

Beverly Branton interviewing Mr. Oliver Benner in his home at 1273 Sunset Drive. The date is June 24, 1985.

- B.B.:** Hello Mr. Benner.
- O.B.:** Hello.
- B.B.:** Could you give me your date of birth please?
- O.B.:** September 29, 1918.
- B.B.:** And your place of birth?
- O.B.:** Just east of Number 4 School.
- B.B.:** Where is that located?
- O.B.:** Down the Number 3 Highway, Garrison Road, Fort Erie.
- B.B.:** And your occupation before you retired?
- O.B.:** Steelworker, layout and...it'll come to me.
- B.B.:** So you were born in the Fort Erie area?
- O.B.:** Yes I lived here from about thirteen months old, I came up here.
- B.B.:** Right in this particular home on Sunset?
- O.B.:** My grandfathers place originally. One hundred and two years ago he bought it.
- B.B.:** How did he happen to come to this area?
- O.B.:** Well he lived up on the corner of Ridge and Bertie.
- B.B.:** And what brought him to Ridge and Bertie?
- O.B.:** His parents from Germany.
- B.B.:** So it goes back quite a few generations.
- O.B.:** Oh yes, about four generations. Now the maps of 1876, there's three of my great grandparents on the map..land owners.
- B.B.:** Do you know why they came to this area?
- O.B.:** Well I guess its for freedom and to get away from some of the conditions they had over there. Well they left the area, most of them..well there's some..one went to Chippawa, one went to or two to Fort Erie, a couple to Rochester and then two of the girls married and went to Chicago. Well one of them got in the newspaper business. He was a school teacher from Ridgeway..got into the newspaper business, and they went from Naperville to Chicago and he became the manager of the Chicago Tribune paper and his son Howard did afterwards become manager. Now he's retired and his son left the Tribune, Robert, and he's now in Long Beach California and he's publisher-director of the fourth largest magazine in the United States, 18 million copies, Modern Maturity Magazine. So that was

my mothers side. My father's side was the Benners which my great, great, great grandfather came over with the United Empire Loyalists and he use to live just a couple hundred feet south of here from Number 3 Highway up to the hill. And some of the family is still on the property. And he and his wife and some of the children are buried up in Dr. Rutherfords front yard in Ridgeway on the Nigh Road which we found out several years ago. But the Benners is a big group. There are a few groups of Benners, one family branch that doesn't belong to ours, no relation but a lot of the others are. We have a big book on that, trying to complete more of it and I've been working on it, like yesterday even made a stop to do some calling so it's interesting that way too.

B.B.: Now you were born by the Number 4 School.

O.B.: Ya, down by where Fred Sanders lives now. He's treasurer of Horton Steele, C.B.I. That's the house, my sister and I and mycousins daughter were all born. We lived there for a couple of years and then my dad bought this from my grandmother. My grandfather died early when he was in his early thirties so we come up here.

B.B.: Number 4 School..was that located where the Garrison Road School is?

O.B.: That's the one. My grandmother use to be janitor of that. Of the old stone section in front, years ago. That's all that was there. And then when they built the red brick section on the back in about 1923 my sister went there, first year it was opened, my older sister.

B.B.: So what do you remember of the school?

O.B.: Well I remember we had two teachers.

B.B.: Do you remember their names?

O.B.: Oh yes. There was Miss Hibbard I had and Roy Taylor was in the other classroom, senior class. And they became married and afterwards they went to Toronto. So I had Mr. Hilborne Pickett the last year for my teacher when I was in grade 8. He had married a Nigh girl from Fort Erie. But Taylors went to Toronto..Roys dead now, he was in the 1st World War but she's still living in Toronto. I seen her not too long ago. She was from Ridgeway, her father was Mr. Hibbard, the real estate man that they named the street after them up there. So..oh, ya they were very good teachers. And the teachers followed but that was all I had. I was there seven years for public school and then I went to high school for five years in Fort Erie.

B.B.: You went in town to the Fort Erie High School.

O.B.: Oh, ya, five years.

B.B.: Has that changed much?

O.B.: Oh yes. Original building was..let's see, three rooms was in the back and there were about 18...there was only about 21 rooms in the original building. I think my grandmother's cousin built that school.

B.B.: How many stories were there.

O.B.: Three, three, the same that they have now. But now they've went out south a bit and they went out west, that's all added, changed around.

B.B.: How many years was the high school...?

