

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mr. Patrick Ryan at the Barnea Tavern, 28 Courtwright Street, Fort Erie, Ontario, and the date is August 22, 1985.

**R.H:** Good morning Pat, how are you?

**P.R:** Oh, great thanks.

**R.H:** Could you tell me where you were born?

**P.R:** I was born in Hamilton, Ontario.

**R.H:** When did you come to Fort Erie?

**P.R:** I came here in 1971 on probably...July, I think it was the sixth. It was supposed to have been earlier, but the closing date was held off.

**R.H:** Now, did you come specifically to buy this Tavern or...like had you seen it before you got here?

**P.R:** Oh yeah, I had been down several times before, and looked at it, and really liked the layout of it, so I decided to buy it.

**R.H:** Did you own a bar before or was this your first one?

**P.R:** Oh yeah, this was my first one.

**R.H:** Were you ever in the hotel business before?

**P.R:** No. I had worked in a few of them before, but had just decided to quit my job at Proctor and Gamble and move down here into the pub business.

**R.H:** What was your first impression of Fort Erie?

**P.R:** I liked it.

**R.H:** You liked it, did you?

**P.R:** I liked the small town, and you have a close proximity to almost everything that you want to see. If you want to see any sports you can go over to Buffalo, or you can go to Hamilton and watch the Tiger Cats which we did. You can go to Toronto as well, and everything you want is here. Good schools, and things for the kids, but this is a great area.

**R.H:** Could you tell me approximately when the Barnea was built?

**P.R:** It was 1871 or '72, and I think the reason it was built, was to build a rooming house and that was to accomodate the people that were working on the International Bridge, which is the Railway Bridge coming through Buffalo, from Canada.

**R.H:** So it was strictly a rooming house at the beginning?

**P.R:** Yeah, that's what it was used for, but probably in the back of their

minds, the people that were building it probably were hoping that they would be able to get alcohol.

**R.H:** You mean a license, was it hard to get a license in those days?

**P.R:** I think it was more political just the same as it is now getting things moving in that direction. If you want something you have to politicalize.

**R.H:** So you have to know certain people?

**P.R:** Yeah, that's the way it seems to be.

**R.H:** Was this more-or-less a beer license, or would that be for liquor too?

**P.R:** Well, that was, I think just beer and wine. Those were the first ones that came out.

**R.H:** I guess that was what they first served in the Barnea, wasn't it?

**P.R:** Yeah, but I think mostly...probably more in Canada, I think. They served more beer than the wines and stuff, and the liquor.

**R.H:** So this was a rooming at one time, how many rooms, do you know?

**P.R:** Approximately about 24 rooms I believe, and they used to have, I think they served meals to their clients.

**R.H:** Were the clients mostly men then?

**P.R:** Oh yeah, mostly men. It was just a small room with a lavatory in there and maybe a bath that you could use. They had a...as a matter of fact I could tell you... There was two bathtubs. and two lavatories.

**R.H:** For how many people?

**P.R:** For about 24.

**R.H:** That's interesting, did they come from out of town, these people?

**P.R:** I imagine a lot of the construction people probably did come from out of town. They were probably specialists that did bridge work.

**R.H:** Was there a train station down here at the bottom of Courtwright?

**P.R:** Yeah, well, that was after they had the Bridge built and everything, and they used to... People used to come in on the train, and they used to drop off, and they used to come in to the Barnea. They'd probable have a sandwich, or have their beverage, and then they'd take off on their horse drawn carriages and go up to the Racetrack.

**R.H:** Where did they put these horses?

**P.R:** Oh, they used to tie them right out in the front of the place. They used to have hitching posts, and they also had a big veranda across the front of the hotel where the patrons could sit out.

**R.H:** Oh, there was a large veranda on the front of the Barnea?

**P.R:** Yeah, pretty nice, and it was very airy like. I have pictures of it, but I'm not sure if I've still got them now.

**R.H:** So they used to tie their horses up outside, and didn't they have a livery stable here at one time?

**P.R:** Yes, I think it was on the right hand side of the Barnea, then on the other side...let's see, on the corner side of Klauck Street and Courtwright they had a, sort of a...well, I can't even describe it. It was probably just a building that they used to have the salesman in that came in from Toronto, and Hamilton and all that, probably even from Buffalo. They used to show their wares and sell them right out of this little building.

