

This is Michael Near interviewing Mrs. Ruth Case, at her home at 141 Bertie St., it is May 27, 1985.

M.N: Mrs. Case, you were born in Fort Erie?

R.C: No, I was born in Sherkston, my Father was born in Fort Erie.

M.N: And your Dad's name was Learn?

R.C: Livingston Learn.

M.N: And he had a business in Fort Erie?

R.C: Yes, he's had a business in this district since... he was born in 1873 and he started building fence in 1892.

M.N: Your family goes back a long way.

R.C: Oh, he built a lot of fence in Fort Erie.

M.N: Where did he have his business?

R.C: In Sherkston.

M.N: And your Brother still operates the business?

R.C: No, my brother took over in 1953 and then in 1984, his son took over, Wilfred Learn, my brother and that's Carl Learn he's my nephew.

M.N: So the business has been in the family for quite awhile?

R.C: Oh, I should say so, since ... I haven't checked... since 1892 to 1984 is quite awhile, its 1985 so Carl has had it for a year now.

M.N: And how is he doing?

R.C: Oh yes, he's really busy, its a lot different since my Dad started he had mostly farm fence to build, people didn't make chain link fence at that time, so now he has more business in town.

M.N: So the business has gone from agriculture into the community?

R.C: Right.

M.N: Did you grow up in Sherkston?

R.C: Thats right, when I got married fifty years ago we moved to Fort Erie, my husband and I.

M.N: And that was Harold Case?

R.C: Thats right.

M.N: And he had a garage in Fort Erie?

R.C: From that time on, yes.

M.N: Did you always live in this house?

R.C: No we lived at the north end of town, he had a garage behind Spear's a terrible looking little place, he sure didn't make much money at that time.

M.N: That would have been Bridgeburg at that time?

R.C: Yes.

M.N: And from our research, we've found that Bridgeburg and Fort Erie were considered two separate little towns?

R.C: Yes, that's right.

M.N: You notice a big change in the town then?

R.C: Oh my goodness, I should say, we bought this lot next to our house and built the garage, and now Ogilvie has a chiropractic business in there.

M.N: Harold was over on the corner for quite a few years?

R.C: Yes, he was, I don't remember what year that was.

M.N: Do you remember as a girl up in Sherkston... did you go to school in Sherkston?

R.C: Oh yes.

M.N: Was that a big school up there?

R.C: No, it was a litte tiny school with about 14 pupils.

M.N: Where was that located?

R.C: That was next to my Dads farm, so I never had to carry my lunch to school, I had to walk home, because it was right next to the house.

M.N: Is it still there?

R.C: Its still there but people are living in it.

M.N: Oh, its someone's home now.

R.C: Yes, it was a little brick school.

M.N: Do you remember the name of the school ?

R.C: Humberston, they called it Humberston number 7.

M.N: Do you remember any of your teachers?

R.C: Oh, the one ... the last one I had before I ... she lives in Ridgeway her name is Miss Belfield.

M.N: Did you think it was a good school?

R.C: Oh yes, it was nice, we had one teacher named Miss Currie, but a lot of people... she was into agriculture, she took us out on long walks in the woods, to see a hawks nest and all kinds of things... snakes which I hate... one time she had a snake this snake at school and they were passing it to hold, it was only a garter snake and she said if any of you girls leave the room she said you would get the strap, so I thought I'll take the strap, I jumped out of that room and run home, it was only a little way and my mother said she better not give you the strap. That was one thing I hated was snakes.

M.N: What would have been the closest town to you?

R.C: They came to Fort Erie on horses.

M.N: On horses?

R.C: Did they come down the Garrison?

R.C: No, I think they came down by back country roads.

M.N: Mrs. Case is showing me a picture, who is in this picture Mrs. Case?

R.C: Well this is my oldest sister and I and my Mother and Dad.

M.N: Would that wagon be called a democrat?

R.C: Yes, and the horses name is Frank.

M.N: Would you keep a horse like that for a long time?

R.C: Oh, that horse lived to be 21.

M.N: I imagine you can become pretty attached to a animal like that?

R.C: Oh yes.

