

Diana Matthews interviewing Mrs. Evelyn Plato in her home at 767 Garrison Road, Fort Erie. April 30th, 1985.

D.M: Hi Mrs. Plato.

E.P: Hello.

D.M: Can you give me your full name?

E.P: Mabel Evelyn Plato.

D.M: How long have you lived in Fort Erie?

E.P: 1918 I moved here.

D.M: You weren't born here?

E.P: No.

D.M: How old were you when you moved to Fort Erie?

E.P: I was 13.

D.M: What was Fort Erie like then?

E.P: Well, there was a ferryboat running and there was a couple of streetlights, I lived on Bertie Street at the time, there was just a few streetlights, it was a mud road. That's all about Bertie Street.

D.M: Where did the ferry run?

E.P: 'Cross the river to Buffalo.

D.M: Did you go there often?

E.P: Well, after I got married, I used to go over there every Saturday night to do a little shopping, grocery shopping and we visited because my grandmother lived over there.

D.M: What was Jarvis Street like then?

E.P: Well, I didn't know too much about Jarvis Street because we didn't have a car and I didn't get down to that end of the town too much, but it was busy, it had alot of stores on it and it was busy. Not as busy as it is today of course, but there was alot of stores and things there and it was paved... Jarvis Street was paved.

D.M: What did you do for fun when you were a kid, where did you go?

E.P: Well, I got acquainted with my husband when we first moved over here, and we used to go sleighriding down on the Douglas hill. That's what we used to do in the wintertime. In the summertime we used to go up to Erie Beach and there was the train that went up to Erie Beach and the ferry up to Erie Beach. You see, I lived up here two years before I got married and then after that I was over here all the time.

D.M: What was Erie Beach like then?

E.P: Oh, it was lovely. It was nicer than Crystal Beach ever thought of being.

D.M: Were there lots of rides?

E.P: You bet there was! There was the Blue Streak...

D.M: What was that?

E.P: A big scenic railway.. There was the Blue Streak, there was an old mill, there was a merry-go-round, oh, they had a zoo up there. They had the big Dance Hall that's gone now. They had swimming pools, oh they had everything up there.

D.M: Your husband worked there, didn't he?

E.P: My husband did carpentry work out there, he was a carpenter. He worked out there for Mr. Bardol for years.

D.M: Did you know Mr. Bardol?

E.P: My husband did, I didn't. I knew the boys, But I didn't know Mr. Bardol.

D.M: Did you ever go to Crystal Beach?

E.P: Oh yes. We went to Crystal Beach too.

D.M: What was it like?

E.P: Well, it was nice, it was a nice beach, but I never liked it as much as Erie Beach. Erie Beach was better I thought. Yeah, it was real nice out there.

D.M: Do you remember when it closed?

E.P: I think it was 1930, wasn't it? I think that was the year.

D.M: Do you know why it closed?

E.P: No, I don't know. Mr. Bardol used to own this house.

D.M: Who built it?

E.P: Oh, now that's a long time ago, I don't know.

D.M: You lived in Fort Erie through the Depression, didn't you?

E.P: No, I lived out here during the Depression.

D.M: So this isn't Fort Erie?

E.P: Well, this is Fort Erie too, but it wasn't Fort Erie then.

D.M: What was it then?

E.P: Bertie Township.

D.M: When did it change to Fort Erie?

E.P: Oh dear, I've forgotten now.

D.M: How did the Depression affect the town, was it difficult?

E.P: Oh, there was no work and everything was sad for people, you know. Groceries and things were cheap at the time, but I mean it was hard to even get them because there wasn't any money going around.

D.M: Did your husband work?

E.P: No. Not through the Depression. It was hard, hard times.

D.M: What do you remember about the railroads?

E.P: My dad was a railroad man.

D.M: What did he do?

E.P: He was a switchman. Today I gots two boys that works on the railroad

D.M: Did the railroads play a big part in Fort Erie?

E.P: Oh yes! More so than today, the trucks are taking over today.

D.M: What about the second Wo rld War, did you live here then?

E.P: Yes. I had a boy in the second World War and a son-in-law that was in the second World War.

D.M: Did you go to school when you moved to Fort Erie?

E.P: No, I... when I was 13, my mom and dad bought a house down in Fort Erie in the town there, on Bertie Street, right across from the Fire Hall-where the stores are now.... Beckers. We lived there and then we moved over here in April and I graduated from school in Buffalo, in June.

D.M: Do you remember when the Peace Bridge was built?

E.P: They made those big things.... the things that go in the water! They made them down at the foot of Bertie Road and then they would take them up, put them in the water out where the bridge is now then they started building.... we all went down to the big opening.

D.M: What happened there?

E.P: Well, nothing, it was just a... they had the Prince of Wales, the Prince of Wales was here, we saw him. It was nice, it was just a big crowd of people gathered. I guess all of Fort Erie turned out that day.

D.M: Did it bring more Americans into Fort Erie?

E.P: Yeah.

D.M: What did they come for?

E.P: I guess they came for shopping.

D.M: What other types of things did you do when you were growing up in Fort Erie?

E.P: Oh, let's see....

D.M: What did you do on a Saturday night?

E.P: Go to Erie Beach!!! Or we went down to Niagara Falls. By that time I was going with my husband, keeping company, and we would... his cousin had a car and we'd all drive down to the falls, and the nights that we didn't go to the beach, like every other night, like Saturday night, We'd go to the beach or the falls.

D.M: What happened at the Dance Hall at Erie Beach, was there bands?

