

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mr. Harold Ruch, 116 Waterloo Street, Fort Erie, Ontario, and the date is October 14, 1985.

R.H: Good morning Mr. Ruch.

H.R: Good morning.

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

H.R: April 17, 1918.

R.H: And, where were you born?

H.R: Fort Erie.

R.H: Was that the North End or the South End?

H.R: It was the South End, the original Fort Erie on Niagara Boulevard and I think the apartment my mother and dad were in, is just over where Riverside Travel is now, on Niagara Parkway.

R.H: Can you tell me anything about the area, what it was like?

H.R: It was a real thriving business area actually at one time. They had two meat markets, a hardware store, a grocery store, and a clothing store. John Charles had the clothing store you know, where the Salvation Army is now. There was the two hotels, the King Edward, Mr. and Mrs, Ramey had that and the Anglo American and Mrs. Hunt had that, at that time. There was a lot of activity with the ferry dock, the ferry dock was right in behind where Agrette's Store is now or was and... After that time... we were married in 1940 and prior to that we looked for a home, a place to build a home and it was the South End that we picked because of the proximity of the business section and then it all disappeared over the years. Now, we have restuarants and we have no problem going out to eat but...

R.H: But you enjoyed living in the South End then?

H.R: Yeah, the South End was real nice. We watched it disintegrate, the business section, but the park lands grew. We watched the Peace Bridge being built and actually all the dirt for the circle at the Bridge was hauled right from behind the library here in...

R.H: Oh, was it?

H.R: Yeah in horse drawing wagons. At that time, a few of the first solid tire trucks were on the road. That was all hauled.

R.H: And you watched the Peace Bridge being built?

H.R: Yeah. The cribbing for the piers in the river were built right at the foot of Queen Street and towed up to the Bridge area and sank

in the water and that's when they poured the piers, right on the rock.

R.H: Didn't they used divers for that?

H.R: Yeah, helped locate them and then we watched the concrete work and we watched the steel go up. We watched them join and we were there for the official opening when the Prince of Wales came.

R.H: Oh, you were there for that, what was it like that day?

H.R: Great! it was a good programme. You wouldn't recognize the area from then 'til now. Where they came off the Peace Bridge and went up the main road, it went right straight up where the Q.E. is now. That was Main Street and that took us right up to... well, it's Walden now, right up through Garrison Road. It came out by King Wah Gardens, that's all been reversed now. There was a big restuarant, the Plaza Restuarant was on the left hand side.

R.H: What street was that on?

H.R: On Main Street and that ended up the Armouries for Lincoln and Welland. They just tore that all out when they reversed the flow of traffic.

R.H: When they built the Peace Bridge, of course a lot of homes had to be taken away, did any of the streets actually disappear completely?

H.R: The Niagara Parkway, you see it now from Walnut Street to Albany, from south on Albany is all brand new. The old original road was called Erie Street and it went right straight from Walnut... it cut in, it is all truck lot there now and it went right straight across and hit the foot of Garrison Road and Goderich and they all came together in front, to the Garrison. All those homes were moved, just a couple were tore down but most of them are relocated somewhere up on Lavinia Street, some on Garrison Road. I think Erie Street still remained in... as far as the Peace Bridge property would be, maybe an 1/8th of a mile in that section. In that section there were four houses, there were five. Mrs. Kee was on the corner, a big stone home and then Waites-Waites had a home and Rutherford, he had a lumber company and he had a small home there and a smaller one beside it, that his son Jim lived in. The next home, I can't think who was in it originally... but my mother-in-law, Mrs. Shore, they bought it, her and her husband and they had a small print shop. He did the gas bills and the water bills and next to

it was a big stone, stone and brick house and that was Mr. and Mrs. Bill Kee and here, that's back... oh, I can't think what year... They bought them out, the Peace Bridge finally bought all that out and Mrs. Kee had a life lease on her home. When she died, they tore it down too but all the rest was tore out and there were trucks backed right up beside her property for a few years, she wouldn't move, she stayed in her home.

R.H: She wouldn't move? 1976 10 1

H.R: No. They bought it and they knew then that they had it once she gave up.

R.H: Didn't she know that she had sold it?

H.R: Oh yeah, she sold it to them.

R.H: Did she change her mind?

H.R: No, but in the lease, she still wouldn't move. She would sell it if she could stay there as long as she needed it, so she did. She stayed right in and she had trucks around her place but she was hard of hearing, so... mother always laughed that she never heard a thing at night when she took the hearing aid out.

R.H: So, when did she finally...?

H.R: I can't remember.

R.H: But she finally moved though?

H.R: No, she died right there. Her daughter was... her son was killed overseas and Betty died early, she was married to a Donald Muir. That was a Fort Erie family, his father owned the Brewers Warehouse on Gilmore and Don still works for Brewers Warehouse, unless he's retired. Betty had a son John and I think he came down and took everything out of the house, everything was left to him. Everything's gone, there's no street or anything anymore. It's all the truck parking back there.

R.H: What was her name again?

H.R: Mrs. Kee. Where the main road is now, the Niagara Parkway, it was a millrace. The edge of the river was right in that area. We used to fish in this millrace as kids.

R.H: What is a millrace?

H.R: Well, I think at one time there must have been a mill of some description for grain or for what, I don't know, and there must have been a water-wheel some place in there. There was just a race where

came down from the lake into the river and turned the wheel...

I can't just go back that far.

R.H: And you went fishing there?

H.R: Yeah, we could fish in that without going right into the ...

R.H: Is that the place where people have said that some of the divers stayed when they were working on the Peace Bridge?

H.R: Stayed where? In a building? They might have but I can't remember whether there were construction buildings under the Bridge or not.

R.H: This was an old place that was there and they used it to house the divers, do you remember anything about that?

H.R: An old home? Well, there was a number of them on the riverside and the millrace was in behind them. Erie Street went right straight up to hit the corner of the Garrison and Goderich and then Lakeshore from there, and there were homes on both sides of that. They've all been relocated or tore down.

R.H: Did you work any part-time jobs when you were growing up?