M.N: What year would that have been, roughly?

R.C: Well I'm a baby there and I'm 75 now... so that would have been 75 years ago... I was a tiny baby.

M.N: Thats a nice picture.

M.N: Would you go into town very often?

R.C: No, my mother made the bread and butter... so, we would go once every two weeks.

M.N: When you went into town, would you go to Bridgeburg or Fort Erie?

R.C: Bridgeburg... I was trying to think of the store... I can't say I was just a kid.

M.N: I bet Jarvis Street has changed a lot, was there a lot of stores down there?

R.C: No, there wasn't many, there was only one grocery store, as far as I can remember.

M.N: And what year would you you have come to live?

R.C: Well that would have been fifty years ago.

M.N: And you lived down in Bridgeburg and when you bought the lot you moved up here?

R.C: We bought the lot off the town, it was really reasonable at that time... and it was owned by the town.

M.N: So this area must have developed alot then?

R.C: Oh yes.

M.N: My mother has mentioned that there was a lot of empty spaces.

R.C: This is a very old house, I've often wondered how old it is, you see Harold did it all over.

M.N: Did you notice a big difference during the war?

R.C: Oh yes, a lot more people came in, a lot of French people came in.

M.N: Most of them worked at Fleet and Horton?

R.C: Yes, they did.

M.N: Through our research we've found a place called Winston Hall, were St. Michael's Church is now, do you remember that?

R.C: No I don't remember that.

M.N: People stayed there ...

R.C: What year would that have been?

M.N: 1939 or 40.

R.C: I can't remember that I should.

M.N: Who was the first mayor you remember?

R.C: What was his name?

M.N: Which mayor do you remember?

R.C: I can't remember who the mayor was when we came here, but of course I remember Herb Guess, I remember he was a big man, when Harold had the garage they lived over the garage Mr. and Mrs. Guess, at the north end on the Blvd., now Spears have it, that was where Harold was with Hampell and Herb Guess lived upstairs.

M.N: The town was a lot smaller then and you seemed to know a lot more people then?

R.C: Well Harold knew a lot more people then I did.

M.N: Well, he was a business man?

R.C: Yes, thats right, he was in business for fifty years, until he passed away 3 years ago.

M.N: Your family must have been out in that area for quite awhile... the Sherkston area?

R.C: My goodness yes, all my relatives, my aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, lived out there.

M.N: Would you ever go into Ridgeway?

R.C: Yes, we wouldn't shop there, there wasn't very much there when I was small.

M.N: Do you remember Erie Beach, do you ?

R.C: Oh yes, when I was a kid we used to go there for picnics, it was very nice, it was quaint, everything was much more quaint... they had a coaster there and I was sca red to death to get on it.

M.N: They had the big dance hall?

R.C: Yes, they did.

M.N: That must have been very nice?

R.C: Yes it was, we used to have the farmers picnic there, until I got bigger.

M.N: I don't remember anything about the dance hall, just the hall itself, I understand there was a lot of rides, and swimming pools, ...

R.C: Oh yes, there was big rides, it was really quaint, I always thought the ticket booths were so different then Crystal Beach, well you see it was a older park, it was really quaint.

M.N: You must remember the Canadiana then?

R.C: Oh yes.

M.N: Were you ever on her?

R.C: Well I was working at Crystal Beach when the Canadiana used to come in all the time, I worked at Crystal Beach at a ice cream stand.

M.N: Things must have changed a lot?

R.C: Oh yes.

M.N: Do you remember the big band era?

R.C: The big band era, oh yes thats the one I remember the most at Crystal Beach, you see I worked there, at Crystal Beach, not Erie Beach and ... it would be so stormy that, the water would be coming over... they'd have to turn around and go back... they couldn't land, they used to get big crowds from Buffalo.

M.N: Mostly Americans?

R.C: Yes.

M.N: Do you remember any of the big bands up there?

R.C: No I don't remember the names of them.

M.N: I heard it was very nice up there?

R.C: It was nice, but its different now, now you pay to go in and ride every ride then you payed at every ride.

