

This is Shelley Richer interviewing Ross Brown in his home at 5 Jessie Street, on July 19,1985.

**S.R:** Hello Mr. Brown. How are you?

**R.B:** Fine, thank you.

**S.R:** What is your date of birth?

**R.B:** January the 26th, 1905.

**S.R:** Where were you born?

**R.B:** On Dufferin Street in Fort Erie. It was Bridgeburg at the time.

**S.R:** Have you lived in the area all of your life then?

**R.B:** I have.

**S.R:** Could you tell me what school you attended and where it is located?

**R.B:** Rose Seaton, and it's not there any more. It's tore down. It was on Phipps Street. The one they tore down and built it over here on the other street.

**S.R:** Do you know why they tore it down?

**R.B:** Oh, I don't know.

**S.R:** How far away from home would your school have been?

**R.B:** Oh, two blocks at the most.

**S.R:** How did you get to school then?

**R.B:** Walk. Walked to school. Oh, we used to go to school bare footed.

**S.R:** Could you describe your school and your teachers names and the number of students?

**R.B:** I remember we had a teacher Jane Gerrard. I think it was two sisters. I think the other ones name was Hel en and she was a wonderful teacher. She was very strict and she'd take a strap and hit any kid in any seat. She'd just throw from that desk and she should have been a ball player. Hughie Henderson was the principal.

**S.R:** Could you describe your school, like it was when you started?

**R.B:** When I went there was two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. There was...in the hallway in the front there was stairways went up this way and this way. And that side was the boys side and this was the girls side. And we wasn't allowed on one anothers side at recess. The girls stayed on their side and the boys stayed on their side.

**S.R:** Did the school change at all after that?

**R.B:** Oh yeah. They built some on the back and there was more rooms.

**S.R:** Do you remember what year it was built?

**R.B:** No. It was there when I went to school. That's all I know.

**S.R:** Is there anything interesting you can remember about your school days? Any little stories.

**R.B:** Well the first coloured boy ever went to the school here, there was fourteen of us got a whippin' for calling him chocolate drop. In them days you got a whippin' on the hand with a strap. We got it pretty good. That was Mr. Henderson, the teacher was at school, the principal was. My grandfather donated part of his property for a coloured grave yard there, way back, years and years back. I can't tell ya...on Ridgemount Road and...it's near the grave yard...what do you call that grave yard...the Ridgemount Grave Yard. He donated the property for the coloured people. Now they're living at this end of the town. They had to go up to the other end of the town, Old Fort Erie, and there was, up on the hill there, and they used to have to live there. They didn't belong in this end.

**S.R:** Are you a member, or have you been a member of a church?

**R.B:** No.

**S.R:** You were never a church attender or anything like that?

**R.B:** The wife and the kids are. My kids went to sunday school and I believe they should go.

**S.R:** What church was your family brought up in then?

**R.B:** Presbyterian.

**S.R:** And where is that church?

**R.B:** Highland and Central. Saint Andrews Knox Church.

**S.R:** Do you remember what year it was built?

**R.B:** 1930. Opened in 1930.

**S.R:** Have you ever been in it to know any changes that took place in it, or if there was any additions or anything like that?

**R.B:** Yes, I was in it when my kids got christened. One time I was in uniform when I came back. We had our boy christened because he was born when I was over...when I was in Newfoundland. When I come home we went to the church so he could be christened. I took my daughter down the isle when she got married. That church burnt down. The original Presbyterian Church was on Courtwright Street. You know where the bowling alley is now on Court...just around the corner on Courtwright Street there?

Well just around the corner towards the river, back of the garage there was a big building. It was a Presbyterian Church. My mother used to look after it, do the cleaning in it, and that's why I remember. When I was a little boy she used to take us there when she did it. This would be around, maybe 1910 or 11. That church burned down.

**S.R:** Do you remember about what year?

**R.B:** I don't remember what year but it's a long time ago. It burnt down in thirty-one.

**S.R:** Some of the changes in the area. Could you describe the old boundaries?

**R.B:** Well. Bowen Road. Gilmore Road was a boundary between Old Fort Erie and Bridgeburg. And Bridgeburg was called International before Bridgeburg, and before International it was called Victoria.