O.B.: I think they started it in..was it '28? They had it's 50th anniversary a couple of years ago. '29, I forget exactly. I have a booklet on it..it was a little over 50 years ago. And the same with 100, I think they celebrated a 100 years down here at Garrison Road a couple of years ago too.

B.B.: If you went down to Fort Erie to high school, how did you get there?

O.B.: Well, I, my cousin lived nexted door or my cousins husband and he worked in the machine shop, foreman of the machine shop, superintendent so I went with him a couple of years. And then I rode a bicycle other times but I didn't drive like they do today. I even walked sometimes. But sometimes I went down at seven o'clock in the morning to school.

B.B.: Were there many other people going from this area down to Fort Erie to school?

O.B.: The Spear boys on the other road, on Pettit Road, I use, their father worked there too and we use to go together. Roy was my age and Alfred was two years older and there was a few other neighbours that went to Fort Erie too. But there weren't too many from this area at that time. I think I counted up the other day, I can remember from Concession Road to the Ridge Road, there were only about 40 homes in that whole stretch. And most were all farm homes, not many other.

B.B.: So most of this area was...?

O.B.: Farmland.

B.B.: Would you consider that going into the Cresnet Park area..was that farmland?

- O.B.:** Oh, yes, definitely!
- B.B.:** Tell me about Crescent Park, how that use to look and how it developed?
- O.B.:** Well there was two farms or four farms down in Crescent Park from Crescent to Buffalo..there was four farms. D.L. Hershey had from Buffalo Road down to Ferndale, just about to Ferndale down there, down to the church..that's where the church, Garrison Road Church, United Brethren Church, got their property from..Mr. Hershey's father and it went down to Phillip road if I'm not mistaken. And the old Wale farm, they call Wales bay out in the end..out at that end of Buffalo Road, that was from Buffalo Road east. And Chester Fretz owned from Crescent Road west, that's where Ryans Restaurant is presently now, that was the old farm house with additions to it and...
- B.B.:** And that was Mr. Fretz's? Tell me about that..it use to be his farm home?
- O.B.:** That was his farm home..that was his farm, ya. In fact some of, one of, my uncle bought his barn when he tore it down and some of the sheeting on this back portion of this house is from that barn. And I remember when he had a sale and when D.L. Hershey had a sale, at his, I think it was his nephew, Wes Hershey up at who lived at Crescent Park, and he use to have a lot of water systems for the American people, his own water system before they put the town in. And D.L. Hershey's sons are both dead now. One worked for the Customs and the other for the Fort Erie Dairy. But they're both passed away now. The one wife I think, she use to teach at Number 2 School, Wilfred Hershey's wife, Hazel, lived on Emerick Avenue. There both gone now but there children are still living.
- B.B.:** So there was the Hershey farm, the Wale farm and Fretz farm and ...
- O.B.:** The other farm I don't know but way back in the old, a hundred and some years ago, Mr. Bitner, Chris Bitner owned it and he's a distant relative of my grandmothers cousin, had this great nephew who lives across the road from me, right now, presently.
- B.B.:** Do you remember who started selling off the land first?
- O.B.:** Ward Winger bought it I think, Ward Winger from Ridgeway and sub..put it in all the subdivisions and they put roadways through,

planted trees, put a lot of the sidewalks in. And then I think Frank Benner who owned east of Cresent Road, he started selling a few lots and somebody else bought lots and they're building all on the east side of Cresent Road now. But that use to be my great grandfather's place, Benners, Jacob Benner from Cresent down past the school..acres. Then after he passed away my grandfather got the fifty acres across from the school and the other went to Philip Benner, his other son. Then his son Hedley got it and after Hedley he sold it to Franklin Benner which is no relation of ours.

B.B.: So, Mr Winger when he..when you say he bought property to subsidize it, did he buy all four farms?

O.B.: No, I don't, I don't think so..well although he made of, I don't know for sure. But he had the big house just south of the high school in Ridgeway. That was his home, that huge home up there. So I don't know, I was just going to public school and I remember when he built it. And the, Mr. Stein's Brewery from Buffalo built that big home down here between Ferndale and Buffalo Road, that big house with the big fence out in front, stone gates and that..Stein's Brewery built that. And they had a gardener and things like that.

B.B.: Do you remember when he moved in..that house went up?

O.B.: It was in the late '20's I would think. And then that house on the corner of Ferndale, they were built around the late twenties and the early thirties. I was still going to public school. I remember that.

B.B.: So before Mr. Winger started putting in the roadways, that was just all farmland?

O.B.: That was farm, 2 farmlands.

B.B.: So there was no way of getting across it in a car?