M.N: They're talking, maybe this year of bringing back some of the big bands, a special thing to raise money for the old Canadiana, to see if they can restore it.

R.C: That was really beautiful.

M.N: The Beach at that time, was there a lot more people staying at the Beach, actually living there?

R.C: There was a lot of people staying there in cottages, a lot of people would come and stay the whole season.

M.N: Mostly big family's then?

R.C: Yes, yes, a lot of children, they would ride the rides.

M.N: We heard that when Erie Beach folded they took a lot of rides up to Crystal Beach.

R.C: They did, thats true, you must have talked to a lot of people.

M.N: I'm learning something about the history, people mention things and I'm really surprised, have you ever heard of the dummy?

R.C: I remember hearing about it but I was never on it.

M.N: Did you use the ferry very much?

R.C: Here in Fort Erie? Oh yes, we lived on Murray Street for awhile, and when the boat would leave Buffalo, we would hop right down to the landing and go to Buffalo, we never had to wait, you see, we could see it leave Buffalo.

M.N: Was it a long trip over?

R.C: No, you were there in a short time.

M.N: What would they do in the winter time, when the ice was heavy in the ...?

R.C: They wouldn't use it, I don't think so, I can't remember it in winter time, I wonder how people got to Buffalo, they must have used the trains, I guess, you could talk to Mr. Leslie he might know a lot about it.

M.N: Who's Mr. Leslie?

R.C: He was a police man on the C.N., he could tell you a lot ... he would know a lot more then I do.

M.N: We get a lot of different view points.

M.N: Do you notice a lot more people move now then they did years ago?

R.C: I would say they do.

M.N: And the nieghbours change more?

R.C: Oh yes.

M.N: In this area, I remember as a boy, Harold had a garage on the corner, Thompson's had a store, who had the store on the corner of Bertie and Central... I know its changed a lot?

R.C: I can't remember who was in there, the one down the street was there for a long time...

M.N: That was Annie Crockers.

R.C: She was there for a long time... I don't think that place is tooold, do you Mike?

M.N: I can't remember. This wasn't the only section to go shopping, you could go to the south end, did you go to the south end very much?

R.C: No, I would say we kept going to the north end more.

M.N: There seems to be a lot more down there?

R.C: Yes, on the main street there, oh I did like Thompsons, when he was there, we used to shop there a lot, he had such nice meat.

M.N: He was a butcher wasn't he?

R.C: Yes he was, that's Red's father.

M.N: Mrs. Thompson, I haven't seen her in years, but she is still around, I guess?

R.C: Ross's wife, the older lady is still living... isn't that... say she would be a good one to interview, I wonder where she is living.

M.N: She was living over by Bob Hanna's, but she moved to ... somewhere.

R.C: My she must be a good age.

M.N: I think she's in her nineties.

R.C: You could talk to Ross, he could tell you.

M.N: Did you feel strange coming to Fort Erie, was it like coming to a strange town?

R.C: Actually it was, coming from the country, I had never lived in town before.

M.N: Was it difficult for you, was it kind of scary?

R.C: Well we had a small apartment in Mr. Johnson's house on Phipps St, just two rooms, when we first started, they were nice people.

M.N: A lot different now with all the conveniences, my mother mentioned about the ice box?

R.C: The money I had in the bank, when we got married, I had from working at the Beach in the summer time, is what we used to buy our first refrigerator, it was one of the first, it wasn't big like they are now.

M.N: A lot of convenience, the television makes a big difference?

R.C: I don't know what I would do without the T.V., I was wondering if I should show you the picture of my pupils.

M.N: Sure.

M.N: Mrs. Case is showing me a picture of some of her pupils, and you taught guitar, didn't you Mrs. Case?

R.C: That's right.

M.N: That was Spanish guitar?

R.C: Well I did both Hawaiian and Spanish, these boys in the back are playing Spanish and these are Hawaiian, some of the girls are holding their up, these two boys were twins, from Stevensville, the Beck

R.C: boys, you know one has just died in Fort Erie, he lived down here and this is Ross Johns, do you know him?

M.N: I don't believe I do.

R.C: And this is Mrs. Denim.

