

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mr. Harold Jackson in his home at 217 Highland Avenue, Fort Erie, Ontario, and the date is Sept. 26, 1985.

R.H: Good afternoon Mr. Jackson.

H.J: Good afternoon Mrs. Hearn.

R.H: Could you please tell me when you were born?

H.J: I was born January 7, 1917.

R.H: And where were you born?

H.J: I was born at 255 Gilmore Road in Fort Erie West, Ontario. At that time it was called Amigari.

R.H: What was it like growing up in Amigari?

H.J: I lived and grew up in the West End of Fort Erie from the time I was born 'til 1958, when I moved with my family to 217 Highland Avenue in the North End of Fort Erie where I now reside. During this 41 years, I was absent one year attending school in Hamilton, from 1936 to 1937 and three years in the Royal Canadian Airforce, 1942 to 1945. I was stationed during this time at the Royal Canadian Headquarters in London, England

R.H: When you were talking about Amagari, could tell me what the area was like when you were growing?

H.J: The area known as Amagari had many wide open spaces. Where Oakes Park is situated was the Curtis Farm and it was used for pasture by some of the families along Gilmore Road and Jennet Street. Now, the south side of Gilmore was another farm called Sherk's. Their home was on the corner of Bertie and Concession and their farm stretched north of Bertie almost as far as Gilmore Road. The second part of their farm was quite a large group of trees which we called Sherk's bush. Gilmore Road and the other streets such as Jennet, Russell, Torrance, Ellen, Concession, and Wood Street were dirt roads, and the sidewalks were mostly cinder paths. Many of the homes that were in this area are still there. Some of them were renovated, many of them were tore down. It was in the late '20s when paving began on Gilmore Road and the sewers were put in. The old ditches then on either side of the road were filled in.

R.H: Have you seen many changes through the years?

H.J: The biggest change in Amigari came in 1941 when the government

built 242 homes in the area between Gilmore Road and Bertie Street. They were called wartime houses. They were intended to be temporary homes but after the war, there was such a need for housing, they were rented out by Central Mortgage and Housing and eventually sold. Many renovations had to be done, such as new cement footings to replace the wooden posts that were sitting on. I lived in a small wartime house at 171 Gilmore Road after the war for 13 years from 1945 to 1958. When the three villages of Bridgeburg, Fort Erie, and Amigari were dropped, they became Fort Erie North and Fort Erie West, respectively. At this early time, Fort Erie was known as a railroad town. It employed numerous people. Today, it employs only a skeleton crew. There was as many as 39 passenger trains a day passed through here. Today, there are no passenger trains. Similarly, freight cars diminished from thousands a day to perhaps one or two thousand now. Some of the main industries in the early years besides the railroad were the Horton Steel, the Mentholatum Company, Fleet Industries, the Arner Company, Hart and Cooley and the Clayton Brick Factory.

R.H: Did you say the Clayton Brick Factory?

H.J: Yes, the Clayton's were a family that came here from Montreal and built this factory and they made bricks.

R.H: Have you any idea where that was situated?

H.J: About the end of Lewis Street. Horton Steel in the early years was a large wooden structure. It was known as the Bridge and Iron Works, its parent plant was in Chicago. In the early '20s this factory was burned to the ground and the present building was erected and called Horton Steel. The Clayton Brick Factory was quite a large concern. It was located on the property near the end of Lewis Street. It was also burned but was never replaced. The large furnace chimney stood for years in that location. The Arner Company and Hart and Cooley are both closed down but new industries such as the Gasket Company and Irvin Airchute opened. Many other changes of course have taken place, such as new homes, roads, and schools and the change to Regional Government in the formation of the larger Niagara South Board of Education. These are most of the changes I can think of.

R.H: What schools did you attend when you were growing up?

H.J: I attended Wintemute Public School and the Fort Erie Secondary School. Those were the two schools in Fort Erie.

R.H: And were they still on Central Avenue and...?

H.J: Wintemute School of course, was on Wintemute Street and Fort Erie Secondary School was on Tait Avenue.

R.H: Just like they are now, right?

H.J: Yes, the same location.

R.H: Can you name some of your teachers?

H.J: Two of my former teachers at Wintemute School are still living in Fort Erie. Miss Gussie Everingham taught me in kindergarten in 1923. Mrs. Robert McBain or Miss Culver taught me in junior second or grade two. [Culver is Mrs. McBain's maiden name] Miss Clayton was the grade three or senior second teacher. Mrs. Bruce Hogg or Miss McGrotty taught me in grade four or junior third. [McGrotty is Mrs. Hogg's maiden name] Miss Black taught grade five or senior third. Miss Byers taught grade six or junior fourth, and Mrs Harvey or Miss Carter taught grade eight or senior fourth. [Carter is Mrs. Harvey's maiden name] I remember many of the teachers from the high school when I was going. Mr. Orville Weaver, Mr. Bell and Mrs. Baker were the only local people. Now, I don't know whether you want more names there of high school teachers, but those were... Mr. Weaver lived here on Highland Avenue, Mrs. Baker lived in Stevensville, they're the only local people. There's a lot of other names I could give you but...