**S.R:** Do you know why the names changed so much then?

**R.B:** Well, International was changed on account of the bridge being built, this railway bridge called International Bridge. So they changed the name from Victoria to International. Yeah, International Bridge. Then when it got changed to Bridgeburg...I don't know when that happened. It's been Bridgeburg pretty well as long as I remember. The other is history you know, what I've been told in school.

**S.R:** Then there was three areas in Fort Erie?

**R.B:** Yeah, there was Amigari, Fort Erie and Bridgeburg.

**S.R:** So then Amigari was the Thompson Road.

**R.B:** Yeah, Amigari was the...that end of the...the top end of Gilmore, right by the railway tracks there. You know where the hotel is there across from the race track? That was Amigari. You know where the...well there was a little store there on Gilmore Road there. That was Amigari, pretty well Amigari. All from the Horton Steel over was Amigari. Over that way. It used to be Jackson's Store. It was right on the corner there where...the first road from the railway tracks. There's all lumber across from it now.

**S.R:** Could you tell me who your neighbours were when you were growing up?

**R.B:** Yes. There was people by the name of Britnell lived next door to us. And there was Flake's lived on the other side of us, Frank Flake. There was people lived further down called Jones. I don't

know, remember his first name. But I remember one time my brother and I was in there when we was kids, and they had little peach trees next to 'em, and we was in there taking the peaches and we had our caps off. We had them full and she come and we run and left the caps and all. It was some years afterwards that we moved next door, next door to them, and she kept calling us kids to give us a hat and we was scared because we was thinking of the peaches, so finally she give them to my mother. Here's the kids hats that had the peaches in.

**S.R.:** Back then, about how many neighbours, how many people lived on a block?

**R.B.:** Well, where I am now, there was nothing here but bushes. Jarvis Street is almost the same. There's a few differences. Jarvis Street, back of the Pratt and Lambert, used to be the ball grounds. Baseball. Then it was moved on this next corner down here. The corner of Robinson, right on the corner, in that field over there was baseball. Then over on Jarvis Street, back on the other street, was behind the ball grounds, and there was people by the name of Hannis's lived there. They were allowed to keep pigs in Fort Erie. They had a pigpen there. Their son Charlie goes up to bat and he hit a home run, and he hit it and it landed in the pigpen. That's interesting isn't it?

**S.R.:** Could you describe Jarvis Street? Take me on a little memory walk down Jarvis Street. What the street was like, store names and owners.

**R.B.:** It seemed to be more hilly. It was just mud with some stone on it. I had an uncle that lived on Jarvis Street, that had a livery stable. In them days nothing come to the stores by truck, it come to the station and it had to be walked from the station to the stores, and that's why the livery men did a lot of that, as well as delivered to homes. And he, right where the Royal Bank is now, there home was. Back of it he had a barn because there was an alley back there, and he kept his horses in the barn, and he had his horse. Of course there was no automobiles in them days. His name was William Brown, my father's brother.

**S.R.:** What about the other stores and store owner's name that you can think of?

**R.B.:** Well there was a store right next to it that was called Ward Kraft

Store. There is some of their ancestors are alive someplace yet. That's about where the Canadian Tire is now. Well, where the Canadian Tire used to be before they moved over there. And I had another Uncle Pete who was a plumber in Fort Erie. He was also the custodian to the town hall for years.

**S.R:** What did Amigari have to offer?

**R.B:** A railway run through there. The race track is there.

**S.R:** Which railroad would that have been?

**R.B:** It would be, at that time, the Grand Trunk. The CNR now. It wasn't government owned. It was called Grand Trunk, and it run through Amigari there. And there was a little yard over that used to be cars stored into. On this side of the Royal Hotel there was half a dozen tracks there. And the later years they had a coal pile there. This would be during the Depression years, the thirties. They used to have a huge coal pile, oh there was hundreds, and hundreds on tons. I didn't know why they stored it on the ground there. Well when the Depression come along that was really handy for a lot of the people. Almost any house in Amigari, or even in this part of the town, you'd see black smoke coming out of the chimneys. People not working, they'd carry the coal away. Nobody bothered them.