M.N: I know Mrs. Denim, she was one of my teachers.

R.C: And this girl is from Fort Erie, her name is Plato, this boy went to war, his name was Warren, he died, he was killed.

M.N: What year would this photo be, Mrs. Case?

R.C: Oh, oh, can you find me in this picture, you can see the difference in how long its been, you haven't got this on the tape, have you?

M.N: Oh yes, it doesn't matter.

R.C: Well I'll see if you can find... I showed it to some one yesterday, Mrs. Buyues, and she reconized me but a lot of people don't.

M.N: I can't find you.

R.C: Well you wouldn't reconize me, we came here 50 years ago, I started teaching right away, it was fifty years ago.

M.N: Had you always played the guitar then?

R.C: I started... I took lessons when I was a kid, so many people asked me ... I don't see this girl.[the picture]

M.N: This is a interesting building [the picture] what building would that be, I notice the windows, was that a school?

R.C: No, it was taken in Port Colborne at a studio.

M.N: Did you play concerts?

R.C: We played for the Lions Club several times, we went as far as Niagara-on-the-Lake to play, a lot of people in the Lions Club would remember, I think that was the only time we got a standing ovation, we played a Hawaian piece, called Kala ing ton hus, and that was at the Fort Erie High School, I never forgot that of course.

M.N: When did you stop teaching guitar?

R.C: Quite a few years ago... I don't remember what year it was, it was after we moved to Bertie Street.

M.N: Well its nice you have something to do. Did you belong to a school or were you just on your own?

R.C: On my own, I asked my teacher if I could give lessons and he said sure, go ahead and do it, I was taking lessons from a real Hawaian, the teacher I had.

M.N: Was there very much to do in Fort Erie, when you first came here?

R.C: Yes, I think there was, we always went to the United Church, I played my guitar in a orchestra in the United Church, yes there was lots to do, we were very busy.

M.N: Did you ever get to the theatre, movie shows?

R.C: Oh yes.

M.N: That was in the north end?

R.C: Yes, it was.

M.N: That's the old Bellard, the Ziffs owned that didn't they?

R.C: Yes, they did.

M.N: That was across from where Ernie Benner lived, Spears are in there now, do you remember him delivering coal?

R.C: Yes I do, Ernie Benner.

M.N: I've interviewed him, he's living out on the Bowen Road, he's a nice guy.

M.N: It must have been awful messy with coal?

R.C: He used to deliver up here, so we had coal here.

M.N: How would you ... this is something younger people wouldn't know you would have to put the coal directly into the furnace and light it?

R.C: You sure did and you know what I did, I went out to see the milk man, he had come for his ticket money and the furnace went out, he had been talking to me for quite awhile, so I had folded it all up in my hands, I went down to the furnace and threw the money in and all my change was in the furnace.

M.N: That's something that's gone too, is the milk delivery, there used to be quite a few dairies in town, they used to use horse and wagon for quite awhile?

R.C: Yes they did, in the winter time they used to come with a sleigh and a team of horses, to deliver milk.

M.N: Ernie Benner still has a team of horses, he still works them in the fields but there's so much work involved, tractors are easier.

M.N: Was there a lot of building up here, there wasn't as many houses around?

R.C: Fort Erie sure has a lot more houses than was when we came.

M.N: Just up the road, on Bertie Street is the Douglas Memorial Hospital, that's grown quite a bit hasn't it and the Fire Hall?

R.C: The fire hall wasn't here when we first came.

M.N: Oh it wasn't.

r.c; Mrs. Plato was telling me, that there was a fire, they let all the horses out at the race track and they ran right down Bertie Street, these beautiful race horses, that was before we were here, Bertie Street was just mud, all those race horses went right through all that mud and tore right down Bertie St. of course they had to let

R.C: them out.

M.N: That must have been quite awhile ago

R.C: Oh Mrs. Plato, her husband worked on the railroad, he had both his legs cut off, run over by a train, his daughter died not to long ago, and that was this cute little girl here [the picture] she was cute.

M.N: Do you notice that Fort Erie was a railroad town, the railroad was pretty big in Fort Erie?