O.B.: No, Ferndale, or Cresent and Buffalo Road were the only two roads. And I remember when they paved Buffalo, or Cresent Road and that was the first road in the Township that was paved. It was a narrow dirt road. And of course I have this old, this little booklet..did you see it on Cresent Park that was written by the Americans..and when they delivered it to me, Mrs. ^{LYNCH} Flynn who had wrote it, she said, 'are you who I think that you are' and I said, 'I think you are right.' Because my father use to work for all those people along the lake out there. And...

B.B.: What would he do?

O.B.: Well he landscaped, did landscaping all through the park, landscaping lawns. And he use to clean the beaches for them. Use to clean all the debri, limbs and boards that washed in and all the seaweed. He use to plow the beaches to plow all the seaweed under. Put water pipes out for them and bring them in in the fall.

B.B.: Would this be by horse?

O.B.: By horses, right. I use to help him out there after I finished high school, a little bit now and then until I started Horton Steele. That was back in the 1940's.

B.B.: How would he get down on to the beach?

O.B.: Drive down. Down the roadway.

B.B.: What roadways were there?

O.B.: Well Cresent or Buffalo Road. Of course there wasn't near as many houses up the western end of the section as there are now either, a lot of room..he had a lot of room. Oh, and then in the month of June he'd go out there around Wale's Bay and in the seaweed the old carps would be up around there and they would shoot out between you and around you and scoot..they use to be there. But there's still a lot of those people that I know faintly because they use to call up here all the time for work being done, and come out to see dad. And I want to go out there one of these days and see a lot of the people because I got all the names and all the lots numbers and I know exactly who's, who. Half of them or so I know. So Mr. May, he used to, was a manufacturer of Pierce-Arrow Automobile in Buffalo, he lived east of Cresent Road. He had a big section down there. And it was part way down to Kraft Road, a quarter of the way down. He had a big estate there with several homes and there's other people, Americans down there. But they're very nice people and I use to know Henry May myself. I use to see him walking up the beach..I use to talk to him. He had the Pierce-Arrow Company over there.

B.B.: Was it basically built up along the lake then as it is now?

O.B.: Oh yes..it started in was it 1908, 1910 possibly they started buying.. according to that booklet, they started buying property there. And they'd come over by horse and then I think they had hoof 'n mouth disease and they couldn't bring horses over. And then they use to

come across on the little Dummy across the bridge, the International Railroad Bridge. And go up that little Peanut train from the ferry landing up to Erie Beach and then walk on up the rest of the way. Then later on they had the train that came down along the lake that would stop at a little shelter out there they had just east of Crescent Park to pick up the people and go to Buffalo to work every day. And the ladies use to, when they came over for the summer, take their children on the train to Ridgeway to get their hair cuts and go and do some shopping. And they have a little booklet that they had out..I don't remember all of it but I remember going back about..of course my dad and my uncles use to work out there all the time. And years ago my dad use to make a dollar a day, not an hour, a dollar a day working. So it wasn't too plentiful, money, in those days. But expenses weren't either.

B.B.: How has the Garrison Road changed?

O.B.: Oh, it's well, what I can remember it was sort of a paved road and then when I was going to public school yet. I would say in the later 20's, '28 in there somewhere, or maybe '27, 26, 27..they repaved it and made a good two lane highway out of it. And I remember when the shoulders were still soft we came up from school one day, just about where the golf course is there, where that sign is now down there, east, a couple of hundred feet east of our road here, Sunset and one fellow wanted to give us a ride but we were so close to our road we didn't need it, my sister and I and my cousin. My younger sister came up with the teachers, they gave her a ride up. And we were there and it was Mr. Brisbane, a president of the Maple Leaf Milling Co. came along and went to slow down a little bit and he skidded on the tary road and hit three of us. I was under the car but fortunately wasn't hurt or anything except I got my clothes torn a bit, raincoat, and had a lot of gravel in my knees and my cousin was knocked across the road but we survived it all right. My sister stayed off the rest of the week and I did too I guess but my cousin went back to work the next, back to school the next day. So that was it and in 196..was it 67, Centennial Year I think, they started making the four lane highway out of it. From Fort Erie up to Concession, up to Gorham Road I guess at that time, they did that, or somewhere up in there they made a 4-lane out

B.B.: What about the Dominion Road?

O.B.: Well I remember when they put that through..that was early, maybe in the 20's, when they put that through.

B.B.: And where did it go to?

O.B.: Up to Ridgeway.

B.B.: But where did it stop.. if they have to put it through?