H.R: Around 1927 or '28, my father was Town superintendent when they had to put in the main sewer system and pave a lot of the streets, I can remember. Princess Street, Princess particularly, I remember when they were paving that, it was all rock and when they put the sewers in, they had to blast. My dad said, "What do want to do for the summer?" I asked, "Doing for the summer?". He said, "Would you like a job?" I said, "Sure". So, I was water boy on the construction and I spent all summer on Princess and Queen, I remember.

R.H: So, they had to blast because of the rock, did they use dynamite?

H.R: They had to blast into rock and yes, they used dynamite. One in particular, one home is still there and it's the second house up from Archange and there's a fellow in there by the name of Alfie Coulthurst, his still lives there. This day, they blasted and they had mats and they had railroad ties, everything on top. I don't know whether they put in too much but up she went and a stone about six inches in diameter came out and went right through the bottom panel of Alfie's door, the front door. So, there was a little furor for a while, but they got it repaired and there were a few things that... They blasted right in the middle of the residential section and it was hard rock, oh, just crazy.

R.H: And then of course they put on the blacktop?

H.R: Yeah, they filled in all the sewer and water trenches and compacted it and then put in the stone base and... that's all there is on there, pretty well yet. They've re-topped it since but...

R.H: What year did this go on?

H.R: '27 or '28.

R.H: How old were you when you were doing that?

H.R: Oh, about ten years old, I was born in...

R.H: Ten years old?

H.R: Yeah.

R.H: You were the water boy and you got paid?

H.R: Yeah, I can't remember how much. It was pennies but it gave me something to do for the summer.

R.H: And then, did you have any other jobs after that?

H.R: No, nothing 'til after school. I can't remember anything besides that. My dad built a new home on High Street right behind the Douglas School and we were very close to school. And then we went from there to high school. The year I started high school, we moved to the Racetrack, dad took the superintendent's job at the Racetrack in 1932 when the Towns amalgamated. He could see what would happen. The amalgamation of Bridgeburg and Fort Erie 'caused the jobs to be split so he had an offer to go to the Racetrack as superintendent and he took it. He was there until '52 or '53.

R.H: Did you say that you lived right there?

H.R: Yeah, we lived right on the Racetrack in a big home. That home is down Catherine Street about a block from Concession. Some people by the name of Malucci have it now and they've fixed it up, bricked it and everything. But, it was a big frame home, sat right inside the railroad tracks at the front gates. We lived there, dad lived there 'til 53 or 54, he took sick and he couldn't carry on. That's when they amalgated all the racetracks in, Hamilton, Longbranch and Toronto. They brought a man in that was superintendent of the Hamilton Racetrack. I was dad's assistant at the Racetrack and I took over as assistant to this Bert Faulkner. He passed away in '57 and I got the superintendent's job then. I was superintendent from '57 until '62. I left when they built the pollution plant at Cozy Dell. I joined the water resources and I was chief operator of that plant and I was there until I retired in '83.

R.H: What was the name of that plant?

H.R: Fort Erie Water Pollution Plant, it's right at Cozy Dell.

R.H: Tell me about the Racetrack, was there anything different about it then, than there is now?

H.R: Oh yeah. Well, basically the buildings are in the same place but they were a lot different. They remodelled the clubhouse at one time and I have a picture, there was a picture and I took it apart, somebody wanted the picture. There was a newspaper in behind the backing and it's the original architect's drawings of what he thought the Racetrack should look like when it was built. I have those at home in a file but I don't dare touch them, they're just like... brittle. But the drawings are there and it shows a picture... a drawing of the main grandstand and the clubhouse and what a stable would look like. This is what the architect was envisioning when he built it. It was quite an old-fashioned styled track at the time they modernized it back in... from '52 on. I was through all that construction of the new stables, new grandstand, new clubhouse.

R.H: When did your father take this job?

H.R: 1932, and he was there 'til '52.

R.H: What was his first name?

H.R: Henry.

R.H: Can you remember anything else about the Racetrack? Were there more races then?

H.R: They only had two weeks racing, right up until the time they started to rebuild in '53, '52 or '53. Only when the Ontario Jockey Club took over did they get more racing. They got the spring meets, and our summer meets but apart from that, there was only two weeks of racing. That's all the charters that the, what they called the Niagara Racing Association had. That was controlled by two men, two or three men out of St. Louis. The general manager came up from St. Louis every year and run the Racetrack. Dad looked after it the rest of the year. No, there was just two weeks at that, just two weeks. Now they can't make a go of it no matter how many weeks.

R.H: So, they didn't have the Prince of Wales Stakes then?

H.R: No, nothing in that time. They had the Hotel Buffalo Purse, something like that and that was centred around the American trade coming

across and it still is.

R.H: What about the Bertie Fair, can you tell me anything about that?

H.R: Yeah, that was there a long time. My dad was the director of the Bertie Fair. It was there before we ever moved and then he took quite an active part in that. It was at the Racetrack 'til it just fizzled out and there wasn't anyone left in this area to run a Fair with. Dad run the horse drawing contest and the different things that they had.

R.H: What was that like, the horse drawing contest?

H.R: It was with a team. They'd load up a team... they'd build a stone boat...

R.H: A stone boat, what was that?

H.R: Yeah, it was a skid, it had two poles and a deck on it and they used to fill it up with sandbags. A team pulled it and when a team pulled it, they'd add a couple of more sandbags and they had to pull so far. The one that pulled the farthest with the most weight won the event. They still have them but they got some terrific floats now and as they pull along on a wheel the weights automatically ride up the bed and put weight on the front where the team has some extra pulling. They still have horse drawing contests and they have them for tractors and trucks and everything else, course these big... what do you call them? I can't remember but I went to see one at... to the speedway one night, they had this big tractor drawing contest. It was all souped up tractors...

R.H: What else did they have there?

H.R: Well, they had their displays, fruit and vegetables and home crafts, all their baking and animals. They had an ideal spot because they had the stables right there for the animals and the poultry. They had all their cages and that and the paddock itself was on the west end of the grandstand. It was ideal, they had all these stalls and they just put all the different animals in the stalls and then the cages for fowl were in one section of it. It was a good Fair, real good and it used to have a lot of people.

R.H: You don't know why it sort of petered out do you?