R.C: Oh yes indeed, when we first came here there wasn't to much but that, it seemed to me.

M.N: And that was the old steam locomotives?

R.C: All that black smoke and a lot of noise, we were quite close to them on Phip Street, it was pretty noisy.

M.N: My mother mentioned living on Courtwright Street that when she did her laundry that if you left it out to long it would be covered with soot.

R.C: She was right, now they don't have that.

M.N: There talking now that Fort Erie might come back as a railroad town, there developing more, which should help our employment.

R.C: That would be good.

M.N: Do you remember as a girl... you mentioned that Bertie St. was just dirt, were most of the streets just dirt then, just mud roads, there was very few paved roads, were there?

R.C: Nothing like now of course, we weren't living here at the time of the race horses, that would have been more then fifty years ago, how many years has the race track been there?

M.N: 1870's, 1880's something like that, thats considered one of the classic race tracks, very few of them left.

M.N: When you were living in Sherkston, Mrs. Case, were did you get your mail was there a centre were you could go?

R.C: Yes, we did, we had to go to Sherkston.

M.N: That would have been like a village then?

R.C: It was very tiny, yes, its bigger now compared to then, they have had a couple of grocery stores there when I was a kid, but Dad had lived in Fort Erie and he liked coming down here, thats why he did it.

M.N: Do you know were he lived when he was in Fort Erie?

R.C: No I don't know if my oldest sister would know or not.

M.N: Did he farm down here?

R.C: Well, he ... when he was quite young he and his brother had... I think that was after he started building fences, they had one of those thrashing machines, that go around and ... a big steam engines.

M.N: We were talking to Mrs. Spear out on the Bowen Rd., she mentioned about the big thrashers coming through, the men would work.

R.C: We would hear that coming down the road, the kids would all run to watch it go by, but you know they are going to show out at my brothers place, they have those old steamers come in for a display.

M.N: That would be interesting to see.

R.C: That happens on the 29 to the 30 and the first of July, and they have real old machinery, its right on the farm up there, thats the farm my Dad had, a lot of people come from Fort Erie, so they know about it.

M.N: They show teams up there, don't they?

R.C: Yes, they have horses, the ponies come.

M.N: I believe Ernie Benner mentioned that. He loves to show his horses.

R.C: Oh,that's good.

M.N: Was that a popular thing,hay rides?

R.C: Yes, we did, you see later on, we went for sleigh rides in the winter.

M.N: Was there any place for you to go when you lived out in Sherkston.

R.C: No, not much.

M.N: Isolated,isn't it?

R.C: I should say and when you go to Crystal Beach you would get two nickels, well you could spend a nickel to ride on the little train or the merry-go-round or get a ice cream cone, you had your choice, there was six of us, so each of us got a dime, so we had a nickel for the rides or a nickel for a ice cream cone.

M.N: That was a big deal?

R.C: That was a big deal.

M.N: Now you can't get a bubble gum for a dime now, can you?

R.C: A little boy told me, the other day he wouldn't bend over to pick up a nickel, right over here at the Beckers store, I bent over and said here's a nickel and he said I wouldn't bend over for a nickel.

M.N: Things have certainly changed?

R.C: I should say so.

M.N: Different people have mentioned that they would go to the show and they would take a dime, get in for a nickel and a nickel for pop corn or what ever.

M.N: So that's another thing that's changed, the prices of things?

R.C: That is a big one, I still can't get used to that.

M.N: Do you think the working man's a lot better off, he makes more money but things cost so much more?

R.C: That's true, that is a very good question.

M.N: Does it worry you the way prices keep going the way they are?

R.C: I would say it would have, but you see, Harold... thank goodness he took care of me good, I don't care who knows that, it's the truth Mike.

M.N: You must remember the great depression?

R.C: Yes indeed, that was close to the time we got married, do you know how much he would bring home some weeks, I don't care who knows it, when we were on Phipps St, \$5.00 a week, imagine living on \$5.00 a week, they get three times that an hour now, \$5.00 some times that's all he brought home.

M.N: It must have been hard on the town then, the Depression?