**R.H:** I believe some of the farmers came in too, and sold some of their wares to the people at the Barnea?

**P.R:** Yeah, that's right. They would be right along the street selling, but I think maybe more on Jarvis Street.

**R.H:** When you bought the Barnea, who was the previous owner?

**P.R:** Oh, Bill Warbuck, and Pauline Warbuck.

**R.H:** Do you know how long they had the Barnea?

**P.R:** They had it approximately 13 years.

**R.H:** Have you any idea who owned it before that? How many of the owners can you mention?

**P.R:** I think before them, there was Pete Furac, and Martin Horvat. They were the owners directly before Bill and Pauline Warbuck. I can only go back so far because, I think you mentioned that there was a Dancy, but I got a Percy Rice and he took it back from a Bob Beatty who had it only for a year and a half, then Percy Rice also had it before that.

**R.H:** He had it before Bob Beatty?

**P.R:** Yeah, he got it from Mrs. Barnea, because I think he was probably a nephew or something in between. Now, this is from Harold Western who originally... We got together and talked about this, and he said that Mr. Beatty didn't last because he mostly spent his time over in Buffalo spending the money that he made. He wasn't able to pay the \$1,000 that they were asking for, to pay the bills.

**R.H:** Do you know if this Harold Western was raised by Percy Rice, that owned or managed the Barnea at one time?



**P.R:** Yes, and I think Percy Rice took over for Mrs. Barnea when she wasn't able to do it.

**R.H:** Could you tell me what the Barnea looked like when you first bought it, and what changes you made?

**P.R:** Well, when I first came in the previous owners were in the throes of I think, of putting in carpeting and that, because I think they were going for another license at that time and when I first came in, there was tile floors, or old linoleum really, all different colours. The walls were pink, and the ceiling was black, charcoal black. It's still right underneath there. As I think back, when I took over, they had already put the carpeting down, over the linoleum, and over about 1,000 floors I guess. The floors really needed it. The only things that's really been changed is the ceilings. We dropped the ceilings and put in those tiles, and we changed the wallboard twice. First of all we painted it, we dropped the pink. I think they used to have Christmas lights up all year round.

**R.H:** Do you mean on the outside?

**P.R:** No, inside there, and there used to be a divider here in the, what they used to call the ladies and escorts room, and then we ripped that divider down and took out the old lights and the birds and stuff that they had in here.

**R.H:** They had birds, what do you mean?

**P.R:** Yeah, those little ones that you got out of Lipton's. They used to give out these little birds out of Lipton's Tea.

**R.H:** Where were they hanging?

**P.R:** They were all attached to those old flowers and everything. Well, we just had to clean it out, 'cause it was so old and everything. Then we changed pretty well...everything upstairs has been changed. From 24 rooms it's now about two, three... I'm trying to think. There's a five room apartment and then there's a sort of like a recreation room that the kids use for a gym. In the back we put on a sundeck on the flat part of the roof over on top of the ladies restroom area, and I've got an office up there, and another little stock room and there's about three or four rooms we used for storage, stuff we should throw out. We added an addition on to the back three years ago. I think it cost \$36,000, just for storage too. We changed the kitchen a lot because in the beginning when we came



here, they had a hot beef on wick, and they used to have the Barnea beef special, and the Barnea ham special. So we kept the Barnea beef and ham specials and the beef on wick, and I brought in something that caught fire over here and that was chicken wings. I brought them in to Fort Erie, and ever since, everybody else has got them now. I got the recipe really from one of my friends over in Buffalo and he didn't want to give it up but he said "Oh sure, what the heck".

**R.H:** Yeah, because Buffalo had them first, right?

**P.R:** Yeah, probably that used to be at the Anchor Bar, but I didn't get the recipe from there. I got it from a little Jewish fellow. He used to own a bar on Pearl Street.

**R.H:** So you made quite a few changes and you were saying they had 20 rooms upstairs, have you any idea of the size of these rooms then?

**P.R:** Oh yeah, they were really dank and small. Some of them you couldn't swing a cat in them. Some of them were a little larger but most of them were... We stopped all the renting of the rooms I think about '73 and we only had one person anyway, that was ever in as a roomer. When he died we closed it down. We didn't want that kind of element in the area, not that there is anything wrong with renting rooms. It's just that the transient trade you get now is a lot different now than you got years ago. We used to have entertainment three nights a week, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. It used to be a big thing, we used to have entertainment and we used to have single acts 'cause it is a small place and that went pretty good.

**R.H:** Who were some of the entertainers?

**P.R:** Oh, we had Carol Capena who was a good singer from around here. She had a very good following and I think there was two other people who used to play like... One used to play the drums and the other one used to play the guitar. Carol used to play the guitar and she had a great following mainly from Buffalo. We then went to single groups and... After a while my patrons said "Pat, why don't you get rid of them all and we'll just stop having entertainment," 'cause they said "most of us just like coming in and talking, and having a drink and listening to the jukebox and stuff like that".