H.R: No, there was just not enough farming in the area anymore. Nobody had any animals or teams like... it just... even in big areas right now, they don't draw that much. They are getting away from

farm... we still go to them. We go to the Simcoe one and the Caledonia one and they're good fairs.

R.H: Do you know when it stopped?

H.R: No, I can't remember back to the Bertie Fair when it was last put on.

R.H: Where did you work full-time? I know you told me but tell me again, where was your first full-time job?

H.R: The Provincial Gas Company.

R.H: Oh, the Provincial Gas Company! you didn't tell me.

H.R: No, I went to high school and when I finished high school I was going to go in to refrigeration and air-conditioning and I walked the Peace Bridge every morning for a year and went to a technical Institute on the corner of Niagara and Porter in Buffalo. I just finished my course and I came home one night and mother said, "Mr. Glenn was here and wants to talk to you". He was the president of Provincial Gas. So, I went down and he said, "How would you like to go to work?" So, I went home and I discussed it, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do then, whether I wanted to continue my refrigeration or go to the Gas Company. So, the more I looked at it, they were into... gas refrigerators at that time were just starting to come in, so, I said to mom, "I think I'll take it". So, I was there from '38 'til '41. During the war years then, Fleet was booming and the money looked better there than the Gas Company so I quit there and went to Fleet. I was there from '41 until '46 and then I went with my father to the Racetrack but he had no authority to put me on as his assistant.

R.H: What did you do at Fleet?

H.R: I was in assembly, an assembler on sheet metal. I worked right on the wings and planes like the Lancaster and the Fairey Battle. They brought those in to have repaired and I worked on the Fairchild Trainer. I was on the hydraulics section of that. You see the Model 60 that they built, they built quite a few of those, that was supposed to be one of the better trainers. That was just finishing when I started there and I got in on all the big repairs and then when they started the Fairchild Trainer, I got in on that and I enjoyed that. But then I had nothing after racing finished, I had to find somewhere and that was '46 and '47 that I went over to Hart and Cooley. I

got a job there for the winter. The next spring... I told Mr. Clark, at that time Bert Clark was the manager and I told him, I said, "It's a stop gap" and he said, "I realize that, most everybody here is a stop gap". We were only getting about 25 cents an hour, it didn't go very far. So, in the spring I went back with my father and when Mr. Cella came up from St. Louis, dad approached him on an assistant so, they went for it and I was at the Racetrack, in with dad from '46, around '47 'til I left in '62.

R.H: What did a superintendent do?

H.R: He was in charge of maintenance, grounds and the race strip itself. He had men under him and I trained men to do the different stages and then as it grew, they put in heating for the spring meets, they had steam boilers. I had to get a man that had engineering experience on steam but basically it was all maintenance and I think that I've done that pretty well all my life. That's why I took the job at the Water Pollution Plant, because it was operating a plant, maintaining it and looking after it.

R.H: Do you remember what the wages were then for a superintendent? Like you were assistant first, so how much did you make then?

H.R: When I left the Racetrack, I kick myself now, there was three time-books in my file and I said, "Well, I don't need these anymore" but those were dad's time-books when he went there in '32 and they worked for 25 cents an hour. The Teamsters got a nickel more, they got 30 cents.

R.H: Who was this?

H.R: The Teamsters. They came in... we had two teams at the Racetrack back then that did the hauling before we had tractors. It gradually increased but I don't remember what I got back in '47. It was a lot more than I got at Hart and Cooley, I know that, that's why I went. We worked 12 hours a day and it was about a dollar an hour I think when I started so we worked long hours and a long day for \$12 a day, \$60 a week. But it's went up with everything else and I did well right up until '62 when I left. I have no complaints but this other one looked better and I enjoyed my last 20 years with the Ontario Water Resources up until '71.

R.H: When did you get interested in the Fire Department?

H.R: It was '43, I guess, about '43 or '42, after we were married and moved

back in my dad's home on High Street right in behind the school. That was only a couple of blocks from the Fire Hall. My father had come up through the ranks, he was an officer and all the rest of it and he retired. He formed an exempt Fire Department and that's where I am now. When you had 15 years in of active service, you could go on exempt. This means you... you still go to meetings and do everything but you didn't get paid, or no record. So, when dad said, "Would you like to join the Fire Department?" He said, "I'm gonna retire and I'll put your name in to fill my position". So, I said, "Sure". So, from '42 on, or '43 on, I've been a volunteer fireman.

R.H: So, when you were working as a volunteer fireman, how did that affect your full-time job? Was there any problems?

H.R: Not any job I had right up until '57. They all accepted that I was part of a team that could help them at sometime or another. In '57 when I got the superintendent's job at the Racetrack, they came to me and said, "You'll have to give up this fire chief's job, it might take too much". I could still remain as a volunteer fireman but I had to give up the chief's job. That was the hardest thing I ever did.

R.H: So, that's why you gave up the job as chief?

H.R: Yeah, in '57, or I would have still kept on trying. I enjoyed it-it was a challenge that I really enjoyed. Then after, I stayed on and after '57 right up until about '63. Then I was secretary, then a lieutenant in the five years, but then I lost interest. I didn't feel like running to fires anymore so I just... I had 23 years in, so, I went exempt then. I still go once in a while if they have a ladies night or a dance or something like that, we go and support it, but I don't go to... As you grow up in a group, you went with the majority and they had a carnival, a field day every year and I never agreed that you should spend that kind of time... you work, you labour, they still do but I don't know why. I know why-we made quite a bit of money at field days. But once I retired... I worked two years, I went on a judging stand with the Chief of Police and different ones to help. Units come through to be designated by the judges but after that I finally gave up because I wouldn't haul all that equipment and everything.

R.H: So, what about when you were a volunteer fireman, when you went out on call, where you insured at all?

H.R: Not at first, nothing.

R.H: So, if you had an accident, like something happened...?

H.R: You were on your own and we got no pay at that time but as we got larger and got into it further, the Town gave us a grant each year. We divided that up amongst the volunteers on a point system.

R.H: What about if you had to leave your full-time job, was your pay docked for that?