O.B.: Well it may have been a little roadway, they must have had a small roadway there, because see the Krafts use to live there too on the corner of Dominion Road and Crescent, that south west corner, is one of the Kraft homes.

B.B.: Did you ever me 'the' Mr. Kraft?

O.B.: J.L. Kraft? Oh, I knew him personally.

B.B.: Tell me about him.

O.B.: See they lived on Kraft Road, that's just south of the railroad tracks. The home is still there. And then they built this other one up there and it was a large family. They were of the Mennonite religious order, or religion. And my mother and father went to school with his younger brothers and sisters. And I went to public school with the nephew and nieces..and high school. But he went to Chicago. I guess he failed a couple of times and went bankrupt a couple of times but he managed to pull out and get on top of the world. Now when you see that big pavilion down at Disneyland, last year ago, the spot and this ad down there...He use to come down this way and to meet his relatives. His cousin lived next door and he use to drop in to see her sometimes. But he was a great fellow. I've got his autograph her someplace, when he was done this way.

B.B.: Are any of his relatives still living in this area?

O.B.: Oh yes. Let me see..the Beach's went to, I think their in Ottawa, one of them is a professor in McGill University, Earl Beach. Marvin went to high school with him and I met them, all of them at the reunion at the high school a couple of years ago. And the Learns are still out here, Mrs. Norm Learn was a Kraft. Art Rose married a Kraft and their children, and I'm not sure if their children are alive yet or not. They could be..one married the Glenny boy, Margaret married a Glenny boy. His father use to be the head of the Gas, Provincial Gas in Fort Erie. And the others moved to Buffalo or Chicago too. But they were the..Mrs. Learn, and Mrs. Beach and Mrs. Rose were

the three girls that stayed around here. But they were great people. Then my uncle use to see some of them when they came over from Buffalo sometimes. Of course, he's been gone for quite a long time too. But we use to see one another. Lot of cheese spread..very good.

B.B.: So back to the Dominion then..the Dominion went as far as ..?

O.B.: Ridgeway, at the present time.

B.B.: And it started..?

O.B.: By the Old Fort.

B.B.: You could ride right through.

O.B.: Oh yes after they put it through.

B.B.: Before they put it through, where did it stop?

O.B.: Well I don't know. It's been up that way for years, that little road. I don't know how many years ago, long time ago..it's been a small road maybe like a stone road going up that way. Then they paved it because it took a lot of traffic out that way. And the Erie Beach out there, that dissolved when was it..oh I was still going to public school, in the early 30's possibly around in that area. Then Erie Beach closed and they took a few of the rides up to Crystal Beach. And in fact some of the old subflooring out here in this other section is from the roller rink of Erie Beach. And two of the neighbours here, up this second house up here, they have some of the flooring.. another one the house is gone down here, it burnt. But, in fact, DearNevinger had bought the roller rink and he sold this wood and we have the subflooring from the old roller rink.

B.B.: Do you remember going to Erie Beach as a child?

O.B.: Oh, yes. We use to go out there quite often.

B.B.: Tell me what you recall.

O.B.: Well there was..the Park itself was a beautiful park; the rides were good; their was a big casino or dance hall there along the water; they had a zoo with a lot of animals, birds, peacocks..all kinds of animals. I don't know where they brought them..they must have brought themfrom the Buffalo Zoo over, I would imagine, I don't know. I remember going up in the little Peanut train one time, from Fort Erie up to Erie Beach, up there and back. It was a small thing, open air, just a couple of windows on it I think..unless there was a few but a lot of it was open. A small guage railroad went

up along the waterfront.

B.B.: What were some of the rides you use to take?

O.B.: Well there was the, oh they had the Catipillar and the Hay-Day, and the big Wildcat, I think was there..big roller coaster they called it the Wildcat. They use to have a big slide, on the north end, two great big bumps in it..you know they sat on a bag, it looked like a bag, a bag or something to fly down, because you'd get moving..you could hurt yourself if you hit that surface going down. But it wasn't a large park, it was a beautiful little park, well kept up and..wonderful time out there. But I haven't been out there for years. I should go out there sometime again to see if there's any recollections of anything. Bu the old building is sort of demolished and I don think.. but they had a walk you know, fence along the waterfront and sidewalks. The sidewalk went from Helena Street, down I think, down to the Park. It could have come in from the other way too from the Bardol Road.

B.B.: Were you ever out to the airstrip in Erie Beach? Do you remember an airstrip?