R.H: No, I think the local ones are the ones we are interested in.

H.J: These are the ones that were there when I went.

R.H: Right. Did you go to teachers college?

H.J: I'd like to mention Mr. Thompson.

R.H: Who's Mr. Thompson, could you tell about him?

H.J: Well, as a pupil at Wintemute School, Mr. Howard Thompson was the principal.

R.H: When you were a pupil there?

H.J: At that time, Wintemute was both elementary and secondary schools. The four rooms on the first floor were for elementary and the four on the second floor were the high school. It became crowded and even the basement was turned into the classrooms. The old original school in Amagari, a small wooden building that had been situated

on Gilmore Road west of the railroad tracks was brought in and placed on the corner of the Wintemute property to be used as a temporary classroom. It was heated by a wood stove and there were no washroom facilities. We had to run through snowbanks in the winter to get to the main school. When the new high school was built, Mr. Thompson was moved there as principal. Mrs. Harvey was appointed acting principal 'til the arrival of Mr. Roy Cassey whom I taught under from 1938 to 1942. I returned to Wintemute School as principal in September of 1956 until June of 1960. The school was torn down in 1965 and the new senior elementary school was built in the same location. Now, it's not called the Senior Elementary School now... What's the name of that...? anyway it used to be just grade senior elementary. When it was built, it only had grade seven and eight, now of course, it goes from kindergarten to the end of grade eight. I attended Hamilton Teachers College, at that time called Hamilton Normal School. It was a one year course and I graduated in 1937, I did not teach the first year after college but the following year, I put in my application to the local school board and was hired to teach at Wintemute School at a starting salary of \$900 with an annual income under \$50. I taught all the subjects such as arithmetic, reading, writing, history, geography, and art. Miss young was the music teacher who came one period a week to teach music. I started teaching in grade one that year and each year Mr. Cassey moved me up a grade until I taught most of the grades in the elementary school.

R.H: When you first started teaching, was there a union?

H.J: Yes, when I started teaching, there was a teachers union. It was not as powerful a union as it is today. There were no benefits paid to teachers then, such as medical, dental, or drugs. It was not 'til after 1945 that we began to get these benefits. When my daughter was born in 1945, we had to pay for all our medical and everything. When our son was born ten years later in 1956, everything was paid for.

R.H: So, you didn't get paid vacations either. Did you get any salary when you were off in the summer?

H.J: No. Eventually the board paid us on a twelve month basis rather than a ten month basis. It was stretched out to 12 months, but we

got our summer money in a lump sum at the end of June.

R.H: What about bussing, when did that start in the school system?

H.J: Well, there was little bussing done for children in the early years when I was teaching but as the need arose, bussing did take place. As the town expanded, families moved beyond a two mile radius of the school and busses were provided to transport them to the schools. For instance, children living down in the Boulevard towards the townline, were brought in on busses and other children outside the area... When special classes were started in the schools, busses were provided to collect these children from different areas and bring them to the school, wherever the special classes were held. I had a retarded childrens group and it was called special education then.

R.H: Oh, you had special education classes at that time?

H.J: Yes, this was in Douglas School, yes, and we bussed those children in.

R.H: Have you any idea of the year when special education was brought into the school system?

H.J: I would say it was 1965, 1970, in that period when the special education classes started. The class was about 14 children, Mrs. Hesser was the classroom teacher there and most of the time I was there.

R.H: Did you have to have special training to teach these children?

H.J: Oh yes.

R.H: What about the Home and School Association, can you tell me anything about that?

H.J: The Home and School Association started in the schools in the early '40s, I'm not just sure of the exact date. Mrs. Oscar Teal was responsible for getting the Home and School started. It was actually started to get parents into the schools, to have a closer relationship between parents and teachers. It was to talk about the children, talk over their problems and we would have open house. Lots of times, the parents could come into the school, even in the daytime, sometimes we would have them come in and sit in the classroom if they wanted to find out how school was going on. They could see the school work, how their children were taught, they could ask the teacher questions and so on.

R.H: Did you have to have any special qualifications to be a member of the Home and School Association?

H.J: Oh no, any parent, it was strictly parents.

R.H: Were any of the members voted in?

H.J: Well, of course it was an organization and they did have an election for the president and secretary and... When it started at Wintemute School, I was secretary for the beginning organization there for several years.