H.R: No, no it was very seldom any organization... I don't think even now..any man who's in the volunteers and works in a plant, does he lose time if he leaves. But he doesn't abuse it to do everything else, it's just for the call itself. You see, they feel that they would like to be protected too someday. But then gradually as we got money for the chief and money for a chief driver you've got those on, like a salary. As the fire marshall got more involved in the individual volunteer groups, we got compensation then. I can't remember what year, but it was during my term as chief.

R.H: So, you were covered then?

H.R: We were covered for accidents then.

R.H: How many Fire Companies were there before Fort Erie, Bridgeburg and Bertie Township amalgamated?

H.R: Originally there was three Fire Departments. There was Fort Erie, Bridgeburg and Bertie, Bertie was in Ridgeway.

R.H: There was no Amigari Fire Department?

H.R: Yes, I'm forgetting that one. There was a small one in Amigari. That house has just been the centre of a controversy. Remember the woman that had a car in her living room just a short while back? The house is right on the corner of Jennet, no Russell, where it turns to go down to Horton Steel. There's a little house right there that used to be the Fire Department, that firehall. She's had cars run over her lawn and the last one, I see in the papers, the car went right inside and knocked her china and stuff down. Well, that was the original Amigari Station and all they had was hose carts, I believe. I don't think they had any mobile equipment, no motorized equipment in that hall.

R.H: Oh, I see. So, it was just the horses and...?

H.R: Yeah, and hand drawn hose wheels.

R.H: Where did they get the water from at that time, do you know?

H.R: No, I can't think back. In Town, we still had... I think, even Amigari at that time had water mains and hydrants.

R.H: They did?

H.R: Yeah, at Bridgeburg and Fort Erie. You see, the main water system and everything went in... before you got water prior to '28, they had mains prior to '28 but they updated a lot of things in '27, '28. So, there were hydrants around.

R.H: So, when the amalgamation came...?

H.R: It must have been before amalgamation. I'm trying to think how... Crystal Beach had a Fire Department too.

R.H: They had their own Fire Department and did Stevensville have their own Fire Department?

H.R: Yeah, Stevensville had their own because they had a fellow by the name of Heximer that built their first truck. Then, as it went on, Willoughby started their own and my uncle was the fire chief there, Charlie. They bought a truck and they just put enough equipment on it, like a pump and a hose. They had a 1,000 gallons of water. I guess, they would carry, which for rural was good. Then, East Bertie... I went out, I was called out, a friend of mine, Ed Gorham was interested in East Bertie area and they called me out one night to see... I took Freddy Henderson with me, he was my assistant and we went out to a small hall right across from the little Anglican Church on Dominion Road. It was a community hall, I can't think of the name of it now. Anyway, we met in there with a group of interested men who wanted all the information they could get, on a volunteer Fire Department. So, we gave it to them and before long they had equipment they started to buy, and they started to build a hall.

R.H: Where was this?

H.R: Right where it is now, on Dominion Road. They gradually enlarged it and they've got a beautiful building there now. That was all on their own, they built that themselves through bingo, now the Town is helping them keep it up.

R.H: This was a community hall?

H.R: It was a community hall where we met but then that was the end

of that.

R.H: It became the fire hall?

H.R: No, no, we met in the community hall to give them an idea of what they had to do to form a volunteer Fire Department. So, they decided they would form it and that was the first meeting. They had another meeting in that hall to form their Fire Department. I don't know where they met, from then on or what they did, but they started to get their equipment together and they bought property up where the fire hall is now, on Dominion.

R.H: So, this was East Bertie, do they still have it?

H.R: Yes.

R.H: It is still there?

H.R: Oh yes, that's one of the biggest halls there is now.

R.H: That's still there, right? So, Fire Company No. 1, and No. 2 are...?

H.R: That's No. 3, Ridgeway is No. 4, Crystal Beach is No. 5 and Stevensville is No. 6. When Willoughby... they went to the city of Niagara Falls, it's a Niagara Falls Fire Department now but we were all together at one time.

R.H: Your first hall was on Queen Street, I believe?

H.R: Yeah, and the one that we can remember... I think that it must have been built in the '20s, the early '20s, to house the first motorized equipment we got. It was on the west side of the... well, it's the Legion Hall now, that used to be the Town Hall for the Town of Fort Erie, the big building. It was there until about 1947. We decided that we needed a bigger hall, we had a Seagraves and we had room for the hose drying rack and then in the back room, we had our meeting room. It was pretty well cramped when we started to get 30 men hanging around. So, we went to... the Councilman for our area was Mr. Rapege....

R.H: Who?

H.R: Rapege, he was manager of the Canadian Niagara Power, Findlay Rapege. He would be an uncle to a Doug Rapege, he's with the Regional homes now. We went to him and asked him what it would entail if we could have an addition put on to the Queen Street hall. He came down and he looked it all over with us and he said, "No", he said, "We're not going to spend any money in that hall, we'll build a new one". I said, "Oh, gee, this is great". So, first thing

we know, we went to Council and he convinced them that we needed a new fire hall. They called the Fire Marshall's Office in and they picked out three locations and one of them was the one where it is now. It was picked because it was... the business section was downhill, you didn't have to go uphill and then if anything did expand, going uphill, we would be able to take care of it. So, it was built on Bertie Street and it has been a good site, it's central and... we had Mr. Teal, O.C. Teal built the building for it.

R.H: Teal was the contractor?

H.R: Did you do any of the work yourselves?

H.R: Not in the original hall. We finished off inside...

R.H: On Bertie?

H.R: Yeah, on Bertie and afterwards we did a little remodelling, we put a piece on the back ourselves and changed the stairway. It was a reversing stairway and there was a lot of wasted space underneath. So, we took it right out completely, built a room in there and then where the kitchen was upstairs, we moved it over to the top part of the stairway and put a new stairway up the outside and it made a whole new concept in the hall. Well, then, just a few years ago, they put a piece on the east side and that was during Ken Stouffer's term as chief. They did a lot of the interior... once the brick work and everything was up outside, they did most of the interior. Ken was a carpenter or is a carpenter and he supervised all the work. He did hours and hours of work himself so they owe a lot to him.

R.H: So, of course this hall is a lot larger than the old one, right?