O.B.: Airstrip, no I don't. Was there one there? I should ask my brother. He knows all about airplanes. He's an aeronautical engineer. And I was just reading the other day about, first..was it parachute jumps or something around here in this area, Niagara Peninsula.

B.B.: So you've seen the Cresent Park area go through a lot of changes?

O.B.: Oh, boy! Of course, then they built the new pump house out here, several years ago you know. But they, Bertie built it before they went into the Greater, before Regional came in. And then they enlarged it so. But there use to be ~~the~~ two pump houses in Fort Erie one on this side of the Old Fort, the other at the end of Lewis Street. They had those two pump houses.

B.B.: Why do you think Cresent Park built up so ...?

O.B.: Well there's a nice beach out there. And they subparted it and people started coming and then of course in latter years people started pushing it and buying up lots and building homes and people coming to buy them. And then of course they got water through and sewers through now and all the conveniences and so. Except someplaces haven't got sidewalks but they most all had some kind of ashphalt

roads and stone roads. Some of them had..a lot of people and expanding, that's...same as Fort Erie is expanding. I remember when they paved Jarvis Street, way back in about 1927, 28, somewhere in there.

They had Jarvis Street all tore up with the sewer lines. I use to go to Fort Erie every week to take piano lessons and most of the time mother use to drive horse and buggy and in winter time we'd take the cutter. Dad wasn't always around to drive the car. And we'd go to Fort Erie that way.

B.B.: Would you go in shopping or..?

O.B.: Oh, ya shopping, sure. That was from '27 to about '30.

B.B.: What route would you take to get there?

O.B.: Oh, down the Bertie Road maybe or maybe...and the Bertie Road wasn't all stone down here from Sunset to Pettit Road. That section was mud, no stone at all. No stone up the other way, they've stoned that since. 'Cause they stone this down this way first because the mailman use to go down that way, so they stoned it for him. He came around with a horse and buggy in those days. Didn't have the mailmen we've got today. Oh and six days a week they came. And our music teacher..Andy Griffith said, he was the chief of police in Fort Erie at that time, then she later on went to the north end and went down there to two different homes to take lessons from.. And then before they built the church out here, Garrison Road United Brethren in 1929 I think they completed it, 28 or 29..while they were building it we held church down in the old stone front of the Garrison Road School. And at that time we had the church piano down there and the school piano and so for a Christmas concert at the Number 4 School and our teachers always had big Christmas concerts, great big ones..and my sister and I played a duet in one and my music teacher and another distant relative of ours, played on the other piano and so we had four players on the piano. That was in 1928 or 29 I think. So, saw that grow and then of course the church in the 50's, I forget, it was about the middle fifties I'd say they built a large portion on the back for Sunday School rooms at the church. And then about six, seven years ago they built the new addition on the church. And then a few years ago they use to have horse sheds out the back to house the horses at church.

B.B.: Where were they located?

O.B.: Well they were located on the left side of the church and then when

they built the addition on the back, they put it on the back of the lot yet. And now of course that's gone and that's where the parsonage is now, part of it. Well it's just the edge of that because they bought those, I was trustee of the church then whe they bought the three lots there and they built the parsonage on two of the lots. So that's back in the, maybe in the 60's, somewhere like that. And then they tore that down and bought those three lots and built a parsonage there. Webers were the first ones to live in it. So it's a few changes. And you take where Shaw's gasoline station is there, that was my dad's uncle's place and he use to have a blacksmith shop out there years ago..Phil Benner. And then he went down and bought where the Queen Elizabeth goes through there on the west side of Spear Road and he was kelled with lightening from, he was out to the pump one time and a bolt of lightening come. And that was his son Walter that just passed away a few years ago. He was way up, 90 years old, a contractor in Fort Erie.

B.B.: What other businesses were out in this area that might not...?

O.B.: I remember when Orey Storm, well he lived down there. He had excavating, he started it. And he had pump ducks and diggers. His son Meno worked for him. And J.Storm, they have a company here now and it was started by his father. But there wasn't many other businesses around.

B.B.: So most of the farmers would go into Fort Erie or Ridgeway or both?

O.B.: Yes. Yes there was just farming. There was no other business. Orval Beam out there on the Pettit Road, he use to build some boats and he did gardening for the, lot of the American people. But that's all. There weren't too many other businesses around. And it was practically all farm land back in those days.

B.B.: What type of farming was it?

O.B.: Oh mixed farming..grains and you had a team of horses or two, had some cattle and you made your own butter and had your own milk and cream...

B.B.: Was the land good for farming?