E.P: Oh, there was! And we'd go up there and we'd ride on everything we wanted to ride on, him and me, and then we'd get everything we wanted to eat! And then we'd go over and we'd watch them. We'd never dance, neither him or me, but we'd go over and we'd go in the Dance Hall and we'd watch them dance and just listen to the music, it would really be nice.

D.M: Do you remember any of the bands that played there?

E.P: No, that I don't know, I never was acquainted with them.

D.M: What else was in the Dance Hall besides a dance floor?

E.P: In the downstairs there was a... the bathers used to go in there, there was a big place down there for the kids and the people to change their bathing suits and I think there was something....

D.M: I heard there was a bowling alley in there.

E.P: There must have been, yeah, I think there was too, now that you speak of it, yeah. It was really nice.

D.M: How much did things cost then, was it cheap to go to the park?

E.P: Oh yes. It wasn't... you went in the park for nothing, they didn't charge you to go in. It wasn't much, they didn't charge much, hardly anything at all. You really could have a good time spend a good evening.

D.M: What was the train called that brought you to the beach?

E.P: Oh, we used to call it everything. We called it the... the Sandfly Limited was one thing we called it and then the Dummy they used to call it.

D.M: Why did they call it the Dummy?

E.P: I don't know! But they called it that, they used to call it different names.

D.M: Where did it run from?

E.P: Right down here at the ferry, you know where Greta's store is, it used to come in right there, that's where the dock was. The train ran right behind where that real estate place is, there used to be a drug store, Elliots Drug store used to be there. Well then the train would be right behind there and start up and go up to the beach. I got pictures of the train, my uncle used to work on it.

D.M: The train at Erie Beach?

E.P: Yes.

D.M: What was his name?

E.P: George Templeton.

D.M: What type of work did he do?

E.P: He was a conductor on the train.

D.M: Do you remember your first car?

E.P: Yes.

D.M: What was it?

E.P: A Ford.

D.M: A black one?

E.P: Yes! It was a... we had the one before the Model T. It was a four door, it was older than the Model T.

D.M: What about your first radio?

E.P: Well, lets see, that was.... I got it upstairs yet! It don't work, but it's up there. I know where we got that, we got that from a Mr: Evans up in Ridgeway and we had that one when we lived up here in the country.

D.M: Do you remember where the radio stations came from?

E.P: I imagine Buffalo and the Falls would be the nearest ones.

D.M: After you got your car, did you get around more?

E.P: Yes, we went to Dunville, cause my grandmother was living over here at the time and she knew people in Dunville and we'd go up there and visit them, the older people. Oh, we rode around. After we moved in to this house, we used to go nearly every Sunday, my husband and I, by that time we'd bought a different car. That one we got in Dunville, I remember where we got that one, I can't remember what his name was though. We used to go out every Sunday.

D.M: Where did you go?

E.P: Just around the country roads. We would drive around, we would go maybe along the lake, we knew people up at Long Beach and we would go and visit, you know what I mean? We'd stop and see them and I'd have a picnic lunch and we'd keep on going. That's what we done nearly every Sunday.

D.M: Were many of the streets paved at that time?

E.P: No, not out in the country, alot of them on the highways, they would be, but not the country roads. Alot of gravel roads they were. I remember when they did the Garrison over. We had to climb stepladders and everything else while they were doing it, to get out.

D.M: What did they do to it?

E.P: They widened it. Put another lane in.

D.M: Do you remember when they did that?

E.P: Yeah, that wasn't so long ago.

D.M: Do you remember what year it was?

E.P: Oh yeah, after the war.

D.M: Lets talk some more about Erie Beach.

E.P: It used to leave from the foot of Main Street over in Buffalo to come over...

D.M: The boat?

E.P: Yes. It would come over to Erie Beach, there was a big dock there.

D.M: Do you remember the name of the boat?

E.P: Elizabeth 2.

D.M: Was it really big?

E.P: Oh yes. It carried alot of passengers.

D.M: I've heard there was a boat that carried cars back and forth across.

E.P: Well that was the ferryboat, but I don't think the one did that... the one that carried people.

D.M: When the Peace Bridge was built, I guess less people were taking the boat, is that right? Did more people drive to Erie Beach?

E.P: Maybe so, I don't know, I couldn't tell you that.

D.M: Was the Waverly Hotel there? What was it like then?

E.P: Well, it was just a hotel. I don't even know if it was called the Waverly then.

D.M: Did alot of people stay there that came to visit the park?

E.P: I suppose, I didn't know much about that.

D.M: What about the Erie Beach Hotel?

E.P: Where's that?

D.M: Across from where Taco the Town is now.

E.P: Oh, there was a store there.

D.M: A store, what was it called?

E.P: Heatheringtons.

D.M: What kind of store was it?

E.P: Grocery.

D.M: Where exactly was it?

E.P: Do you know where the Bardol house was? Well, right across from that towards the lake, on the side of the lake.

D.M: Did alot of Americans have homes on the lake then?

E.P: Oh yes.

D.M: So they were empty in the winter?

E.P: Oh yes. I guess they were. The Americans are over here alot. They make me mad sometimes!

D.M: Do they? How come?

E.P: Oh, I don't know. I was born one too, but they get over here and they think they own the whole place.

D.M: Do they think of it as a summer resort?

E.P: Well, I don't know what they think.

D.M: Can you think of anything else you'd like to add?

E.P: No, only that I like it real well.

D.M: Fort Erie?

E.P: Yes.

D.M: Thank-you very much.

E.P: Oh, you're welcome I'm sure.