H.R: Oh yeah, we had two bays, now we got three for the trucks to back in. They put the third one on for the... they made it in hopes that someday that they would be able to get an aerial truck, which they have now. It's big enough to house it on that one side.

R.H: So, how many trucks did you have? Did you have more than one?

H.R: Well, from 1928 on, we had the Bickle Seagraves and that was our only truck 'til 1951. While I was chief, we designed another truck and called tenders. We had a 1951 American LaFrance G.M.C. delivered and we kept the two of them. The Bickle was starting to go downhill but it was still a good back up truck and we used it with the water... we had put a water tank on in later years and we used it to hold the fire with a booster hose until such time that

the others could get hooked up to a hydrant. It served well for a while. In the middle '60s, I can't remember the year they sold it, the Seagraves to the Racetrack, they still have it. They sold it for a dollar with the provisos that it be maintained and ready for any parade that the Fire Department or the Town of Fort Erie had. It's still put in parades. From then on, from the '51 truck, they've had two or three since that year, you'd have to get that from Ken or...

R.H: So, when you got this equipment then, it was brand new?

H.R: Yeah.

R.H: The LaFrance was a brand new truck?

H.R: Everything we've had since that time, since the Bickle, the Bickle was brand new too and the Seagraves. Everything we've went for, we've always had a new one.

R.H: So, that truck lasted a long time then? What would something like that cost?

H.R: Oh yeah, that lasted a long time, that was a good truck. I'd have no idea of the cost, I couldn't find it in any of the books.

R.H: It must have been very expensive though?

H.R: Oh yeah, well, the one that... what was it? The '51, the tender was \$12,000 and that aerial truck was over a \$100,000 at least and I don't know what the other pumpers were that they replaced.

R.H: When you say an aerial truck, is that with the ladder that can reach to higher buildings?

H.R: The big ladder, hydraulic turntable, can go up to a 100 feet.

R.H: You couldn't before that?

H.R: No, the longest ladder we had would only go up 40 feet, it had a 40 foot extension and we had to put that up by hand, it took quite a few men.

R.H: So, you really needed that extension?

H.R: Yeah, for the buildings we've got now and the concept of fire-fighting has changed. Instead of going in and up, you went down from the top. You can take an aerial ladder with a nozzle on the top, we call it deluge nozzle, and just work right down from the top, blanket it so it didn't spread. So, this is a different concept that we used to use.

R.H: What about fire calls when they came in? I'm not talking about calls through Bomar but the early years when fire calls came in, how did you get the information?

H.R: The fire siren was always on the hydro tower way up at the top of Queen Street, the hill. That was maintained by the Power House. In that picture, there's two or three of them who were Canadian Niagara Power men, Sam Kelley, Joe Murdoch, Art Nolan... Art worked for the Canadian Niagara Power Company. (Mr. Ruch is referring to the photograph in the 1932 edition of the programme put out by The Niagara District Firemen's Association) They always had a man on call, day and night, and the calls went in to the Canadian Niagara Power Company and they blew the siren. Once we got to the hall then, we'd have to call back the Power House.

R.H: So, your saying the public would call the Niagara Power Company?

H.R: Yeah, they had a fire call number.

R.H: Was there a special number?

H.R: Yeah, and they would relay everything and record it.

R.H: Did you respond to fires in Crystal Beach too?

H.R: No, only on... there's a name for it and they still use it but we had an agreement that if they needed help, we'd help with backup. It was a backup and I'm trying to think... mutual aid, like a mutual aid deal and we backed up Ridgeway and... When the Erie Beach Hotel burned, well, it was like on the corner of Helena and Edgemere, right there, we had Buffalo over, they even came over and helped us. They brought a big pumper over and took it right down on the...

R.H: When did the Erie Beach Hotel burn down?

H.R: We had our Seagraves then, I think, the early '30s. It was the early '30s I think now, I'm pretty sure we had the Seagraves then and they brought a big pumper over from Buffalo and set it right down the Lakeshore and pumped water from the river, right from the lake.

R.H: Did they have better equipment then?

H.R: Yeah, they had bigger equipment and we got no charge or anything for that, for what they did for us that night. But then, we have quite a mutual aid setup between the... our Fire Marshall got involved and he got a hold of the Buffalo Fire Department... You see, at one time, there was eight or nine different hoses at two and a half diameter and even between Fort Erie and Bridgeburg, they were

different. We had to have special couplings to use the two hoses and Buffalo was different again. So, I don't know whether this has all gone by the board now or not, but at one time there was four boxes, red boxes sitting in the firehall. They had every coupling we would need for this area and if we knew we were going to a different area. But now Ontario is all standardized. As far as Ontario is concerned, the whole Province is standardized, it was done back in around '55, I think. They standardized all the equipment, Buffalo, I'm not sure yet, they could still have a different thread than we do but we have kept up on this and updated the couplings. I don't remember... through my time they were there and if we had to go to work with a Buffalo team, there was a box to take with us that would match.

R.H: What about equipment when you first started, how was the equipment, was it good?

H.R: Yeah.

R.H: It was good?

H.R: Well, as far as the truck but any individual equipment... well, we had leather helmets, raincoats and boots, but nothing else. We had very little protective equipment. Back in 1950 when we were negotiating for the new truck, I had written a letter and Mr. Von Zuban of Von Zuban's Lumber Company used to be, he was the fire chairman of the committee and after the budget was all struck, I went to him one morning and said, "How will we make out for a new truck?" He said, "I didn't put it in". I said, "For why?" Oh, he said, "We can't spend that kind of money", and I said, "Well, we need a new truck and I told you in the letter why". So, he got his other committee member who was Harry Hepburn and they got together and they came back to me a week later and said, "We just found out that we could have the Fire Marshall's Office come in and make a survey. Will you be satisfied with this?" I said, "Absolutely". I knew once the Fire Marshall's Office was called in, we had more than a truck. So, they came down and they took a survey of everything, they ran tests, they blew the siren and they clocked us for getting to the firehall and getting to where they said the fire was. They sat down with us at night and then they asked us different things, what we had and what we didn't have. At that time, we were starting

get a few small things and we'd asked for a... no, we didn't ask for a Scott Airpacks. At that time the self-contained breathing apparatus was Scott Airpacks, so, he said to us,... No. 2 Company sat in on this meeting too, which was old Bridgeburg and they said, "How many self-contained breathing apparatus do you have?" I said, "None". He said, "Well, that's two for each company". Boldly, he wrote the list out and it cost them a fortune, and they could've got by with just a truck.

