

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mr. Ken Stouffer 224 Stanton Street,  
Fort Erie, Ontario, and the date is September 24, 1985.

**R.H:** Good morning Mr. Stouffer.

**K.S:** Good morning Mrs. Hearn.

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

**K.S:** July 3rd, 1919.

**R.H:** And where were you born?

**K.S:** Alsask, Saskatchewan. That's not a true statement exactly because Alsask, Saskatchewan is where my brother is registered but I was actually born across the border in Alberta in our home there, our farmhouse. Strangely enough when my older brother and I applied for our old age pension, it was registered in Alsask, Saskatchewan but on a Province of Alberta birth certificate. Of course they questioned it, they said, "Well, make up your mind, where were you born?" So, when I applied for mine, I just wrote a little note explaining what it was and I never had any problems with it.

**R.H:** So, you went to school there and everything?

**K.S:** No, we moved to Northern Ontario, near Dryden and that was when I was five years old. Of course there was not many schools there, and part of my education was correspondence courses the government ran up in that area. The school guard came through on the railroad every so often, and they gave you your assignments that you had to do at home and you had school work occasionally to get...

**R.H:** There weren't too many people living up there, right?

**K.S:** No, in fact where I was, there was very few. I was actually north of Dryden, about five miles on the C.N.R. near Ainsdale actually, which is no more. There was about 90 to a 100 people living there when I lived there,, now there is about 15.

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

**K.S:** Just before the war, I wasn't here very long. I came down and I worked...

**R.H:** You are talking about when you were an adult of course?

**K.S:** Yeah, well, I was 18 actually, when I came down to Fort Erie. I was handy with making things and that and I decided I was going to be a carpenter. I went to work, I forget the contractor's name now but I worked on unit no. 3 that they built at Fleet, at the start of the war. They built that unit onto Fleet. Then I went down

to Niagara Falls, I worked on the Cyanamid in Port Robinson.

**R.H:** The what?

**K.S:** The Cyanamid Building, it was a chemical plant for making explosives. They were building all new buildings there and of course I worked on construction there for a while. I joined the air-force the following spring and went in as an air engineer mechanic and trained at St. Thomas, I was there for six months. I thought how unfortunate I was, I was shipped directly overseas. From there, overseas, I remustered to flight engineer. I flew Lancasters for a while, I was four years overseas.

**R.H:** The make of the plane you flew, was it called the Lancaster?

**K.S:** Yeah.

**R.H:** Were they made at Fleet?

**K.S:** Some of the wings and the tail sections were made at Fleet, yeah.

**R.H:** When you came back, what did...?

**K.S:** When I came back I went to work for W.P. Troupe who was a building contractor.

**R.H:** He seems to be quite well known?

**K.S:** Yeah, he was quite a large building contractor. I worked for him 'til... oh, 1945 'til 1952. Then an architect who had a summer cottage over here, we used to do a lot of work for Americans along the beach, and I got to know him pretty well and he used to draw plans for some of these houses that he built along the beach.

**R.H:** What beach would that be?

**K.S:** Well, it would be all along, right up to Port Colborne. We built a house up on Lorrain, up on the sandhills there, this side of Port Colborne. We built them along Bertie Bay Road, right along, right down to Erie Beach. Part of the work was remodelling and building the houses. So, anyway this architect talked me into going over to Buffalo to work. I tried for my visa and that took me about three months to get it at that time.

**R.H:** Were you working as a carpenter for him?

**K.S:** Yeah.

**R.H:** Could you tell me the name of the architect?

**K.S:** Oh, Gordie Hayes, he's dead now. He was a real nice guy and of course when I did finally go to Buffalo, he gave me two names to contact. He recommended these two names for me to go to work

for. So, I went to see one of them and I didn't really like the work I would be doing, it would be only one thing. It was a big outfit and I would be like, nailing on casings, that would be all that I would be doing, so, I didn't like that too much. I went up to see the other... Gus Arvidson was his name, he was a small contractor, building residential houses.

**R.H:** Was he over here in Fort Erie?

**K.S:** No, he was in Buffalo but I went to work for him. I could have worked for either one, they would have hired me and things were booming. You could get a job just about any place. I worked for... Well, Gus Arvidson, he retired after about five years after I came over, he was quite old and Hugh Perry took over. I worked for him for 29 years 'til I retired. You couldn't get a better boss, he was great. I was foreman, I guess for the last 15, 20 years, I had a great job.

**R.H:** When did you get involved with the Fire Department?

**K.S:** In about 1952 I think it was, that I joined the Fire Department. I enjoyed it and I guess the second or third year I was in, I got elected to Fire Officer.

**R.H:** What did you get elected to?

**K.S:** A Fire Officer, I got elected to a Fire Officer. I was a Fire Officer continuously up until the time I... I was Chief for 12 years, the last 12 years that I was involved as a Fire Officer. I was Chief 'til 197... I guess it was '75. I really enjoyed it, I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

**R.H:** Did you need special qualifications to get in the Fire Department?

**K.S:** Not to get in, no, but if you were smart and valued your own safety, it was to your advantage to learn all you could.