O.B.: Oh, yes the land was good here. And you'd grown different types of grain and hay to feed your stock. And you'd kill some of your beef, pigs or sheep and chickens, you had your own chickens. Not too many goats. But farmers use to be good, we'd help one another

and especially in thrashing time, we'd always exchange help..silo filling. It's a lot of fun doing that. And of course then years ago we use to have Bertie Fair down at the race track and that was for the Township. And all the merchants put up booths and all the schools would compete in drills at that time.

B.B.: What do you mean by drills?

O.B.: Well going through different marching, this way and this way, crossing, and circles and squares and everything you could think of. And we use to pick up of lot of prizes from that.

B.B.: What time of year would the fair be held?

O.B.: In the fall. And then they'd have exhibits too, farmers would have exhibits. And it would maybe last a day or two. It use to be good.

B.B.: Would there be a good turnout usually?

O.B.: Oh yes. We had a good turnout. All the new automobile dealers would bring their automobiles in on display and down below. And then we, the winners would go to Welland Fair. That was a big day and it was a day off. We would go to Welland Fair and compete in, in that time, our County Fair. So we use to go out there, we'd have a day off, children's day you know, go up there. And in high school we use to have our sports day in the spring..that's competition. And in the winters we'd go to Toronto for the Provincial. I was up there one time in the relay, I think it was 1934, and won a relay from Fort Erie.

B.B.: What do you think stopped the Bertie Fair?

O.B.: I don't know if there wasn't much interest, not enough entries in it..I don't really know what happened.

B.B.: Do you know how long ago it stopped?

O.B.: Oh, a long time ago. I don't know..maybe it was the war time possibly. That could have been, I don't know. 'Cause they didn't make cars during the war time. It could have been that..a lot of people occupied in different ways and that could have been when they just finished it.

B.B.: So you use to go into Ridgeway to..did you?

O.B.: Well we didn't go into Ridgeway too much or Stevensville. On the occasion, something you wanted to go to or somebody you wanted to go and see on the business line occasionally. Fort Erie was our main place of..

B.B.: And you worked in Fort Erie?

O.B.: Oh yes, all my life, forty-two and a half years.

B.B.: So what year did you start at Horton?

O.B.: 1940, right after the war started.

B.B.: When did Horton come into Fort Erie?

O.B.: It was 19 teen, in the teens I think. They started building water tanks for the railroads. That's when they started.

B.B.: And when you started in the forties what was their main business?

O.B.: Well a lot was war equipment. Then we made hundreds and hundreds of buoys for harbours, and oil refineries for storage of oil, and underground storage tanks for down through Goose Bay, Labrador, and of course towns were growing and towns, cities wanted elevated water tanks for water supplies; the pulp industry, paper industry, the mines, they were all expanding..all kinds of work. Today it's flat.

B.B.: Did it employ many men?

O.B.: Oh, yes. We had 250 to 300 men there during the war time. And after the war when it really picked up like Palmer Corp., Dow Chemical..they really started up and got it going again. We did a lot..oil refineries, built them, all kinds. End stocks and small cases for hydro jobs. And Niagara Falls when they put the tunnels in underneath the city, we built the forms for that. They had expanding forms that they moved on tracks every day, quarts of it and we did that. When they built the new Hydro Plant in Lewiston, or not Lewiston, but Queenston we did that..in fact I did the, started the first rings on it, attached to the generators.

B.B.: Has Horton always looked the same?

O.B.: Oh, they've expanded a lot. I remember back in the teens when they doubled that big shop while I was down taking music lessons, the late 20's..they doubled that. Well then they..well some of the buildings are gone and others are new. They're still building here in the last year or two and they're still completing them now to make things more, oh more convenient and less handling of things. A lot of those buildings..the crane wheel on the back was built when I was there and machine shop..now they've built another new machine shop, paint shop and they had where a settle of buildings is now it's all different and they bring them in in bottles now. And the

new offices, all new since I started down there. And factory, the originals all gone since I started. In fact they took part of the upper storey of the old office up near Welland and they made a house out of it. But, in fact before they had the Horton Steele built I think they bought it from a marble factory. They use to make marble down there. And I have a piece or two of marble here that they use to make down there.

B.B.: What are some other factories that aren't around that you might remember?