R.H: The Von Zuban's Lumber Company burned down, were you in on that one?

H.R: Yeah, I helped save it.

R.H: That was a bad one, right?

H.R: All the lumber companies... the last time Niagara Coal had a fire, Ken was chief then, but I was down watching and I had Niagara Coal when it was on Gilmore Road. Von Zuban's was the first fire that Freddy Henderson had after I retired. I still volunteered, but I didn't have to take the responsibility of it.

R.H: They saved it then?

H.R: Enough of it so that they could rebuild.

R.H: He didn't rebuild, did he?

H.R: Yeah, not rebuild but he used a smaller area, that's all. Shortly after that, the Rotary Club got interested when they found out about these airpacks and everything. We took first-aid training from the Buffalo Fire Department through the American Red Cross. They came over and trained us in fire-fighting and first-aid and before we knew it, we had purchased a inhalator on our own.

R.H: What was it you purchased?

H.R: An inhalator and that was to resuscitate. You would take oxygen as you breathed, along with artificial respiration. Fred Henderson had been in the airforce and said, "There's these controls exactly the same as the inhalator in every aircraft, for the individual man". So, he picked up two or three of them but everybody pooh-poohed the idea and that we were tampering with somebody's life, but we have helped people. We had made up three units with an oxygen bottle on a little cart and if anybody had asthma or breathing problems, they could call us and they could use those. They only use oxygen when you inhale, if you needed it, if you didn't need it-it wouldn't

got down. So, we had those for a number of years along with this... I can't think... safety supply, I think, supplied the inhalators. The Rotary Club got interested in the Fire Department and through Chris Eden, he had a garage down at the corner of Lavinia and Niagara Boulevard, he purchased a used van and revamped it, painted it and had it lettered with... that it was donated by the Rotary Club for Fort Erie No. 1 Fire Department as a rescue rig. They started putting equipment in it. Now they do this with most every Fire Company nowadays.

R.H: When you have a fire does this go with you now?

H.R: The rescue rig goes with it and they've got now, well, they've got a boat and a trailer to take it and they use it in the river quite often. They realize the percentage they could gain from it and I think most fire companies... I don't know whether the Kinsmen do it or the Rotary do it for every company, or whether the Kinsmen are involved too now, but they keep that supplied. They've got the jaws of life and anything that we need for rescue, they will supply if they know that we need it. They've been very good.

R.H: How does the Fire Department maintain the equipment? Was that your responsibility as a chief, to see the equipment was looked after?

H.R: I had a chief driver under the chief and he was responsible for training his drivers and keeping the equipment in shape. If they needed anything done there was a garage allocated to do it. Now, Charlie Clements, in our company, was a mechanic and he had a shop on Central Avenue, he did most of ours. Now, I see that most of them are into Dave Spear. He's got the building and the men to do it, so, he has taken an interest in them himself, that's why they... it looks like that's where they are going to end up now.

R.H: Did you ever have any breakdowns on the way to a fire, does that ever happen?

H.R: We had an accident one day. Before the Q.E. was paved, I think the one lane was paved and the other was a big hump that went across the Concession Road and I can't think who was driving the truck... this car must have came out of nowhere, an American Cadillac, and all of a sudden, there was a bang, he hit the backend of the truck. This Bickle Seagraves was a well built truck, it's steel, it's bent and welded in place and there was a slight dent on the backboard

of the truck but you ought to have seen the front of the Cadillac, it just cleaned it right off. So, we had some problems for a while, getting lawsuits and everything but as far as we were concerned, we had the rightaway. There were no stop lights or anything, no stop sign and we blew the siren and where this fellow came from, we still don't know.

R.H: Did that 'cause much of a delay in going to the fire?

H.R: No, we kept right on going. We dropped a man off and told him just to keep the man there and the first car that came along, get him to call the police. The police were there by the time we got back, fortunately it was a grass fire or something we were going to on a Sunday afternoon and we got back in time to get things straightened out. I don't know how the Town insurance made out but they paid and we never got a report back. That's the only time I remember having an accident.

R.H: So, the Town covered you, they paid for the insurance and everything like that on the truck and the equipment?

H.R: Yeah, everything.

R.H: How about when you had to go through the Police Department for the calls, the fire calls, how was that system?

H.R: That was excellent as far as we were concerned. We were very sorry to see the Police Department give it up. They seemed to be one of us because they would go out to the calls and be there when we got there lots of times, and they took an interest in making sure we got the proper calls.

R.H: Did they do what Bomar did, like they had charts of the area and could tell you approximately where the fire hydrants and the streets where?

H.R: Yeah, everything. They knew their areas too, the same as we did. I realize why they had to give it up, they were burdened and that was just another burden for them. Bomar, I'd say the last while back, they've done pretty well as far as I can see. They've got their hands full now, with the areas divided up the way they are. They've changed the boundaries from when I used to be there and they have to know their boundaries. I think they get mixed up once in a while, they get a North End in the South End but that doesn't make a difference

anymore, they all work together.

R.H: But now of course, they have radio-receivers, don't they?

H.R: Yeah, many times there was fires and you didn't even know it, the whistle didn't even blow. But now, everybody has a monitor in their home now.

R.H: When they get this signal on their radios, who do they call?

H.R: I think their monitors on their belt tell them where it is. They can hear the original broadcast, and in their home, they have the regular unit on their table and it broadcasts everything.

R.H: And they carry these monitors everywhere they go, right?

H.R: Yeah.

R.H: Going back, did you know exactly where the streets and where the fire was?

H.R: Pretty well, anybody that lived in the area...

R.H: How did you get in touch with the members?

H.R: Through the siren and if they didn't hear the siren, we went without.

R.H: Did you go without?