**S.R:** What, the Grand Trunk never ever said anything about people taking their coal?

**R.B:** No. They had detectives you know on the railways. We had one. There's some of them living here today. But I think they, I don't know they know but I think they did. They realized that people was up against it. Oh, the Depression was bad. I was laid off during the early thirties and we was on what they call the pogeey, they called it relief. We used to call it the pogeey. I worked two days a week for it. That's eight days a month for twenty-six dollars a month. That's what I got.

**S.R:** What did you have to do to work for it?

**R.B:** Go down and report to the town shanty and dig a sewer or dig a water line up or anything they had to do.

**S.R:** Where is the town shanty?

**R.B:** It was right where the fire hall is today across from the...on Jarvis Street. You know where the fire hall is? That was a work shanty before the fire hall was there.

- S.R.:** Do you know when the three little villages became Fort Erie and the reasons why?
- R.B.:** January the 1st, 1932, and the reason why was it...Fort Erie was back in history, so they thought they'd take a name that had a historical name to it. Where Bridgeburg, you know, they was...they had changed the names and Fort Erie does have an old history on account of the Old Fort. That's why they took the name.
- S.R.:** Is there any other changes that you can...prominent changes that have happened in Fort Erie?
- R.B.:** Well when they built the Fleet during the war, that caused a lot of employment. Enough people worked there. At one time in Fort Erie you was either railway men or customs officers. There was no other jobs. They used to have a little mail car. Mail used to come in by railway. The man had to go over to the station to pick the mail up. He had a cart with two wheels, and he used to bring it back over to the post office from there. And he'd take all the outgoing mail.
- S.R.:** What did Fort Erie have to offer in sports?
- R.B.:** Baseball. We played a lot of it even way back then. It was local...and they used to have the play-offs, they'd go to the other cities and play them off. One year there was a special train out of Fort Erie. With it being as small as it is...to go to a baseball game. And if I remember right, I think it was up north. I think it was a place called Deloro. They run a special train out even. To give you some more information onto it, when you went down town and went to the stores or to the barber shop...closed 'till after ball game. We'll be open after ball game. We didn't go to school either. That's right because nobody had cars. Oh, you'd go down there and there would be two or three thousand people sat around and watched the ball game. Now this is...this time I told you the ball game was over here. They moved the ball ground down by the river where...you know where it is today, at the end of Bowen Road there. The first house as you was going down Central, that big house there, there used to be people by the name of Day moved there. When we were boys, he's older, he was called Homer. So I seen him a while ago and I says, when they used to hit a ball way up there, and it landed in your lawn it was a home run. Is that why they call you Homer? He laughed but I don't suppose that was it.

- S.R:** Was there any famous teams at all? Any really, really popular teams in Fort Erie?
- R.B:** Yes. They almost went to the championship...they went to the championship one year but I can't remember what year. I think they just got beat out by the last team. The championship of Ontario. They were Bridgeburg Mentholatum's.
- S.R:** Do you remember any of the players?
- R.B:** Oh yes, yes. Ray Young, Williamson. He was almost a big leaguer here. Jack Williamson was a pitcher. Hall was the catcher. Tommy Frazer, first base. Wess Towers, Bruce Hogue, he was well enough to be the post master a while back. R. Atwood, he was the undertaker later on. Charlie Hannis, the fellow I told you hit the ball in the pigpen.
- S.R:** In the old arena in Fort Erie, what activities used to go on there?
- R.B:** Hockey, hockey, hockey is all I know. The Bisons played there. That was their home team, home arena. And during the Depression, nobody had much money or anything, so what they used to do...they didn't smoke in there, and between periods, you know the three periods in hockey, they'd open the door and they'd go outside and smoke. Then they'd come in for their next period. Well they had pass out checks for when they come back in, so an old fellow that worked in there, he give me the pass out checks. They had different colours each week. Well he give me one of all the colours. I'd go up between, after the first period and get in. He'd show me which seats wasn't occupied. I was getting in for nothing seeing the last two periods. Well, if you didn't have any money you didn't...I realize it was cheap, but nobody had anything in them days, and I walked from here up to there. You know where the arena is. It's in the same place. Oh, you didn't mind it.
- S.R:** Was the arena the same as it is now?
- R.B:** No, they made some changes in it. The arena was...we had the big snow in 1937 I think it was, or '36, '37...the arena caved in because the snow got too heavy on the roof. It fell down March 17, 1936.
- S.R:** Was anybody hurt or was it occupied at the time?
- R.B:** No, nobody was hurt. It was in the early hours of the morning. No, nobody was hurt. They rebuilt on the same spot now again. That's in the same place, the one there now.