**R.H:** So it became like a meeting place?

**P.R:** Yeah, right. We had probably a few people that started off here. We had the... as a matter of fact the Meteors who will be playing

who will be playing town right now, started off here. Sheila and Gerry, oh yeah, they were great. I used to have them... well, I still do have them for the Irish night. Oh, it was great, they were super.

**R.H:** You mentioned that when the Barnea first opened, it was primarily a rooming house, was it for the railroad workers too?

**P.R:** I think a lot of them, after the Bridge was constructed, was how they got their main group of people from, plus the travelling salesmen that they used to accomodate with that little showroom to the side, or the show area off to the side, or show area that they used to have in that building. There was probably a few of the salesmen that used to stay over one night or two nights in their travels.

**R.H:** Did you ever find out how much they charged for a room?

**P.R:** No, no, but it was probably very reasonable, nothing like now.

**R.H:** What other information did you get about the Barnea when you were researching into the history of the place?

**P.R:** Well, let's see... I always get a kick out of, I don't know, from the stories I've heard. Jack can even verify this. (Jack is the waiter who works at the Barnea) Was it Pete Furac who used to grab the money out of the till? (Pat put this question to Jack) Yeah, he used to grab the money out of the till, and sign Percy Detenbeck's name. (Jack mentioned that he used this money for gambling).

**R.H:** He was a gambler then, this Pete?

**P.R:** Down at the boathouse he did. He used to get about a 100 one dollar bills and put one ten on top to make it look like it was all tens.

**R.H:** He used to take this money for gambling?

**P.R:** Yeah, he used to go down to the boathouse. (Jack says, Pete used to make sure he got back before Martin came down) He used to sign one of the customers names. It was an I.O.U. saying they owed Martin \$200. Martin Horvat found out that it wasn't right.

**R.H:** You mean that Pete Furac put that note in the till?

**P.R:** Yeah, Pete Furac used to put in, \$200 owed by Percy Detenbeck. He would put it in the till you see, but one day Martin comes down and he says "Percy, get over here, you owe me \$200" and he says "I do not" he says "Well, here's the note" and Percy says "I haven't borrowed any money from you" so that's how he found out Pete

was grabbing the money. He was going down to the boathouse gambling. Those are just funny little things that happen.

**R.H:** Did you find out if there was any other businesses on this street?

**P.R:** Oh golly, I never ever thought about that, but I imagine there was too. I think there was something about woodworking but I'm not sure. As a matter of fact up near the Courtwright Tavern which was the Drake, which was... What was it before that? You see the Barnea has been the Barnea ever since it was opened. It has never changed names, so maybe the next owners after me will probably change the name or something. Maybe they'll just name it Barney.

**R.H:** Was the exterior of the Barnea ever changed?

**P.R:** Oh yeah, I had gone on vacation and got back one day and I guess the day before I got back, someone put a rock on the accelerator of a car, and sent it right in to the Barnea. It went right through the front doors, went right through the front doors and everything, business as usual.

**R.H:** So you had to change the front?

**P.R:** Well, we had to change it then, and then the insurance company that was insuring me went under, and I lost \$5,000 repairing the front of the building.

**R.H:** Do you know what year that was?

**P.R:** It was maybe five years ago, six, maybe even more than that. We have changed it a lot .

**R.H:** Has the main room always been two separate rooms like this?

**P.R:** No, it hasn't always been two separate rooms like this. When I first came, it used to be... it used to only be to about here, about three feet past the end of the bar on the left hand side. The building is about half that, just half of the building was here. As a matter of fact I imagine it was right to this part right here and then right across. They built on that ladies part there, which made it a little longer and they built a cellar underneath that. The walls in the building are about two feet thick, they are the old fieldstone, and all the top part used to be all separate rooms. Do you see where these little jets are out, halfway up the room? That's because they were all different little rooms, and they said there was just a little peephole were they used to come out and serve you beer.

**R.H:** Where was this?



**P.R:** Right over here to your right.

**R.H:** Right over there at that right hand wall in front of the bar? So that would be...?

**P.R:** Yeah, that's where they drew it up from the basement.

**R.H:** Oh, that's where the beer came from?

**P.R:** Yeah, the beer came from the basement.

**R.H:** Was it in kegs?

**P.R:** Yeah, big wooden kegs I would imagine. I'm not sure how they did it.

**R.H:** So that's how they served it, from the basement? I guess they didn't have the bar then?

**P.R:** No, not then, no.

**R.H:** Of course the bar was there when you came in, right?

**P.R:** The bar was in when I came in, and they had just put it in about two or three years before. It was the old bar from the Fort Erie Hotel.