**R.H:** Was there a training period in the Fire Department?

**K.S:** Not really, but of course you didn't do too much when you first went to the first few fires. You didn't put on a hot air mask and go into the building or... all you did was help with the nozzle and help with the hose... There was always people who knew what they were doing that would tell you what to do, and you need people to help.

**R.H:** So, it was more-or-less on the job training?

**K.S:** Yes, and of course there was practice every month, at that time

it was once a month. Then, of course I was only in there two years and I got involved in the Niagara District Fire Training Program which was very good then and it's still going on. I was on the education committee five years after I got on the Fire Department and of course, I attended fire school every year, even the first year.

**R.H:** Where was fire school?

**K.S:** Well, fire school... the first one I attended was in Merrittown, they used to move it around. They were in Port Colborne, Merrittown, anywhere in the Niagara District they'd take charge and hold fire school every spring for one weekend, just teaching the basics of the Fire Department. I got on the education committee about five years after I joined and from then on I started instructing. They would go to classes either in Niagara Falls, mostly in Niagara Falls, all winter. You'd take these courses with the other fellows and train them and as a rule some of the paid department members from Niagara Falls would be there. It was instructors to teach the instructors, more-or-less. During that 20 years that I was involved on the education committee, I got to know them and I was teaching just about every subject on fire fighting. I was chairman for three years, of the education committee and I learned an awful lot about fire fighting and of course this is bound to help you in your own department. Ruch was chief when I was in and he was a very good chief, I think he was in there nine years. When he decided that he'd had enough of it... It was kind of a tough job I guess, Henderson took over for, I think he was there for five years and then he left. His job took him to Burlington, him and his brother started a business up there. So, I was elected chief and I was involved with the Niagara District for 20 years, I guess.

**R.H:** When you say you were in the Fire Department, which company did you belong to?

**K.S:** Well, at that time there were two Fort Erie Fire Companies when I first got involved. We got along well and...

**R.H:** Which one were you with?

**K.S:** Fire Company No.1 and of course Alf White was chief for quite a while when I was chief...

**R.H:** He was chief fo Fire Company No. 2?

**K.S:** No. 2,yeah. We got along well, the two departments. There was a little rivalry naturally, but we worked together on fire prevention

and a number of things and still do as a matter of fact. But of course then Regional Government came along and there was a lot of disruptions as far as the Police Department and the Fire Department but they left the Fire Department thank goodness, more-or-less the way they were.

**R.H:** When did Regional Government come in?

**K.S:** I'm not sure, around 1970 or '71 or...

**R.H:** It didn't interfere with the Fire Department then?

**K.S:** No, it didn't change the operation of the Fire Department too much.

The Fort Erie Police Department used to handle all our fire calls 'til Regional Government took over. It worked very good, we got along great with the Police Department. Of course back in the old days, there were no radios. When I first got in the Fire Department there were no radios on the trucks or...

**R.H:** How did you get the calls?

**K.S:** The police used to get the calls and I'd blow the sirens and they'd tell us where the fire was and that's the only contact we had. Of course the police cruiser would come around as a rule, be there, and tell us... they had radios then. Of course now we are radio equipped. When Regional Government took over, the police were regionalized and they didn't want to handle fire calls any more, so we got the alarm centre set up. It actually works better than it did through the Police Department. With all the radio contact you have, it's great.

**R.H:** Was Chris Wren responsible for setting this up?

**K.S:** Yeah, the alarm centre. I forget what the name of it was but it's the one that's there now, Bomar Alarms. Of course that wasn't the name of it then. Chris Wren was the guy that started it up. He was a pretty smart guy.

**R.H:** How does that work in connection with the Fire Department?

**K.S:** Well, there's a fire number in Fort Erie, greater Fort Erie, which includes Crystal Beach, Stevensville, and others and of course it's 871-1200. If you dial that number, you get through to Bomar. They've got charts down there of all the different areas, and who ever calls in, has to give their name and phone number. They can look it up on the chart, tell what street it's near, where the hydrants are that are close to it, and they can blow the siren in each hall. That isn't

the main thing now, everybody has these monitors, little radio receivers. They carry them on their belt and they just push a button and alerts what ever station the fire is in and they tell them where the fire is. Of course, they can blow the siren too but they don't do it at night anymore.

**R.H:** As you went to the fire, did they keep in touch with you?

**K.S:** Oh yeah, you can call them. There was radios in all the trucks and you could call them. Of course the first person the driver answers and gets the call, starts out, calls the alarm and says, "We're on the way" and maybe confirm the location.

**R.H:** Do they relay the information about where the fire hydrants are or...?

**K.S:** Yeah, when the driver first calls in to say they are on the way, they'll tell them where the cross street is or the location of the nearest fire hydrant, stuff like that.