O.B.: Well they use to make Jello down at the, in the Arnour Co..medicine company bought it over and now it's an apartment. Which my brother came down to check out to see if the railroad bothered them too much on behalf of the government to know if they could go ahead and build it. That was the same time as the Garrison Road addition out here. He came through and checked it out that weekend. But they use to, my cousin use to be one of the floor ladies down there. And Mentholateum I don't think they're there any more..Buffalo..Mr. Stratton use to be the head one there. And different companies are here and gone. Hart & Cooley Manufacturing made registers, my uncle worked there for years and years and he use to run the machine that that made chains ..he use to have chains on it to adjust the drafts and checks on the furnaces, you use to grab it from the furnace up into the living parts and then you wouldn't have to go down to the furnace to adjust them. And well he went and measured up for the registers that..Oak Hall down here, Harry Oakes estate and the Cassaloma when they built that or put the heat in..he checked that all through for the heating conditioning.

B.B.: So you've seen Fort Erie go through quite a few changes if you've use to come down and shop and then you

O.B.: Oh, yes. Central Avenue didn't exist through there. That was a ..you had to go around by the river all the time. And then they put the bridge through..oh, I forget when that went through, that Central Avenue Bridge, in the 60's maybe I forget. I'm not sure on that but you can look that up I guess when that went through. That made that a lot more convenient. And then of course there use to be Amigari down here on Gilmore and Concession. That was another little town but Amigari, Fort Erie and Bridgeburg all went together to make Fort Erie and that was back in the early thirties.

I remember when that amalgamation went through.

B.B.: What was the feeling of the people?

O.B.: Well it wasn't too bad I guess. Maybe it did away with one mayor, set of councilin Fort Erie but it was quite a compact although it's a...
...all those war time houses in the west end, Amigari section in the west end..my uncle helped build on some of those and that sort of unified. Of course since then a lot of vacant lots are being filled in and then they built a new Roman Catholic Church, St Michael's Church. Did away with the other church on the Number 3 Highway out there by the mall. And oh, there was some other churches..there use to be a Presbyterian Church on Courtwright Street where the bowling alley is just east of oh south of the bowling alley and then that burnt down and they built the new one on Central and Highland and then that burnt a few years ago, had a fire. So, I remember when Central Avenue Church was just a square part and they built that religous education part on the south end..my uncle worked on that too. And to see all the changes..now the where presently the Credit Union is located on the south-west corner of Jarvis and Central, that was built by John T. James. And he lived..his house is gone in the last few years across from Don Dean Chevrolet, Chev-Olds Dealer, on the south-east corner of Dufferin and Central. That was his old home. And his daughter married Burt Miller who was a foreman at Horton Steele and their daughter married Ken Sauder who use to be treasurer of Hart & Cooley, well he's passed away now and he was on the hospital board too..but she lived down on the Boulevard here. In fact, her husband that's who I named my brother after, Ken Sauder and my mother was flower girl for his parents when they got married. She was a Plato which there's a lot of Platos around here too.

B.B.: John T. James seems to be quite a name with Fort Erie.

O.B.: Yes, he was a prominent business man. I think he had a store, businessman. Yes he was quite famous. Of course some of the little stores are gone but I remember a lot of the old stores. I remember a lot of the old stores..I remember when practically all of Jarvis Street, the present buildings, if there are any brick ones..I remember when they were all built.

B.B.: Who built them?

O.B.: Maybe Teal built some, maybe Oscar Teal, former Mayor Teal's father he built some. But they were practically all, any brick building there.. I remember when they built the post office.

B.B.: Was there a big celebration when Jarvis Street was paved?

O.B.: I don't think so, I don't think so. It was a mud road for a long time but then they paved it, and of course a lot of other streets following. They they seemed to do a couple each year since then you know but that was a long time ago. Now they went and changed some water lines or sewer lines just here a couple of months ago there. My neighbour did the work on it.

B.B.: Were you at the Peace Bridge opening?

O.B.: Yes, oh yes.

B.B.: What do you remember about that?

O.B.: Well loads of people and old cars and of course the Prince of Wales was there. And I have a little momento somewhere of when the Peace Bridge opened.

B.B.: Were there other celebrations going on around town?

O.T.: I don't recall that. But of course at that time I was only nine years old. And well they've changed the entrances and the exits of the Peace Bridge buildings there several times since then. But then, they use to have a laneway going in there about the, where you go in..the same way you go in, where presently is the Mather Arch now, but they had like a little driveway going in there with towers on both sides of the road, that on the driveway, which looked like tower, I guess you'd call them towers or lighthouse towers. I think Mr. Zimmerman tore them down if I'm not mistaken. But they demolished them. But they changed them sometimes. They had hoped at one time it was going to be a toll free exit or entrance, crossing. But not yet..they maintain it good. Lot of expenses there I guess, with a lot of help and they've repaved it several times and now they've changed the roadways from four-lane to three-lanes a few years ago which gives them a little more room, before it was sort of crowded for space, especially if you had wide vehicles.