**S.R:** Were you involved in any sports?

**R.B:** Oh yeah, I played softball. I played for the West Ends. We was the champions of Fort Erie.

**S.R:** What year was that?

**R.B:** Several years..!28, '29, '30. I can show you some pictures of them. So anyway, I got laid off when the war was over...it was being the first world war was on, and I went to work for the Pratt and Lamberts. The players from the Falls sent pitchers to beat us. Nobody could beat us in Fort Erie. At one time we was playing a junior team, another team, I forget their name, but it was run by the merchants of Fort Erie. And anyways it was three out of five, the championship. We lost the first two games. There was a fellow betting on us, and we won the next three. He said, oh you fellows did that on purpose. Well he don't know we had a meeting after losing those two games and was sure we was done. How we ever got out of it I don't know, but we won the next three.

**S.R:** So you won the championship again?

**R.B:** Yeah, yeah. Then I played for McMorrans. We, the West Ends and McMorrans, he first come to town and started his tailor shop down here, sold men's clothes. And anyways, he backed us up and made our sweaters. We used to... well we was a good smart outfit. But I'll tell you what we used to do. We used to run card parties in the winter, and everybody would donate their home. Maisie's mother and father did. We'd go to a different home and have tea and we'd pay a quarter, or whatever it was, then we had enough money to buy our sweaters with. You know our organization was...and Maisie's father used to take up a collection for us at the games and that helped pay for things too. And boy when he took up a collection, he'd walk a mile if someone was a mile away, with a hat. Albert Keenan was her father. He was a boiler maker on the railway.

**S.R:** Do you remember when the fire department started in Fort Erie?

**R.B:** I don't remember the exact day when it started, but I remember the old town hall was a wooden building and it had a little square glass, about six inches square, you broke out and you reached the rope and you pulled the bell. That's what let you know when there was a fire. The bell rang. Frank Benner was just around the corner, the fire hall was on Central near the back end where



the town hall is today. Frank Benner was down there on the other side of Spears Garage there, and he had a team of horses. He come with his horses. He put them horses on that fire wagon. Them horses would just go crazy. That was really something.

**S.R.:** How did they get the fire out? What is a fire wagon?

**R.B.:** They had hoses and big pumps. They had a fire wagon. He'd pull the fire wagon, the horses, and they had the hoses wound down there and then they'd unwind them.

**S.R.:** So there was already town water?

**R.B.:** Oh yeah, yeah, there was town water, yeah.

**S.R.:** Do you remember what you had to do before there was town water?

**R.B.:** Well, I don't remember us not having water but I remember them not having sewer and there were outside, outside, what we called the back house in them days. Outside toilets and pay birds. And they used to...well the, it used to be a fellow out in the country you used to hire him every year, you know. That's when Eaton's catalogue was handy. You never had any toilet paper and you always hauled the Eaton's Catalogue up in the toilet. You know...pages.