**R.H:** Did you have to take any life saving training?

**K.S:** Yes, first aid. We were fortunate that over the... Years ago, we got to know this Dick Stoll who was a first aid instructor, in charge of first aid for the American Red Cross and he was a great guy. He used to train all the Fire Departments in Erie County and further afield than that. He'd go to any firehall, he'd give instructions on any phase of first aid and actually, I don't know when it was, he came over and gave us the first training in mouth to mouth resuscitation. We got it first of any department in the Niagara area. There may have been others in Toronto or somewhere that got it sooner or the same time we did, but I know we got it first in the Niagara area. He was a good friend and when this came out, he came over and gave us the training on it. We had water rescue training, we had a demonstration right here, out here on the river years ago which he put on, which was not too common in those days. When I was chief, he brought over a big steamer trunk full of first aid stuff, gave it to us, made a presentation.

**R.H:** So, you had to have this training after you got in?

**K.S:** Well, you had to know the basics of first aid, we didn't have to know too much. Of course after this mouth to mouth resuscitation was introduced, we all learned it. I don't know whether it's a good thing or not, no doubt it saves lives but it does have it's pros and cons.



If you save a life and they are going to be a vegetable the rest of their life... you know, this is something I've always been afraid that this might happen. It's good training and of course C.P.R. now, Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation or... I got into that a little bit but that's something that's a little newer and of course the Fire Department is really involved in it. They teach it at the firehall every winter, classes go on and they teach this C.P.R.

**R.H:** Did you ever hear anyone talking about a fire on the ship, the M.T. Green?

**K.S:** No, I never heard anything about that, if I did, it didn't stay with me.

**R.H:** What about equipment, did you have good equipment?

**K.S:** Not that great. No. 1 Fire Company had an old Bickle, now I don't know what year it was but I think it was a 1927 Bickle.

**R.H:** Was this the fire truck?

**K.S:** That's a fire truck. Now, you can still see this Bickle because the Racetrack has it. If you watch the parades, Jack Kellar who was and old time member, he drives it as a rule. He drives it in the parades and of course they fixed it all up, chromed all the parts that show and fixed it up and it's worth a mint. We gave it to the Jockey Club, sold it to them for a dollar actually, because we didn't have room for it. We got the new truck, we had to put the new truck in of course and we just didn't have the room to put this old Bickle in, so we just gave it up. I think there's a stipulation that if they ever get rid of it, we have the first bid, crack at it. We had that truck and we had the 1951 Lafrance and they were both... neither one of them were class A pumpers. The old Bickle was an old gear type pump that's just outdated, they never use that kind anymore, but the Lafrance was a centrifugal pump, the same as they have now but it didn't have much capacity, it was only a five speed pump. It would pump, I guess it was a five pound gallon per minute but not at much pressure. I think it was in 1961 or '62, Doug McClary who passed away a few years ago, we lost him when he was quite young. He was chief driver and he started saying, "This is ridiculous, we need a new pumper". Freddy Henderson was the chief at that time and he went down to Council and told them. You didn't get money too easily out of Council in them days for

anything, but anyway they okayed it. I was chairman of this committee for to get a new pumper so we drew up specifications, put it out for bids and Thibault submitted the low bid, so we got a Thibault pumper. I think it was a 1951 '52 or '51, I'm pretty sure it was and that was a good pumper. It was a class A pumper and it really did the job. We also specified that it should carry 600 gallons of water which at that time was quite a bit. Nobody had ever carried 600 gallons, they always had 400 or 500, 500 was about the highest. We said we wanted it and we got it anyway. That truck is still in service and it does a reasonably good job because it has most of the connections and parts that they have today. Of course the trucks today, not only do they cost five or six times as much, but they have a few more things on them, more modern.

**R.H:** What would be the water capacity on these new trucks?

**K.S:** Well, the aerial... we got a new aerial, the Town bought an aerial truck and that's placed in our hall. It's an 840 gallon per minute pump which pumps a lot of water. Now we have, No. 2 Company, all the companies in Fort Erie have got modernized equipment over the years, it's in very good shape really for equipment now. The Rotary Club has been very good over the years, they supplied us with a rescue rig way back in... well, shortly after I got in. Of course that sort of went out of date, it was a small, I think it was a Chev van or something, but you couldn't stand up in it. Then they bought us the one that was... like the big bread trucks, something like that. You could walk in it and there's quite a bit of equipment on it and they supplied that. It was around 1960 that they replaced the original. They bought a new one two years ago, really a good one. It has dual wheels and it has all the equipment on it and there was a couple of service clubs involved, supplying this thing. The service clubs have been very good to us in helping out.

**R.H:** If you really wanted something, you had to submit your request to Council, right?

**K.S:** Yeah. Well, you know as well as I do, how things go. Years ago when there was just the two Fire Departments, No.1 and No. 2, before Regional Government took over, our cost for fire equipment was ridiculously low in Fort Erie. One year, I noticed that the cost per capita, of course this includes women and children and everybody,



was a dollar fifty one per person which was terribly cheap. Of course they didn't have any major expenditures in that year for equipment and we didn't have a lot of big fires that can run your cost up too. So, that was an unbelievably low cost. I don't know what it is today, but that was just one example of one year that we had such a low cost for operating the Fire Department. When Regional took over, of course everybody... The Fire Department in Bertie Township were getting more money than we were 'cause they had a paid chief and a paid deputy. Those guys, they were always having to spend more money than the volunteers just to make their... well, how would you put it? They wanted to justify their existence, that's what I felt anyway. So, they would say, "We need this and we'll do this" and the volunteers of course felt, well, these guys are getting paid, maybe we should get a little more for our services and they did get more. Of course when Regional Government took over, naturally they were going to take a cut in pay, we were put up to their level. We got twice as much or more than what we had been getting. When you start getting into a whole lot better alarm system, because they had to reach all these outlying areas with their radio signals, the cost went up, which is natural. It didn't go up near as much as it would have, if we'd been regionalized, like the Police Department but that's another story.