B.B.: Well can you think of anything else as you look back, any other changes?

O.B.: Well of course they've added street lights, they even have street lights out here, which they didn't have and paved roads. They use to tar the roads and several years ago, this stretch they put a couple

inches of pavement down which is better than tar because the other just fell apart..if they oiled it, all the traffic going through to Fleet, hundreds of cars going past here.

B.B.: On Sunset?

O.B.: Yes we get them all, going west bound to Crystal Beach and that. The busiest town is in the morning and the night. And going to town to because they go through here to the Auction House, they go through here to the drive-in at night..a lot of traffic through here. And even from the Niagara Boulevard you can cut right through up this way instead of ...

B.B.: So that's changed a bit.

O.B.: Oh, it sure has! That Niagara Boulevard is one beautiful park. And I was to the Niagara Parks Commission celebration in Queenston..there 100th anniversary last Saturday, last Friday. It was great and it's a wonderful park.

B.B.: What about the golf course up here on the corner of Suset and Garrison.. do you remember when that opened up?

O.B.: Oh, ya, just a few years ago. He had started down at Gilmore Road and then he moved up here and bought this.

B.B.: Whereabouts on the Gilmore?

O.B.: Ah, just where the Queen E. cut-off is on there. On the north side of the Gilmore, on the corner of Pettit and Sunset. He started there but not too much and then he came up here. Ya I've known Gord for years. But he started, he had 8 holes now he's got, or nine holes, now he's got eighteen. It's a big golf course now, beautiful golf course. Now that way back use to belong to, the farm use to belong to the..they lived down on Number 3 Highway..they had that monument or that little plaque out front of the house, the old Alexander home..maybe it'll come back to me quick. But then it lay vacant for years and the Harry Oakes Estate bought it and just owned it. And my neighbours use to farm it then. Then later on they moved the barn over to the edge of their barn when they were in the dairy business. Then Gorham bought it from the Welland Securities.

B.B.: Do you remember anything about Harry Oakes..he seemed to own different property here and there, in Fort Erie?

O.B.: Well he was thrown out of a train because he couldn't pay his fare, that's when he found his gold. And then of course, I don't know if he was from Niagara Falls or how he got to Niagara Falls but he

has the Oakes theatre down there and his big home down here and the golf course on that.

B.B.: Down here? Oh, you mean Niagara Falls.

O.B.: In Niagara Falls, yes.

B.B.: I mean in Fort Erie though...

O.B.: I don't know why he bought this way unless he did it to donate money but there's Oak's Park down on Gilmore and Central and he had owned this and then they sold it but I guess he had money and he must have either bought up places or donated lots and that to different areas, made a contribution.

B.B.: Do you know any other property in Fort Erie?

O.B.: No I didn't know any other property in Fort Erie . But he didn't use this place over here he just owned it. I don't know if there was sixty acres or something and then he bought it from them and developed it. And he sold the lots across the road and there a lot of beautiful homes there. Not any cheap ones. And I think he plans to build down at the end of..himself some day, in the back of his driving range across from my brothers. He's got a vacant lot there.

B.B.: So Mr. Benner is there anything else you can think of as you reflect back. You've given some excellent information.

O.B.: Oh, not too much particularly I guess. I remember a lot of changes. Even this place has had a few changes outside. It was a brick house and now it's stucco over, the rest is stuccoed and a big addition on to it. It's been shingled several times. And lawns..it use to be, the north of the house here use to be all garden. My grandmother use to keep flowers and she had her own vegetable garden too. She took care of that. And oh she had dozen and dozen of pruned and plum trees and grape yards, vineyards. Use to sell bushels of fruits in the fall and a big orchard in the back. That's all demolished now, all the trees are practically gone. So there's been a vast change around this area! But all I know .. of course building up here ... collects old tractors and restores them and he's got several buildings up here that he keeps, stores them in, all this equipment. My other brother left he's an aeronautical engineer with a Master's degree and he worked for DeHavilon Aircraft and then vwhen they got slack, he's with the Government of Ontario, Environment. So he's busy that way but he's still active in airplanes..he knows all about airplanes.

He's a member..secretary of the Canadian Historical Aviation Society.
And he's just plain crazy..we said that when he went to public school.

B.B.: Well I thank you for the information you've given us. It's been very good. Thank you.

O.B.: Well your welcome.