**S.R.:** What was there to do for entertainment, such as on a date?

**R.B.:** Oh entertainment. Play cards...play cards, play euchre and went to the show three times a week.

**S.R.:** Where's the show?

**R.B.:** It was on Dufferin Street.

**S.R.:** Do you remember the name and where on Dufferin Street?

**R.B.:** Yeah, the Bellard. There used to be two fellows that run it. I forget their names. The Regent then, and then they sold it to the Ziffs. That's when the Ziffs first come here, the whole family. And the Ziff family really had run that show wonderful. And all of them was part of it. Barney, which you know. You know Barney don't ya? Well he had the bowling alley up at the other end, he run the picture machine. His sister played the piano up at the front. In them days they played the piano up at the front because it was silent pictures when they first started. One of his sisters sold the tickets and...the mother. And one of the sisters took them as you went in. The whole family and it was a hard...and I just said today there was one of them from that family. They're really hard working, wonderful...and they're Jewish people. Wonderful people.

**S.R.:** What was the name before it was the Bellard?

- R.B:** The Regent run by a Captain Highland. Yeah, Captain Highland, yeah. And they'd get drunk and they wouldn't light the fire because there was only two stoves and everybody would freeze and go home. Well when the Ziffs came they rebuilt it, then it was called the Bellard.
- S.R:** Do you remember when the Bertie Fair at the Old Fort Erie Race Track took place?
- R.B:** Yes, I certainly do.
- S.R:** Do you remember the years?.
- R.B:** Well one particular year my wife put peaches into it and won a prize for her canned peaches. That was in 1935, or somewhere in there. So, that everybody used to get first prize for their canned peaches and all, you know it was fun, more fun.
- S.R:** Would you be able to guess when it started or when it finished?
- R.B:** 1897 the track was built because that's when my sister was born. She always talked about it, that she was born when the Race Track started.
- S.R:** The Bertie Fair started at the same time?
- R.B:** I can't tell you when it started. It's been there as long as I remember. That's all I can say, because we used to get a quarter to go to the Bertie Fair when we was kids, and that had to last you all day...well you could buy a hot dog for a nickle, sure. But it had to last you all day. That's all you got. Then we used to go to Crystal Beach...a farmer's picnic. Every year, they called it, the farmers had a picnic. My ancestors on both sides was farmers. You know way back. We used to go down here and get on a train and go as far as Ridgeway. We'd get off at Ridgeway and get on a horse bus with benches along the sides, with two horses, and they'd take you into Crystal Beach.
- S.R:** Into the Amusement Park?
- R.B:** Yeah, you go into the park and everybody took a lunch you know...a basket full of food. Oh there was all kinds of food. The farmers had stuff and they was trying to give it to somebody else, you know? It was a real, real picnic, real get-together...wonderful.
- S.R:** Could you describe the Amusement Park, the way it was then? What rides they had, attractions.
- R.B:** Well, it was a...cars used to go around, used to whip around...what did they call them on the floor there...Crack the Whip. And there was a, the thing that goes up and down, you know the Cyclone,

or something they call it...Roller Coaster. And the Merry-go-Round, and there was a Fun House there too. And then there was a Hupity Dumps. It went like this. You get up at the top and you sit down and you slid down. Bumpity-Bumps they called it. You slide all the way...it was all made smooth you know, it wouldn't hurt you or nothing. And we all just could stay on there for hours. Then later on they brought in the skating rink. You could rent the skates and skate in the skating rink.

**S.R:** Ice skates or roller skates?

**R.B:** Roller Skates.

**S.R:** Oh, the one that's across from the Amusement Park right now, or was it in the Amusement Park itself then?

**R.B:** It was in the Amusement Park itself. I think it was about where the dance hall is now, if I remember right. You know where the dance hall is now at Crystal Beach?

**S.R:** Could you describe the dance Hall?

**R.B:** Yes I remember...I never danced but I can remember looking into it. I remember hearing the music. I can't tell you too much about it. I know there was a place where you stand along the edges and watch them dancers in there. It was kind of roped off like a railing all the way around. You could stand here and here and here and there was dancing in the centre. The orchestra set up, well they had...

**S.R:** Did any famous orchestras go there? Would you know that, or was it just local bands?

**R.B:** I think so, but not dancing I...it's not in my memory. See, I never did dance. When we danced all we ever did was square dancing.