**R.H:** So you do get some kind of payment?

**K.S:** Well, our company... now different companies do it different but we have a point system. You get so many points for attending a fire, you get so many points for attending a practice, so many points for attending a parade, of course for the parade you don't get many points. The practices and the fires give you the most. There's points for different things and you get a grant from the Town for fire pay and I don't know what it is now. It used to be, way back in the olden days, it used to be a couple of thousand dollars but it's a lot more now. This all divided up, the total number of points is divided into this grant. Whatever each point is worth, you get that for the number of points you have accumulated over the year, so this is always the way we have done it. It has worked very good and so far as getting paid, you don't get paid, you get some remuneration for what you do.

**R.H:** What about uniforms, do you have to go to the Council for them too?

**K.S:** Yes, there was another big deal which was a big expense when Regional took over. We suddenly ended up with six departments instead of two in Fort Erie. Of course when we had two, No. 1 Company and No. 2 Company had uniforms that were basically the same, but they weren't exactly the same. I think we had a red stripe on our trousers and they had a black stripe, or something like that. Their badges were different but basically they were the same, the blue serge. Of course East Bertie, they had a tunic sort of affair that was a sort of a marching parade uniform. It looked real nice but it didn't look like a fireman's uniform to me. Ridgeway had another one altogether and Stevensville had a different one too, Crystal Beach was different. So, we all got together and we had a committee formed and we used to have meetings and we decided to buy new uniforms. The ones that had just been approved, were the Canadian Fire Service Men... The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, they set up a committee then to come up with a uniform that could be standard across Canada. You wouldn't believe the different uniforms that every department had across the country. I used to go to these fire chief's conventions all over Canada and I'd see them and it was really funny. But anyway, we decided to get the uniforms, so now we've all got the same uniforms, the standard uniform which... not every department has got, in Canada or Ontario, the same ones, you'll still see some that are different. Niagara Falls still doesn't have the standard uniform but it's so close, you can't tell the difference. I think their hats are a little different and I guess their badges are, they aren't the standard badges but I think they are using the standard badges now. Of course this committee that the fire chiefs set up years ago, came out with it, so, it's really good that way. Of course, these uniforms cost us a mint, we had to buy all of them at once.

**R.H:** So, who paid for them?

**K.S:** The Town paid for them. Regional Government realized they had to come up with some money if they wanted this thing to work. I still don't know whether we were better off with Regional Government than we were when we were on our own. I think that... like, I was involved with the police in a lot of things. They used to co-operate, they used to handle our alarms and everything. I found that you knew everybody on a first name basis, everybody didn't but I did.

I knew everybody in the Police Department, the sergeants and the chief, like Trevor Mathews, I knew him real well. I thought it was a lot better because they knew so many intimate details of the people and the operation of everything. I thought it was better than this Regional Government. They are so aloof and you call the police and you get the operator in some cabinet and he don't know what the hell is going on. Unless you know what you want, tell him, "I want the Fort Erie dispatcher" but half the time they're all... The cost, of course, for police protection has gone sky high. There are some things I guess that probably are better, that's supposed to be progress I guess, but they are paying for it. I look at my tax bill and I see just about as much for Regional Government as I do for our own government, you know, local government, and what does it mean?

**R.H:** Was the station house always there on Bertie Street?

**K.S:** No, that was built in 1948. Before that, you know where the old Town Hall is, the Legion building? There was a garage apparently on the west side of the Town Hall that would house the fire equipment. It was a small garage and it housed the fire apparatus and back in the old days when the horses pulled the apparatus, there was two guys that had teams of horses, now I don't remember their names, but I think one of them was Ted Hawkins but I'm not sure. When the old alarm would go, whoever got there first, their horses used to pull the fire apparatus and they used to get a dollar and a half, something, for digging out the apparatus. That's how it used to operate and in 1948 they moved into the one that's up on Bertie Street.

**R.H:** That was a brand new building I assume?

**K.S:** Oh yeah, they built it. It was quite adequate at the time but of course when I was chief, we built an addition on.

**R.H:** I was just going to ask, did you add to that building?

**K.S:** Yeah, we put another bay and we built the rooms upstairs. We've got a meeting room, a lounge, and a sort of games room, upstairs over that new part there. Of course, me being in the construction business, I took it upon myself to draw the plans and oversee the work. We did all the work ourselves, like, I would call four or five guys each night and then come up and meet there. Of course, we didn't do the brick work, Guy Violino, that was the mason contractor,

a building contractor, he did the mason work, the brick work and stuff like that. But as far as finishing a lot of the bull work, we finished that ourselves. I think it cost the Town just under \$20,000 and if we'd have had it done by contractors... we did get a price on it, I think it was \$46,000 it was going to cost us.