**R.H:** So that bar came from the Fort Erie Hotel, did it?

**P.R:** Yeah, that was kind of sad to see that go.

**R.H:** What about the kitchen, did you change that?

**P.R:** Well, we changed it quite a bit, because when we started out it was only like I said ham specials, beef specials, and hot beef on wick which is just roast beef cut up, and sliced in gravy. We used to serve it right off the front of the bar here. Then we got into more elaborate... we bought more refrigeration, and more counter space, we put in more counter space, and we bought a huge stove. The business sort of went up quite a bit from when we first came in, 'cause I remember when Jack and I, we used to be... Jack's been here so long, he's got more information, but a lot of the stuff, I think he forgets now.

**R.H:** How long has Jack been here?

**P.R:** Probably 42, 43 years. When we first started, the business was I think, on a low ebb, and then when we came in it started picking up and picking up until it hit a peak, probably three years ago. Well, maybe five years ago or seven, I don't know, but it's pretty well run on the same level since then. After a while you get stale in the business, and I think you get tired out. Kitchen area, we started getting into like I said, I brought in the chicken wings

and that really went over great, people really enjoyed those. Now, we have hot beef dinners, and hot turkey, and we used to have... New Year's used to be our big splash at one time, almost as good as St. Patrick's day but St. Patrick's was always the best day. and still is. On New Year's Eve we used to have open house, and we used to have everybody in. Sometimes we used to have entertainment, and sometimes people just sort of brought in music that they liked. We used to play it on our record player, or our tape-recorder. As it progressed, radio was brought in, and television has got so big, and they've done some nice shows and stuff like that. We used to clear out one spot and we used to have dancing for the people, and we used to set up the drinks just at regular prices and everything. We used to give out horns, and hats and all the various things, and we used to serve them a meal at 12 o'clock. We used to start serving this meal, and there was no cost to you. We used to just serve you, maybe a turkey sandwich on a bun with potato salad, and some coleslaw, and we used to have as much coffee as you wanted so you'd be able to drive home safely. People really caught on, and they really enjoyed it so much, and eventually it got so big that we used to close at about six o'clock on New Year's Eve, and we'd open again about seven. At one time we used to have hedges that were around the side of the building, and they used to be lined up to get in to the place, right around the corner, right down Klauck Street, to get in for this New Year's Eve party. I think a lot of people started having New Year's Eve parties at home because they said "They didn't want to have drinking, and driving, and stuff", so that petered out. Now we don't even bother opening on New Year's Eve.

**R.H:** Before you changed the kitchen, was there a lot of the old things still in the kitchen?

**P.R:** No, it was pretty well raked out by the time we got there. Most of the stuff that was old or vintage or anything, I think Bill and Pauline pretty well took out of the place. Most of the stuff that was found, was old bottles and things underneath the building. I guess the previous owners after they finished them, would chuck them underneath the building. When we renovated the... when we did a lot of the plumbing work, they found an awful lot of the

bottles, but I sold a lot of the bottles too. I guess they were pretty valuable too, some of the them.

**R.H:** I heard that during Prohibition this place was sold for \$3,000, is that right, do you know?

**P.R:** That's hard to believe. Well, I guess \$3,000 was kind of a lot of money at that time 'cause everything was so inexpensive and that. Well, remember Bob Beatty, because he didn't have a \$1,000, he lost the place. He lost it for \$1,000 and I don't know what year that was. It must have been in the '30s or something like that. I thought, gee whiz, that a guy should lose a place for a \$1,000, that's kind of sad.

**R.H:** It seems unwise to sell it during Prohibition when the States were dry, doesn't it?

**P.R:** That's right, you'd think they'd be thriving over here. At that time, there was probably a lot of people who didn't have transportation, and stuff like that back then. Buffalo wasn't that big and thriving then either, and that's probably were all the speakeasies where. They had a lot of that. A lot of the people used to say "That they used to make runs with liquor and that". A lot of people made a lot of money in Canada with the rum smuggling.

**R.H:** Could you tell me anything about the porch, do you know when it was taken down at all?

**P.R:** I don't know. Hey Jack! (Pat was calling Jack the waiter, but he wasn't available at the time) Why don't I get Harold Western to call you and...

**R.H:** I'd like to thank you for the interview Pat, thank you very much.

**P.R:** It was very enjoyable, and I really enjoyed talking to you. Thank you very much Rose.