**S.R:** On those farmers picnics?

**S.R:** Do you remember the riot in 1969 at Crystal Beach?

**R.B:** I remember hearing of it.

**S.R:** But you don't know what it involved or what happened or anything?

**R.B:** Well I think it involved mostly Americans wasn't it? Blacks and whites from Buffalo. I'm not absolutely sure of that, but I think that's it. I don't think there were Canadians involved in that as I know of.

**S.R:** Do you know why it started at all? Do you remember?

**R.B:** The difference between the blacks and whites. Whatever their differences was I don't know.

**S.R.:** Do you know what the Sand Quarry was?

**R.B.:** The Sand Quarry, no. Oh, where they used to go swimming. They used to go swimming in there.

**S.R.:** The Ontario Hotel, did you ever visit there?

**R.B.:** The Ontario Hotel. I can't remember.

**S.R.:** Do you remember anything about Ridge Dairy in Crystal Beach?

**R.B.:** Ah, yeah, I don't know whether it's in the same place as it is now. I can't remember much about it. I remember going by it.

**S.R.:** Did the people from Fort Erie have very much to do with the people from Ridgeway or Stevensville or Crystal Beach?

**R.B.:** I'd say no most of the time. Not unless it happened to be plumbers or carpenters or someone that went back and forth like that. Being on the railway, and most of the people I worked with, my friends worked on the railway. They were all here. But a few come in from the farm, but not too many.

**S.R.:** So there were no reasons why, political type reasons or anything, why you didn't?

**R.B.:** Oh, no, no, no...there was no hard feelings or anything like that. It was generally, generally the whole area voted for the same person anyway. See Crystal Beach and Ridgeway and everything else vote for the same peole, don't they? Well they used to be way back...there used to be a lawyer in Welland by the name of German. He was elected the...continuous, all the time. He was always...but he was Liberal. A fellow by the name of Willson used to sell Ford cars in Ridgeway. He...I voted...he was a Conservative. I voted for him once.

**S.R.:** Was that when it was mayor or what would there...?

**R.B.:** Back in the 20's. Ridgeway at that time, I think it was called...Bertie Township had their own police force then, you know, and Fort Erie had their own police force. And what happened, see Ridgeway was a town of their own...it wasn't the Fort Erie now. Stevensville was a town of their own. Well they never had sewers there or anything else, so then they became Bertie Township. They had their own police force. So when the Fort Erie... it was declared Fort Erie,they repainted all the police cars. A short time afterwards, I can't remember exactly, very short, they became Regional and they repainted them again. The policemen was all Regional Policemen...not the Fort Erie or Ridgeway or, they're just Regional now...all the police force.

**S.R:** Do you remember the Peg-Leg Railroad going into Crystal Beach?

**R.B:** I can't say I do. I worked on the Paddy Miles train. Paddy Miles used to know all the Niagara Branch. He used to run right into Niagara-on-the-Lake. There used to be a train run every day.

**S.R:** It came to Fort Erie?

**R.B:** It come to Fort Erie and it used to come out...and we used to tend to the engine, because the engines had to be attended at the end of the trip all the time.

**S.R:** There were two railroad yards in Fort Erie. What railroad yard would it have come to then?

**R.B:** It come to the New York Central yard. Michigan Central at the time. See that name changes over the years. That was Michigan Central before it was New York Central.

**S.R:** What yard...where was it located?

**R.B:** Right up here at the end of Phipps Street. You wouldn't remember. You know that factory up at the end of Phipps Street, Graham Manufacturing, well there was a round house there. I worked there and I just lived across the road from it. I'd be to work in one minute. It was what you call a round house. You know what a round house is? That's what they keep locomotives in. Then when you went into the round house, it was round like this, there was tracks in for each engine. You come onto a turntable. A turntable was big enough to hold the engines in. They had an electric motor and you'd push it around until it come to the track you wanted to put it onto. Why you put it into the round house? It had pits underneath between the tracks so the machines could get underneath and repair what was underneath. They couldn't do it when they were on the tracks down like that.

**S.R:** What year did you start working on the railroad?

**R.B:** 1923. Oh I started on the CN in 1920.

**S.R:** Was the CN in the same place?

**R.B:** The CN, I worked in the yard office and I was call boy and then I got to be a checker.

**S.R:** The CN was in this place you were talking about with the round house?

**R.B:** No, no. Later on the round house was on...CN I worked at the yard office. See that was in the checking department. Where they check the cars. The round house was on Michigan Central. In 1923 I started there.