**R.H:** So, you saved them quite a bit of money, right?

**K.S:** Yeah, we saved them quite a bit.

**R.H:** Did they appreciate it?

**K.S:** Well, yes, I think they did and Jack Teal was mayor then. He put it in the press and that and...

**R.H:** I know that it is all volunteer and you all had full-time jobs as well, so did they have to carry a beeper with them?

**K.S:** Oh yeah. It's a lot better now than it was, because we didn't have those beepers. They would hear the siren or someone would call them maybe, their wives or whatever, just call them at work. If they worked too far away to hear the siren, then, they would call them at work, providing their employer would agree to let them go. A lot of employers won't let them off, a lot of them do, like, Fleet lets them off. Most of them are pretty good that way. Where our company was always fortunate, we've always had a number of men that worked on the Customs, on the Bridge and they are shift work of course. A lot of them are around in the daytime and of course, there are other jobs too, that are shift work. Take for instance, Red Thompson, he was his own boss and he lived right there on Bertie and he would answer the alarm. he was generally the first one there to find out where the fire was. Now, if he happened to be real busy and couldn't go and if they had enough guys, he would go back over to his store, but he was always there. I would say we always had more than three guys on Customs who were off, which made a big difference.

**R.H:** How many men did you actually need to go out on a fire call?

**K.S:** Well, the minimum... you could take the pumper out with three men if you had to. It has happened many times but they respond and...

**R.H:** Does it depend on the fire?

**K.S:** No, not really because you don't know how the fire is 'til you go on the call. If there are three guys there, they will go with the

pumper and of course as the guys come in, there is always other people showing up. They might have to come a little farther and they'll come to the fire directly with their car or bring the other apparatus. They'll take the pumper first and they'll bring the rescue unit and before they get there, if they need the aerial, they'll get people to bring that.

**R.H:** So, you can go with three people?

**K.S:** Yeah, I've gone often with three and as matter of fact, when I first got into the department, we went to a parade over in Buffalo and when we came back, we weren't home too... well, two of us came back together and the siren went, we went over, there was only two of us. Of course, they were all still at the parade and hadn't got back yet. So, the police said, "It's Pierce and Stevens". Well, the last place you want to go for a fire. We waited, well, it seemed like an hour but it was probably only two minutes to see if anyone else was coming. This other fellow was the driver and I wasn't even an officer, I was just a rookie in the Fire Department. I knew how to use the nozzle so we said, "Well, we are going" and we told the police. When they call, the police of course, they naturally would notify No. 2 Company when it's a bad deal, a school, that's the rule of the call, both companies. The two of us, we got over there, turned the pump on and I got off the booster line and I broke the windows. I could see the fire inside the window so I pushed the nozzle in and I was spraying in there and I was never so scared in my life because if there had been an explosion it would have come right down on top of me. We had quite a lot of damage there, No. 2 came eventually and of course our fellows started coming back. We had enough to operate, but it was a bad fire.

**R.H:** Where was Pierce and Stevens?

**K.S:** Same place as it is today.

**R.H:** I don't know where it is.

**K.S:** Oh, you don't know where it is? A big outfit like that. Well, let's see, you know where the Racetrack is? Well, when you come out of the main gate of the Racetrack, it's right on your left as you come out. There's a number of buildings there and that big block building is Pierce and Stevens.

**R.H:** Was there a lot of damage down there?



**K.S:** Well, not really to the main building, it was just where the fire did the most damage. There was quite a bit in there. I shouldn't say there was a lot of damage because it didn't affect the place where they make the paint, just the warehouse.

**R.H:** Do you know when this happened?

**K.S:** It would be about '63 or '64, somewhere in there. Of course they've had other fires in there since that. They had one in the office area about '70, around 1970. It did quite a bit of damage to the office area, it didn't gut it or anything, just a lot of smoke, fire damage, and water damage.

**R.H:** Was there any other buildings, such as historical buildings that were burned down?

**K.S:** Well, Knox Church of course. Do you remember when that burned down?

**R.H:** Knox Church? Is that on...?

**K.S:** Knox Presbyterian Church. That would be No. 2 Company's area. It wasn't our fire but of course we went down and helped them. That was quite a historical place. It burned right to the ground. Niagara Hardware and Lumber is another big fire we had too... that was real bad and of course that was set and the wind was just blowing...

**R.H:** Where was the Niagara Hardware and Lumber Company?

**K.S:** Where the... at the foot of Bertie Street. That Marina place there, that was Niagara Hardware and Lumber. Of course as you come down Bertie Street there was a lot more buildings on the left that went down along that road by the river there. They were just storage buildings and real firetraps. Of course somebody threw a match in there, the east wind was blowing real strong and we had no chance of saving it. We had four fire companies there then. The only thing that we could save was the office area and the main hardware. Well, that part that's standing there now was all we could save. But there was water and smoke damage in that even. This terrific wind blew everything up through the building. I guess we were lucky to save any of it.