H.R: A couple of times we were shy, then we blew the siren the second time and we got a couple of more out. We were never too far down the road. After I was chief, Ken... before he was chief even, he took quite an interest in young men coming up and knowing the areas. He had a book in the dash of the truck and if you knew the street you were going to, the number and everything, he could go to a page and tell you how to get there. He had it all layed out from the main streets, the cross streets and I think they probably still use that.

R.H: So, you still, more-or-less, do your own area unless you are called for backup?

H.R: If you're called up... and usually when your are called out for backup, you usually go to the other hall. Now, with the aerial truck being in No. 1 Firehall they get calls quite often for the aerial truck for backup, so, they go right in then, to where the fire is.

R.H: So, you're the only Fire Company that has an aerial truck?

H.R: It was bought for the Town. Our hall was big enough to house it so it was kept in there.

R.H: Did you ever hear of a fire, or did your dad ever mention a fire, that was on a ship called the M.T. Green?

H.R: No.

R.H: Never heard of it?

H.R: No. Where was this, in Town?

R.H: It was down by the Shipyards. I believe it was a cruise, dance, party ship.

H.R: No, and my dad worked at the Shipyards too, he helped during the war at the Shipyards. He was chauffeur for one of the men at that time but I can't remember hearing anything about a fire.

R.H: It was a large ship that was used as a pleasure ship but it was on dry dock.

H.R: Oh yeah, it wasn't on water then?

R.H: I'm not sure, maybe it was on water but it wasn't taken out on the river.

H.R: Well, there's not too many people around anymore that you could contact, that worked there.

R.H: Oh, I just wondered about it, that's all.

H.R: One thing that I forgot to mention to you, in the old South End, there was two boats built at the foot of Queen Street by Horton Steel.

R.H: Is that right?

H.R: Yeah, they built two big steel boats there, and launched them and everything.

R.H: Do you know the name of these boats?

H.R: No, it's in an article some place, in one of the Fort Erie histories someplace but... There's one of the books... the Park Commission just put out a new book that they had for sale. We bought one in Niagara Falls one night and I think there's a picture in there that shows... it could be the one that Al Spear had of Fort Erie, on the Peace Bridge. But these boats were both duds of history, they both sank, they tipped over, they weren't stabilized right or something. I don't know what happened to them but they didn't build anymore, they just built the two. I remember seeing those down at the foot of Queen Street when I was a kid, being welded together.

R.H: When you needed money, you had to go to the Town Council, right?

H.R: We had to make a budget the same as anybody else. Towards the end when I took over as chief, we'd prepare a budget. We'd put it in and then we'd either have to cut more and get along without,

or...

R.H: Who was the mayor then?

H.R: Yeah, Jack Teal was mayor then and he was mayor from... a lot of the time he was mayor and I'm trying to think who else we dealt with, Charlie Price and... boy my memory's going.

R.H: You have some notes with you I see, what kind of information do you have written down that you want to tell me about?

H.R: I found out that back in the... from 1900 on, they used hand-carts, our area too. They graduated to a steam-pumper, a horse-drawn pumper but we can't find out who ever got it, where it ever ended up or... we know that a fellow by the name of Charles Baxter had a team and he would draw the steamer, the pumper, and it was housed in a barn owned by Art Rose who lived in where the Erie Lane is now. The barn is where Robo is now, the big barn, and he used to go over and actually the rig was kept at the firehall and then he'd go and hook up and take it. But then, that was retired when they bought the... it must have been in the early 1900s when they got the Model T.

R.H: The Model T?

H.R: Yeah, and where the other one went... I think we did locate a couple of the hand-carts, they were in a museum down in New England somewhere. Some fellow had come through and saw these hand-carts sitting in a berth in a lot next to the Catherine Street Pump Station at one time. I remember them, and he said, "Am I in the firehall on Queen Street?" He must have seen them while looking around and they gave them to him, I don't think he even bought them, they just gave them to him. I think somebody's got that steam pumper someplace, we never located it. That's too bad, stuff like this should... we've been down to New England and all over and they've got museums... they have the old hand-pumpers there...

R.H: Why don't you have a museum?

H.R: Well, to look for this stuff now would be hopeless I think, to get a lot of it. We went to a fire chief's convention in New Brunswick once, St. John's, there was six of us went in my car and Harold Morningstar was chief of the No. 2 Company, myself and the chief of St. Catharines, Arthur Birch and our wives. Every fire station we got to, we had to stop. Art had a museum in St. Catharines

Fire Department. So, he was just looking through them for ideas and we got into one down towards New England some place, in Boston, but we were headed for Boston because we knew a fellow there that was fire chief of Arlington, just outside of Boston. He had a firehall second to none and I always wanted to see his museum and firehall so, we went there. But prior to that, we hit a fire station one day and he took us upstairs and he had glass cabinets and the whole upstairs had everything in it, pails, hoses, and it was leather hose, hand sewn leather hose. Art said, "I'd give my right arm for that". He said, "I got a leather pail, I got everything but I haven't got a piece of leather hose". So, he said, "You will have". So, we went on through and he called somebody, one of his men and when we got back into the room, here's a three foot piece of leather hose. He had gone up in the attic and cut a piece off for Art, I just can't believe it. When we got to St. John's, New Brunswick, they had to pack a box and ship it home, we couldn't get it in the car. He had a field day that trip and I think that is still in the St. Catharines Fire Department, they have their museum there. But we've gone too far down the road now. We could've kept our stuff as we went along but they just kept giving it away and they'd forget about it.

R.H: What else have you got for me in your notes?

H.R: I think that's it.

R.H: The first station was the one on Queen Street then?

H.R: Yeah, that's the one that I remember, I don't know what they did prior to that. That had to be built in the '20s in order to house the Model T.

R.H: And you don't know what happened before that?

H.R: No, and whether the steamer was, the pumper was kept there or whether it was kept in the barn, I can't find that out yet. There's only one man that can relate back, maybe close to this, is Ken Minor. He's in that picture (The photograph in the July 1, 1932 programme put out by the Niagara District Firemen's Association) and he's still a very active exempt man. I'll talk to Ken someday and see if he can remember 'cause that was in 1932. He was a young man and he may not go back that far and there's nobody else left, they are all gone.