R.C: I would have thought so. We survived, I was giving guitar lessons, so that helped, you couldn't charge them much at that time.

M.N: Most of the people were in the same boat, weren't they?

R.C: Sure they were.

M.N: That would make a difference too wouldn't it?

R.C: I think so.

M.N: Buying food was a lot more different then?

R.C: Oh yes.

M.N: Your meat was fresh cut rather than packaged.

R.C: It certainly is a different world.

M.N: Do you think for the better in some ways?

R.C: I don't know, I wouldn't want to say, I suppose it is, but the terrible things didn't seem to happen, of course we wouldn't hear about it as much.

M.N: Well, communications are a lot better now.

R.C: Well with television we hear everything, so maybe it was just as bad but we didn't know.

M.N: The second war must have been a shock to the people?

R.C: Oh indeed, the closest relative I had was a cousin, and... it was Giv Fretz, you know, he's my cousin.

M.N: He's a member of parliament?

R.C: Yes he is and his wife's brother and I sent him packages, chocolate bars.

M.N: You must remember rationing then?

R.C: Oh yes, I should say so, when sugar was rationed that's when I stopped putting it in my coffee.

M.N: What else was rationed?

R.C: Meat was.

M.N: Was it a difficult ration, did you miss it a lot?

R.C: Well, it was a little bit difficult, you didn't get to much, I had my kitty cat that I thought so much off, and she liked meat, then Sullivans Fish and Chips place was down here at that time, he would give me the little ends and I would cook them for my cat, so the kitty had lots of fish.

M.N: Somebody is going down to interview Mr. Sullivan, Mrs. Sullivan passed away a few months ago and Mr. Sullivan is there.

R.C: That should be interesting, his fish and chips were so good, when my family came to visit, we would have fish and chips, they all liked them and it was cheap to what fish and chips are now, it wasn't very expensive .

M.N: He must have had quite a business there, with the baby hole right there and all the swimmers.

R.C: You remember that?

M.N: Oh I'm getting up there.

R.C: Oh no, you're young.

M.N: The southend was like a separate little town, it had its own doctors there, do you remember any of the doctors?

R.C: I remember Dr. Streets and Dr. O' Mullivany, you remember him. He's gone now too.

R.C: Does Ernie Benner remember the one who started the hospital?

M.N: I think he might have mentioned meeting Dr. Douglas, he mentioned Dr. O'Mullivany one time, Ernie Benner's father paid him with two tires, because his car was in such bad shape and he needed these tires, I guess he didn't have much money, he took the two tires as payment.

R.C: He didn't have much, he was good to us.

M.N: That was in the days when doctors visited the house, they don't do that any more.

R.C: No they don't.

M.N: Are you happy with the way the town is running, do you think the local government is doing okay, tell them about it, happy with the water rates?

R.C: Yes, don't you think that \$74.00 for a woman living alone is quite abit for water, I think thats pretty high.

M.N: When we live next to one of the greatest fresh water supplies in the world.

R.C: Well that bothers me. One person doesn't use much water, I only wash with the washing machine every other week, I don't like that big water bill.

M.N: The taxes must have really increased over the years?

R.C: Well, I wonder if I could find any of the first ones.

M.N: Your property tax and with Harold having the business to...

R.C: It sure is higher than it was, but of course you expect that, but the water bill... they're not that high in Niagara Falls or Port Colborne.

M.N: Do you think your service is good, garbage pick up, the clearing of the streets and that?

R.C: I can't find any trouble with that, they sure did fix the sidewalk out in front here, I was glad they did, right in front of my house, the water used to stand in there on the sidewalk, everyone had to walk on the lawn, they fixed that, I don't like that water bill.

M.N: Do you notice anything different because of Regional Government?

R.C: I can't say that bothers me toomuch.

M.N: Some people are mad at it, they say it's toobig.

R.C: I was worried that they would put all the police up in St. Catharines, but they are on the streets, and they come and sit on the corner and I'm glad they do.

M.N: Have you noticed most of your nieghbours have stayed the same over the years, pretty well?

R.C: Yes, I would say so.