**R.H:** [Mr. Stouffer has some notes with him] Have you got anything in your notes you'd like to mention?

**K.S:** Well, I've just got some dates down here that might interest you.



We've got a banner in our hall that says... you can tell it's a real old banner, it's got the old chiefs trumpet on it. It says, organized 1857, now this is before the Fort Erie Department started. It says, organized 1857, Fort Erie Fire Department, Fort Erie, Ontario. As I say, this must have been Amigari or something because I also found a clipping put in there about 1964. It states that the Fire Department of Fort Erie is presently organized, which would be after Bridgeburg and Fort Erie amalgamated, I assume. It came into being on January 1, 1932, so, that sounds about right to me. One thing that we've never mentioned is the fact that our Fire Company always entered this fire prevention contest that was organized and run by the National Fire Protection Association. This is an American outfit, this association. We've... Harold Ruch started it when he was chief, entering it. We've received... I think we've ran third place on two occasions in the Province of Ontario in this contest. Every year... we got an honourable mention back in 1951 which has to have been about the first entry, maybe not the first but it was near the first, when Harold Ruch was chief. I noticed in one of the clippings that was in the book in that Times thing, [I think Mr. Stouffer means the Times Review] that William O. Sullivan who was the representative from the Fire Marshall's Office in Ontario, came down to present this certificate to the Fire Departments at a Council meeting. He stated that, "In the 15 years he'd been with the Fire Marshall's Office, he had been down here 15 times to present some sort of certificate. Either a certificate of merit or an honourable mention, or a second or third place finish, something like this". I know that we were right up there, tops in the Province of Ontario contest. Now, what this contest is about...

**R.H:** Could you tell me where they held this contest?

**K.S:** Well, this contest, I'll just explain to you what it was. It was organized by this Fire Protection Association. They had forms that you filled in and they expected you to do certain things in your municipality, to better your fire protection. Some of the things were, you inspected all the factories, businesses, looked for fire hazards, pointed it out to... gave them a written slip that stated what the hazards were. There were different things that would help them as far as fire protection goes. Like, some of them needed extinguishers

in different areas, the types of extinguishers they needed. We'd tell them anything that would improve their ability to handle fires. This contest was about anything connected with fire safety. Whatever you done, you put down in this form and of course depending on how extensive you covered all the subjects, that would determine what rating you got in the contest. Of course the contest, although it was judged in the States, it was a... They had different categories like, I think we won in the class B category which would be a population of 10,000 to 15,000. You competed with people in your own Province. So, you would be placed in this contest, in your population category in the Province of Ontario. They also had it Canada wide. We did win an honourable mention on three or four occasions, Canada wide. We've still got all the old books that we sent in. They tell you if you want them back, to check here and we always got them back. We've still got a number of the books that we submitted in this contest. This just wasn't No. 1 Company, this was the two companies that cooperated on this and submitted this entry. So, it was a joint No. 1 and No. 2 Company venture. Another note that I've got here, the worst fire we ever had in Fort Erie, was in 1962, the Walpole fire.

**R.H:** Walpole?

**K.S:** That was a family that lost, they lost six children and the father. This fire killed seven people and of course, that's something that I'll never forget because I was one of the very first ones there. There was a lot of dolls, the kids had a lot of dolls and you didn't know whether you were picking up a doll or child when you went upstairs. It was just terrible and that sort of made me aware of how dangerous fire is. When they first came out with these smoke detectors, I don't know when this was but I bought the first one that I heard of, in Buffalo. It cost me \$49 and it wasn't really that great, I think after a year it was no good. Well, they guaranteed them and I think it went before the guarantee was up. I took it back and they gave me another one, a different brand and that one lasted me a year. That was a lot of money in those days and back then, \$49 was a lot more than it is now. But, I bought one and I've had a smoke detector in my house since. I've got three of them in there right now.

**R.H:** So, you firmly believe in smoke detectors?

**K.S:** Oh, certainly, anybody that doesn't have a smoke detector in their home, there's got to be something wrong. I don't care who it is, I'm as conscious of what fire can do as anybody but I know if a fire started and I'm sleeping, the toxic gases could kill me before it'd wake me up. I'm aware, I smell something like that, I'd be awake like that but I still think it could do it to me. Anybody that doesn't have a smoke detector, there's got to be something wrong with him.

**R.H:** Is it the toxic gases then that overcomes people?

**K.S:** Yeah, that's what it is. You see, in this modern environment that we live in, there are so many things that are made of plastic and acrylics. Even the paints on the walls have got things in them now that creates these gases. You only have to take a couple of lungs full and you're done. This is different than it was 40 years ago because things that burnt then... well, you got a lot of smoke but they weren't going to kill you. Oh, it would kill you eventually, but you could take quite a bit of it and survive. But there's so many things today that combustion starts with this thing, and you get these toxic gases coming off them. You don't need to take too many lungs full and you're done. That's why I think smoke detectors are so important.

**R.H:** Did they bring some kind of law that every home should...?

**K.S:** They have it in Fort Erie now. They just brought it out but it's not very effective.

**R.H:** Is there a law saying how many you have to have?

**K.S:** Well, you should have one for each floor but even one in the house near your area where you sleep will at least save you. You might get a lot more damage if you don't have one down in the basement or the first floor, if you're sleeping on the second floor. You'd get more damage if you don't have one down there, but at least the one up by your sleeping area could save your life.

