cause I had a family then too.
- C.N.** Could you tell me about your marriage, your husband ... How old were you when you got married?
- J.H.** I was eighteen. And my husband was born in Buffalo but they moved back and forward. His father was from England too and his mother And they lived in Buffalo: and then they lived in Fort Erie: and then they moved back and forward. And he was Anglican too so I met him through the church and of course we had the A.Y.P.A., Anglican Young People's Association, you know. We both belonged to it and so that's how we met. And we were married and we had three children and then twelve years after I had a girl.
- C.N.** What did you want for your children?
- J.H.** The best of everything that I could possibly give them.
- C.N.** What did you want them to make of their lives?
- J.H.** Well, then the second world^{WAR} came and my boys were in high school so they left high school. My oldest boy left high school and went to Fleet to work during the war. He was too young to be called up and then while he was at Fleet he had part of his hand cut off.
- C.N.** How did that happen?
- J.H.** Well they had a machine up there. He was working in the machine shop and they had a machine that didn't have a guard on it.
- C.N.** How many fingers?
- J.H.** He's got these [first two fingers] and part of his thumb off.
- C.N.** So his ...
- J.H.** But he said, if his grandfather could go through life like that he could too.
- C.N.** And what did your daughter do?
- J.H.** My daughter went through high school and then she was married young too. She married the boy up the street and that was her life too.
- C.N.** Did she have children?
- J.H.** Yes. She lives in Fort Erie and she has, she had three, three boys and a girl. And then when all her children were in high school she adopted a new baby.

C.N. And how old are these children now? These children would be your grandchildren. How old are they?

J.H. All married and have a family of their own. One is a ... Her oldest boy is a technician, refrigeration technician in Brantford and her one other boy ... They all went to Niagara College: no Fanshawe. One boy went to Fanshawe in London for a refrigeration course and the other two went to Niagara College.

C.N. So these children you're talking about ... They're your great grandchildren?

J.H. They're my grandchildren.

C.N. Oh! Your grandchildren.

J.H. These are my grandchildren: my daughter's children.

C.N. But you do have some great grandchildren do you?

J.H. Yes, yes.

C.N. Could you tell us their names?

J.H. Well, my one son has three girls and a boy and my other son has three girls and two boys.

C.N. So how many great grandchildren do you have altogether?

J.H. That's grandchildren. I've got over about twenty some odd grandchildren, great grandchildren or grandchildren.

C.N. And how many great grandchildren?

J.H. About the same I guess.

C.N. And what do you want for your great grandchildren?

J.H. Well they're pretty young yet so I don't know whether I'll ever see them grow up. They're all pretty young.

C.N. What would you wish for them?

J.H. I wish for them a happy life you know, and a family. They're pretty nice kids.

C.N. Tell me more about your children.

J.H. My oldest boy was Kenneth and he worked in the office of the Hart and Cooley and then they moved out of Fort Erie so he's in between jobs right now.

C.N. Does his wife work?

J.H. No he lost his wife three years ago. She died with a heart attack and he's just remarried. And Jack is a refrigeration man and he ... His wife works. She works in the public school in Ridgeway, in the office.

C.N. How did Jack get into refrigeration?

J.H. Well, he took the course. He took a course in refrigeration and then he ...
I can't think of the name of where he works ... Novadel in Fort
Erie .

C.N. And you have two daughters.

J.H. Yes. Ruth is married to Alven Mehlenbacher and he's a refrigeration
man at Rich's. And then Janice is married and is a homemaker.

C.N. Going back to earlier times do you remember when you first heard
a radio?

J.H. Yes my husband was working at Pratt and Lamberts and one of
the men there lived in Buffalo and he was quite interested in radio,
you know, and they had one of those little sets with a , with a little
... What did you call those things? [wireless] Can't think now
what the name of them is. And ... Anyway it was when radio first
came out. It was just a little tiny thing that you had a wisker like
thing that you found the stations with. Then he got interested
in that too.