R.H: I guess you don't even know when it actually started, the first Fire Department?

H.R: Yeah, 1857, that's on the banner and that's hanging in the South End hall now.

R.H: Who were some of the chiefs, can you name them again?

H.R: Yeah, there was Douglas, Bullock, Sumner, Nolan...

R.H: Could you give me the dates too?

H.R: Alright, the first book we went through, was 1914 and Lou Douglas... I figured out from those books up to... there's one set of books missing from 1930, one set, a year's in there, but Lou Douglas was chief before and after the next book so, I think, he was right straight through. So, from '14 to '29, was Lou Douglas, 1930, was Norm Steiman, '31, '32, '33, and '34, was W.L. Bullock, '35 to '38, was Tom Sumner, '39 to '46, was Art Nolan, '47, was Louie Harris, '48, was Art Nolan again and in 1949, I took over from Art and I was fire chief from then until '57, nine years. Now you've got... from Ken, you got Henderson and the rest of them up to the present day, right?

R.H: I know you mentioned fire protection gear, did that change?

H.R: Well, they modernized the helmets and they made waterproof coats that were a lot lighter, the boots are safety toed now with steel plates in the sole. But basically it's all the same, you buckle up and get a helmet on right away.

R.H: Is any of it fire-proof?

H.R: Well, as much as you can get, I guess. The helmets, at one time, we had metal helmets and they would be fire-proof. Now they are mostly plastic, I guess the new helmets, so, I don't think they are actually fire-proof. They may be resistant but the coats, we lost a few coats here and there with the hem burning and it would burn through, they were canvas, rubber lined and they were hot. Oh, you worked in these all buttoned up so that you wouldn't get wet and you were wetter than if you didn't have the coat on sometimes when you got finished. The boots were cumbersome, they are getting into now, a little bit lighter weight, with protective gear in them.

R.H: How old did you have to be to join the Fire Department?

H.R: I don't know what it is now but we had 21 when I was in that time.

You had to retire at 65.

R.H: What about his first-aid training, was there anybody... I know you got people over from Buffalo to teach this training, do you remember who it was?

H.R: Oh, Paul Uster was one of the instructors in first-aid and his mother... he's a Fort Erie lad, he moved to the States and he retired from the Buffalo Fire Department and he was in the alarm office. He worked his way up to the alarm office so he did quite well. Well, then, there was Ted Green and Sy Donovan and they were officers in the Buffalo Fire Training Session and they'd come over and put us through our paces, oh, for five or six months I guess, one year. And then, we took the American Red Cross first-aid training through... oh, how could I forget the man's name?

R.H: Was it Dick...?

H.R: Yeah, Dick Stoll. He was tops, we lost a good man. I think his picture was some place around where we had received first-aid certificates and buttons and Mrs. Staddon got involved in that. She was with the Canadian Red Cross.

R.H: You mentioned that the monthly meetings were held at the Queen's Hotel, and that's going back, can you tell me something about that?

H.R: Yeah, that's prior to '14.

R.H: So, they were held there 'til when?

H.R: Well, up until this new hall was built and I think that would be the early '20s. We had a meeting room in the back of the new hall.

R.H: What about the old hall, did they have a meeting room in the one on Queen Street?

H.R: That's the one I said.

R.H: Oh, I thought you meant...

H.R: No, I had the meeting room in behind, no, this new one was built in '48 and the whole top floor was a meeting room. It was a well layed out hall.

R.H: And how often are your meetings now?

H.R: Twice a month, second and fourth Mondays. I'd like to tell you about one incident, we had a man in the Fire Department, Bill Nicks, his picture is in that paper, (The July 1, 1932 programme put out by The Niagara District Firemen's Association) and they put us through paces. Every man had a fire hose spread out in the field

and every man had picked up a coupling and another man would go back halfway the length and he could carry, transport this hose, hundreds of feet somewhere, hundreds of feet of it around and no problem. So, this one night we were working with the hose and the first night we went up to the inside of the Douglas School, up the stairwells, we got right to the top floor just by two men carrying a length of hose and they were all connected. They could get up there and then they could turn the water on. Well, the next night they got the 40 foot ladder up the side of the building and all of a sudden, up the ladder... so, here we are, about 15 or 20 of us on the roof of the school with all the hose and Bill Nicks sits down and he says, "What am I doing here?" I said, "Why?" He said, "I just spent \$150 to have my gable ends painted", and you know, he froze, we had to take him down on a rope hanger, a saddle.

R.H: You mean he froze up there?

H.R: Yeah, he just... he was scared of heights and he didn't realize it. We were all together going up that ladder and he went up that ladder and got to the top and...

R.H: He couldn't get down, he couldn't move?

H.R: No, but these guys from Buffalo thought that... they'd never seen anything like that before but they helped us get him down. They knew what happened, he just froze.

R.H: But that didn't prevent him from being a fireman, did it?

H.R: Oh no, we just didn't let him go up a ladder but he was a good fireman, other than that. He got up there that night and he said, "I'm crazy, I just spent a \$150 to have my gable ends painted and now I'm up here". He couldn't do anything when he got up there.

R.H: Could you tell me where you got the money to build the new firehall?

H.R: The Town supplied and built the new hall but the East Bertie Firemen, through bingos and fund raising, they own their own building. I'm not sure whether the Town has taken it over since it has gone Region, or what, but I think they maintain it for them. They just put a new addition on themselves, again, I'm pretty sure. And Stevensville built theirs. They are a good bunch of volunteers, I tell you.

R.H: So, does anyone get paid at all? I know the chiefs do but...?

H.R: The chief and the chief driver and they still give a grant to the

total Fire Department and it's up to the officer to decide who gets any part of that. So, every time you are at a fire or a practice or a parade, there's a point system and you divide that number of total points into the money that's available and that's what each one gets, a percentage.

R.H: Is this a yearly grant?

H.R: Yeah, once a year. I'm not even sure what it is anymore now, I can't even remember what it was then.

R.H: Thank-you very much for the interview, it was really interesting and I enjoyed it very much Mr. Ruch.

H.R: You are very welcome, I'm glad I could help to get some of the information together with such short notice. If I can think of anything else, I will get back to you.