**R.H:** Are these smoke alarms better now than they used to be?

**K.S:** I don't think there's too much difference. There's two types, there's the ionization type and there's a photo-electric type. I don't have a photo-electric type, I should have, I guess. But they recommend now that you should have one of each because they operate on different principals. One, the ionization type picks up any product in combustion.

You don't have to see it, it can be in the air, just fumes or whatever can set it off. The photo-electric type, it's got to be something you can see, to set it off. In other words, particles of smoke have to enter the detector. So, one will operate better in certain circumstances than the other and vice versa, you know. The only thing about the photo-electric detector, it is quite a bit more expensive and there's not too many of them around. Everytime you see one advertised, it's always the ionization type.

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

**K.S:** Well, we've had a great social relationship with Seneca Hose which is in West Seneca, for the past 30 years. It's no big deal, I mean. I guess a lot of Fire Companies have these different relationships with other companies but this goes back 30 years. We go over there for their installation of... well, not all of us but I've been going to their Commissioner's Inspections and their installations since I became chief. I don't go to their Fire Commissioner's Inspections anymore but I do get an invitation to their installation of officers because I'm an honorary life member. There's about six or seven of us in our company that are honorary life members. We presented them with a large Canadian flag years ago. When I was chief, I don't know what year it was, their firehall burned down, maybe two years ago, I guess. They just rebuilt it, a beautiful building. They got really a super firehall there now. They have rooms upstairs and all the facilities you could want for training and everything else. We are going to present them with a Canadian flag 'cause everything burned. We have international night every year. The one year, we go over there. The next year, they come over to our hall but this year we go over there, sometime in October, I think it is. So, this is just something that has really been a plus for... it's a bond through the Fire Departments. It's something your wives take part in too 'cause it's a social thing. Another thing, I think I did mention before, was that we were always very active in the Niagara District Firefighter Association, education wise. It might be interesting to note that we've supported Muscular Dystrophy for a number of years. We have walk-a-thons and we have a Muscular Dystrophy Ball. In 1970, we had a walk-a-thon for Muscular Dystrophy in a blinding snowstorm. By the time we finished, we walked 20

miles, I was on that one too but I didn't walk in later years. We walked 20 miles and by the time we were finished there was six inches of snow on the ground.

**R.H:** Was it in the spring?

**K.S:** No, it was in the fall, November, I think it was. On that walk we raised \$3,914 for Muscular Dystrophy. In 1972... of course, we got the Muscular Dystrophy Ball and the walk-a-thon but there was some other thing that they raised money on. I can't think what it is now but in 1972... Ken Raynor was the chairman that year, we raised \$6,000 for Muscular Dystrophy and that was the highest per capita for a community in Canada. So, we were really proud of that. In 1972, they also had the Canadian Open here at Cherry Hill. This wasn't just our department but the six Fire Departments supplied all the drivers for that. I think General Motors supplied the cars, the courtesy cars to take the people around and the Fire Departments supplied all the drivers. I drove myself but I didn't get any big name golfer in my car but I enjoyed it, it was good.

**R.H:** So, the Fire Department does a lot of good for the community then?

**K.S:** Well, we do a lot of things for the community, yeah. Of course our jamborees supply the funds for a lot of things.

**R.H:** Is this the jamborees you have over at Oakes Park?

**K.S:** Yeah, it's been going on every year since... it hasn't been called a jamboree since I've been in the company but I think it's about the 29th or the 30th jamboree that we've had this year. Before that, it was a band tatoo that we had at Oakes Park. Ever since I got in the company, it has been called one or the other. But the funds raised from that... like, we've started scholarships for high school students. Oh, I don't know when but it was during my time as chief they started it. So, it would be back in the '60s, the late '60s, somewhere around there. We give \$500 to the high school for different scholarships. I think there is three or two... what is it? I just forget how it's divided but anyway that's been going on for years. We purchased a boat and a motor for in the river for rescue work out of these funds. They support minor hockey and minor baseball with some of these funds. Of course, although we don't like to mention this too much, but some of this money goes to Muscular Dystrophy indirectly. Like, we pay for food for



this walk-a-thon, that comes out of these funds too, then all the profit goes to Muscular Dystrophy.

**R.H:** So, you take in quite a bit of money from these jamborees then?

**K.S:** Oh yeah, they do fairly well with the jamborees. They are a lot better in the last ten years than they used to be. Years ago, if you made a \$1,000 or \$1,500 back then, you were really doing pretty good. But now of course, it's up in the thousands, what you make.

**R.H:** Is there an age limit for joining the Fire Department?

**K.S:** Well, you got to be... it used to be 21 when I joined it. You had to be 21 before you could join it, now I think it's 18. 65 is the Town bylaw for retirement which is a good thing. Anybody that is 65 or older shouldn't be chasing fires, it's too strenuous.

**R.H:** Do they still chase fires when they are in their 60s?

**K.S:** Generally most of them get on the trucks now. The odd one goes by car but there is still a lot of people who chase fire trucks that shouldn't be chasing fire trucks.