C.N. So did he bring one home? Did this man loan you his?

J.H. Yes and then my husband purchased one too you know and that's
the first radio that I recollect.

C.N. Do you remember the first programme you listened to?

J.H. I think it was I ... I think it was a football ... Baseball game.

C.N. What were your feelings when you heard this?

J.H. Well when you hear that ... something lke that and you know it
was from so far away why you just wondered what it ... And then,
oh, there was a comic on there and I can't think what her name
was right now, from Buffalo.

C.N. Did you listen to this comic regularly?

J.H. Yes, yes, everytime she was on we listened to her and I was living
at home with my mother at the time and it was before I'd gone
housekeeping and we each shared the headphones. She'd take one
and I'd take one.

C.N. You couldn't hear it without the headphones?

J.H. No, no you couldn't hear it. You had to have headphones to hear
it.

C.N. And what about television? Do you remember your ... watching television for the first time?

J.H. Yes. Where did I first see television? Oh, my sister had a television set. And I know we used to watch Uncle Milty [Milton Berle]. Is that what they call him? Yes.

C.N. And when did you first get a television set?

J.H. Well shortly after my sister had one. Then we got one, just a small black and white. I don't just remember just what, when it was that we got ours, not too long after my sister had one.

C.N. And what about a car ride? Do you remember your first car ride?

J.H. Yes. When I was just a child the neighbours next door had a friend from Buffalo that come over and they had, I guess, it's a Model T Ford Roadster. You had to put the side curtains if it rained and they took us not very far. It couldn't have been any more than around the block in it. We thought that was wonderful: the car ride.

C.N. And do you drive?

J.H. Yes.

C.N. When did you learn to drive?

J.H. Before I was married I went with a young chap that had a Model T Ford and one day he stopped and he said, "move over." and he said, "You drive." And I said, "Oh no! I don't know anything about driving." He says, "Well, I'll teach you." So that's when I learned to drive.

C.N. So you learned to drive on a ...

J.H. Model T Ford.

C.N. Model T Ford! Do you remember when you and your husband first had a car?

J.H. Yes. My husband was in the ice business and we had trucks and then we had a car too but I don't remember the name of it, what kind it was right then. But I learned to drive the trucks.

C.N. So you ...

J.H. We had a pickup truck too that I drove.

C.N. So you must be able to drive a standard shift.

J.H. Yes, I could drive a standard shift but I don't think I could do it nowadays. With the automatic you get out of the idea of how to drive a standard shift.

C.N. Tell me about your hobbies.

J.H. Well, I like knitting and crocheting and tatting.

C.N. What is tatting?

J.H. You don't know what tatting is?

C.N. No.

J.H. Well, it's made with a ... it's worked with a shuttle and thread.

C.N. And how does it turn out?

J.H. Well, it's ...

C.N. That's pretty!

J.H. Edging for a handkerchief or you'd make doilies or...

C.N. How is this different than crocheting?

J.H. Oh, it's a lot different than crocheting! Crochetijng is done with a needle and that's done with a shuttle. Well, a shuttle is ... with a point on it, it's just about that size [three inches], with a point on it, you know, and you have to work it with your hands.

C.N. Do you find it easier than crocheting?

J.H. No it's hard. It's ... Tisn't too many people that do tat because it's ... If you get a knot in it you're done, you know, it's hard to pick out a knot.

C.N. Did you do this on the edges of clothing or just handkerchieves and doilies?

J.H. Well, I made doilies. No. I've never done it on anything else but handkerchieves and doilies.

C.N. Did you ... You say you did knitting and sewing. Did you make your children's clothing?

J.H. No. I wasn't that good as a sewer. I did some smocking on dresses, you know, for my daughter but I wasn't too much of a dressmaker

C.N. I see a lot of doilies. Did you make them.

J.H. Yes.

J.H. Are they crocheted?

J.H. Yeh.

C.N. So you do that too. What about knitting? What did you knit?