R.H: So, the purpose of this organization was to have more communication between the parents and the teachers?

H.J: Right.

R.H: Where did you apply for your teaching positions?

H.J: To the school board. A position was advertised and you made your application.

R.H: And you taught at Douglas School, how long did you teach at Douglas School?

H.J: Well, I taught there and I was a principal there both. After the war I was transferred to Douglas School from Wintemute School on October 16, 1945, that's when I came out of the service, Mrs Esther Kinnear was teaching my room 'til I came back. I was there until April 12th, 1950, when I was transferred to Mather as principal. I was there for five years until June of 1956, then I went back to Wintemute as principal until June of 1960.

R.H: Was that the new Wintemute School or the old school?

H.J: Oh no, this was before the new school was built, this was in 1960 you see.

R.H: So, you were actually the principal of the old Wintemute School, do you know when they tore it down then?

H.J: In 19... oh...

R.H: You may have already answered that question and I may have missed it, but maybe you can tell me again, could you?

H.J: It was torn down in 1965. In September of 1960, I went to Douglas as principal and I was there 'til 1977, 17 years as principal. I retired from there.

R.H: Was there a dress code for teachers as well as pupils?

H.J: I don't think there was ever a code established but... You're talking about teachers and pupils both.

R.H: I always knew there was a dress code for pupils but was there one for teachers?

H.J: We weren't actually told but we always wore suits. Men teachers always wore suits. Of course lady teachers wore skirts and dresses. There were no slacks and jeans, it was a little more formal in the early years. The children dressed better, they didn't come to school in shorts or running shoes, this type of thing, you know. It was a little more formal all the way around.

R.H: But you were never chastised if anybody came a little...?

H.J: Not really, but it was only within the last few years that a principal would go to school with a sports shirt on and not a tie and coat. All my... I mean up until 1977, I always wore a tie and a suitcoat but of course, we did get more lax in the last years as far as the pupils were concerned. I can remember one time an inspector, when I was a teacher at Wintemute School, and that's going quite ways back, told me about a child who wasn't too well dressed. Now, I just can't remember how that child was dressed, but he was an elderly man and he'd been brought up very strictly to dress properly. That's the only time I can ever remember being told anything about proper dress. I tried to set certain standards in the school but you couldn't tell parents how to dress their children.

R.H: So, the principal could have standards set as far as dress went?

H.J: Yeah.

R.H: When you first started as a teacher, you told me you made \$900 a year, how did you supplement that income? Did you do some moonlighting, like some of the other teachers?

H.J: Yes, I did. I worked on the Peace Bridge as an immigration officer for 16 years from 1929 to 1945. [Mr. Jackson told me later the dates should have been 1949 to 1965]

R.H: Did you also have to work shifts?

H.J: Yes, they always put the summer help on the busy shifts.

R.H: So, you worked for the whole summer, did you work during the school year at all?

H.J: No, no, it was only summer employment. As soon as school was over, I went to work, and the day before school started back again, I finished up.

R.H: What shift did you work?

H.J: Well, we worked the busy times, it was always day work, never night work. I worked one to nine and that seemed to be the shift that

crowd, the four o'clock commuters, the eight o'clock baseball crowd.

R.H: Now, they get the bingo crowd, right?

H.J: Now, you get the bingo, that's right.

R.H: And you worked in Immigration?

H.J: Immigration, yes.

R.H: And you were of course, right down at the Peace Bridge, was it still as busy then?

H.J: Well, we had some very busy times but I guess there are more cars on the road now. Oh, there were times when traffic would be backed up, going back into the States and away up the Garrison Road coming to the beaches in the summertime. Yes, we went through some busy times.

R.H: Did you work a lot of hours?

H.J: Well, it was an eight hour shift.

R.H: How many days a week did you work?

H.J: Well, as I say, when I first started I worked seven days a week through the whole summer, but during the last few years we did get two days off.

R.H: Is that what you were hired to do, was work seven days a week?

H.J: Oh yeah.

R.H: What was the rate of pay then, going back when you first started at the Immigration?

H.J: You've got me there, I can't remember, I can't really remember but it was enough to keep us going through the summer.

R.H: But it wasn't a great salary?

H.J: Oh, no, the men that worked on the Bridge directing traffic made as much we did.

R.H: Did you get any benefits even though it was only a temporary position?

H.J: Well, they took out pension and when I retired after the sixteen years I worked there, I got my pension back in a lump sum. I got \$600 and something, back in a lump sum. It wasn't too bad and it was the year my daughter was married, so it came in handy.

R.H: Thank you so much for the interview, I really appreciate it Mr. Jackson, thank you.

H.J: You're quite welcome I'm sure. It was real interesting for me to go back over my past history and think over some of the things that happened to me, in my life, in teaching, and where I've lived.