**R.H:** Are they really active during the fire or are they mostly directing operations?

**K.S:** Who, the ones that are...?

**R.H:** Well, for instance the fire chief, he's got to be in his 60s, right?

**K.S:** Why?

**R.H:** Can you get a young fire chief?

**K.S:** Why not?

**R.H:** Don't you have to work up to something like that?

**K.S:** If you can do the job. All in all, there's not many of them in their 60s. Not in the volunteer department, in the paid department, yeah. Ruch, he quit when he was 40, I guess, 42 or something like that. At the time I was chief, I was 56 when I got out of it. Of course, Frank Bremner was in his 40s, he was chief for five years after I was there. Then Tim Morin, he was in his 40s, I don't know how long he was... two years, he was chief. The present chief, Tom Reid, I'd say he's in his 40s too.

**R.H:** So, they don't really stay in the volunteer Fire Department 'til they're in their 60s?

**K.S:** Well, they stay but maybe not as the chief. They won't be the chief but they will still be a volunteer fireman.

**R.H:** So, you are more-or-less telling me that if you are chief, you have to be at every fire?



**K.S:** Well, anyone who is chief, wants to be. They're going to be there if they can possibly get there. That doesn't only apply to the chief, it applies to any volunteer fireman. I would say, if there is an alarm, they're going to go. Of course, if they can't leave work or somebody can't go... but they are all going to answer that alarm.

**R.H:** So, when these guys retire as fire chief, do they stay in the Fire Department?

**K.S:** Well, he did for a few years. [Mr. Stouffer means Harold Ruch] For example, if you're in the Fire Department for 15 years as an active member in our company, you can apply to go exempt which means, that you have the privileges of attending their social functions, attending meetings and you get these privileges. The only thing you don't have to do is attend these practices. Of course, there is an election every two years of the fire officers and they elect the president and vice president, secretary, treasurer and so on down the line. They elect the chief, the deputy chief, the captains, and chief driver. This is every two years, they do that.

**R.H:** You were a member of the board for Douglas Hospital, right?

**K.S:** Well, I got interested in the hospital first of all through a member of the Fire Department who was... Bill Carpenter, he was a member of the Fire Department and his wife was a secretary and the administrator. Of course they used to... me and Bill Thompson got to know him, not only through being the fire chief but... He was very good on fire regulations and rules of the hospital and during the time I was chief, we just sort of took over the drills and the inspections for fire prevention in the hospital, which we didn't do before that. They more-or-less done it on their own. We'd give them demonstrations on how to use fire extinguishers, and fire hoses in the boxes and all that stuff. So, he said, this is Bill Thompson, the administrator, he said to me... I used to go to the annual meeting of the association, which you probably know is a Hospital Association who elects members for the board. So, after one of these meetings I think we went to the Queens Hotel or something and had a couple of drinks and he said, "Why don't you run for the hospital board. You'll do a good job and we need people on there like you ". So, I did run and I got elected. That's how it started and I guess I was interested. It's a funny thing about the hospital board, you can be on there for a

couple of years and unless you've had the background, hospital care and so on, you really don't know nothing about it. You know absolutely nothing about how a hospital operates. So, it took a couple of years to sort of get into the swing of the thing and the feel of the thing. Then of course... well, after sharing for a number of years, I got onto the management committee and from there, I was elected vice chairman. I was vice chairman for three years during the last fund and building drive that we had there at the Emergency and Outpatients.

**R.H:** So, that was what the drive was for, the Emergency and Outpatients Clinic?

**K.S:** Yeah, and of course the drive went right over the top. It was really amazing to me that people responded so generously. I think we got a pretty nice little hospital up there.

**R.H:** How long were you there?

**K.S:** About 16 years, I'm not sure.

**R.H:** And you're still on it?

**K.S:** Yeah, I'm still on it but I think probably... I just got elected this past meeting of the association for another two year term. I think probably when I get that through, I'll give it up. We do go to Florida now for a couple of months and if I'm going to be on anything, I like to do the job. I don't want to be sitting back and let somebody else do something that I should be doing.

**R.H:** Did you say you got voted in?

**K.S:** Yeah, there's a nomination committee which consists of board members, at least three board members and they present the list of nominees before the board and they... what they generally do, like this past year, John Glenny, he's got some job with the Travellers Association, he's tied up pretty well so he wanted to get off the board. He wanted to get off the board this year so the nominating committee presented two names when there was one vacancy. This is what they generally do, they present an extra name more-or-less so that you've got an election anyway. So, Paul Fell was elected to the Douglas Memorial Hospital Board this year. So, this is how it goes but they generally recommend all the people that are on the Douglas Memorial Hospital Board for re-election. They always have since I've been there. I guess if they got someone who was just drifting along or disrupting

the board in anyway, they probably wouldn't recommend them for re-election.

**R.H:** So, thank-you very much for the interview Mr. Stouffer, I really appreciate it, it was a lot of help.

**K.S:** I'm glad to do it. Any information I've given you, I'm sure it isn't much but if it helps, that's fine.