J.H. Sweaters, baby sweaters and bonnets and booties and slip-over sweaters, I've made: scarves and mitts.

C.N. I guess with all the children in your family you must have ¹been busy knitting baby clothes.

J.H. Well, I have made quite a few baby sweaters and booties and such like.

C.N. Do you do a lot of reading?

J.H. I do when I go to bed. I generally take a book to bed with me and read.

C.N. What kind of books do you read?

J.H. Oh, I like ... I haven't read much lately on account of I'm busy with other things, you know. I've been busy doing that and my granddaughter's going to be married so I've been busy working on things for her so I haven't done too much reading just lately.

C.N. When is your granddaughter getting married?

J.H. The first of June. Saint Paul's Church.

C.N. That's nice. Who is she marrying?

J.H. Richard Jukosky and he ... boy she went through school with, through high school with. I knew his mother from Eastern Star.

C.N. Does she plan to be a homemaker or does she have a career?

J.H. She's in training for a nurse. She'll be finishing her first year but she is continuing her course, you know, and she'll have two more years to go.

C.N. What do you think of the feminists and their careers? Would you want that for your grandchildren or did you want it?

J.H. Well, for them to have a career, to work after marriage? Well, if they are so inclined, if they feel as if that's what they want, why I think it's all right but depends upon what they've taken up you know.

C.N. You wouldn't object to them being full time homemakers either then?

J.H. Oh, no! No, that's what I was so ...

C.N. Did you find it enjoyable?

J.H. Yes! Yes! I was perfectly content to be a homemaker.

C.N. What would you say to Betty Freidan if she said that homemakers were bored?

J.H. I can't see how they could be if they have a family to raise ... If they are raising a family that takes quite a bit of your time and the times you prepare meals and things I can't see where a person has to be bored.

C.N. So you enjoyed your career as a homemaker?

J.H. Yes I did.

C.N. And you would recommend it to others?

J.H. Yes I would.

C.N. And what do you think of today's fashions?

J.H. I don't like them.

C.N. Why?

J.H. I think they're sloppy, really. They ... I don't know. I don't like all these jeans and things like that I think ... I like to see a person in a dress.

C.N. What kind of dresses do you like?

J.H. Oh, anything plain. I'm not a fancy person. I like to see a nice suit or a plain dress. Depends upon where you're going and where you're going to wear it.

C.N. And what about men's clothing? What do you think about the way the young boys dress today?

J.H. Well, I'll tell you if my ... When I was growing up, if my husband or boyfriend came to see me in the way they dress nowadays my mother wouldn't think much of it and I don't either. I like to see a boy in a nice pair of trousers and a nice shirt or something like that but I don't like their kind of clothes they wear.

C.N. What did your husband wear when he was dating you?

J.H. He wore a suit.

C.N. And what did you wear?

J.H. A dress of some kind, course, my days there wasn't any jeans or anything like that.

C.N. Did you wear a special dress, a good dress for dating or did you wear your school dress?

J.H. Well, we only dated like weekends, something like that and I was always dress up, you know. When we went out I had my best clothes on.

C.N. And what do you think of the rock music and the fads that the young people have today?

J.H. Well, I can't tell you much about them because I don't listen too much to anything like that. I'm not into it.

C.N. What do you listen to on the radio now?

J.H. Well, generally talk shows or something like that or ...

C.N. And what do you watch on television?

J.H. Well, I like the evening programmes that are on, you know, the quizzes, and things like that or a good story.

C.N. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

J.H. Well, we're a close family. I had two sisters and we've always stuck together. Our families and our children are quite interested in each other's happenings and things like that and we used to all maybe pack a lunch and go on a picnic and go to maybe Queenston or someplace to the park and oh there'd be quite a few of us down there and the men would play ball and the women would talk and we'd pool our lunch and we'd have a good time: listen to the band concert. That's all I can think of.

C.N. That sounds very nice. Thank you very much for talking to me.