**S.R:** Where was the CN yard?

**R.B:** Where it is now. They had a round house too. They tore it down on account of the diesels.

**S.R:** Oh, so the CN was in the Amigari area?

**R.B:** Yeah, oh yeah. Now...see the diesel engines, when the diesel engines came in 1944...by the way, a steam engine had to be renewed at the end of each trip. You had to clean the fire, get the clinkers out of it, you had to load the tank with coal, machines had to go around and grease all of the rods...where a diesel is roller bearing. They can go hundreds and hundreds of miles with nothing done to them. But they laid off hundreds of men. That's what done away with us. They closed the shop completely on account of the diesels.

**S.R:** Just like computers are doing now?

**R.B:** That's right, that's right. You explained it.

**S.R:** How many tracks were there when you got started? The difference between when you started and then when expansion came.

**R.B:** Well, our...we always had double tracks, east bound and west bound. On the trains you'd keep going. But the Grand Trunk which is CNR they used to have single tracks. It means, with a single track, that you have to have what they call sidings. If a train's going that way and one's coming this way, he goes in the sidings to let it by. That makes it longer going over the road. But the New York Central used to call it the Americas Speedway because it run from Detroit to Saint Thomas to Fort Erie. And you have divisions. From Fort Erie to Saint Thomas in one division and Saint Thomas to Windsor in another division. There's a tunnel underneath the river at Windsor where they meet the train tunnel. It's been there for years. I don't know when it was built. So the reasons why you had divisions is this. There's about a hundred and sixteen miles from here to Saint Thomas by railway, and about a hundred and eighteen from Saint Thomas to Windsor. Well, an engineer, or fireman, or brakemen working on a train, a hundred miles is eight hours pay.

**S.R:** Did it take eight hours?

**R.B:** No. If you was on a passenger train you could be over there in a couple of hours and you got eight hours pay. And when they went from here they got a hundred and sixteen miles, so they got sixteen into a hundred. More than a days pay, you see? Well they went up and back in the same day so they used to run by mileage and

the freightmen was allowed thirty-eight hundred miles a month and a passenger forty-six. Well if you go...if you go from here to Windsor and back in the same day, you had it four times. You had four days in. So, they used to do...when their time was in they'd take the rest of the month off. But they found out...they used to be paid once a month. What you earned from the first to the fifteenth, you got on the twenty-third, and what you earned from the fifteenth to the last of the month, you was paid on the ninth...so the ninth and twenty-third was payday. So they found that by getting their time in the first of the month, and taking off the end of the month, the second pay they had nothing coming. So what they did was, they would layoff a few days to keep that down so halves would be alright. We always had a spareboard...four or five men on the spareboard. You call them off when they're laid off. See they keep their mileage down. See, if they're allowed thirty-eight hundred, you try to get nineteen hundred each half. In the first half of the month if you had nineteen hundred by the tenth, you'd take five days off. See, that's the way they done it. But see, well anyway, when they started the five days a week...see I worked seven days a week up until 1954...when they started at five days a week, why they gave us six days pay for five. We lost one days pay. Well all the fellows that worked in the yard though...you see on the yard you had regular shifts, four to twelve, twelve to eight, and eight to four. That's all they got, eight hours. But the fellows that was in the yard, when they come to five days a week, all went back on the main line where they got this mileage I was telling you about, thirty-eight hundred miles a month. See, the money was higher on the line but sometimes you were away from home. See that's why they got a boarding house down there by the CNR Station. You know where the boarding house is there? Well that's for main line. See, when they come in from Saint Thomas well they go to bed and have a nice rest before they go out the next day.

**S.R:** It's on Lewis Street?

**R.B:** Yeah.

**S.R:** Did the CN help at all during the Depression? Were people laid off? Did they help out any of the workers?

**R.B:** During the Depression the bosses were terrible.

**S.R:** Why, and what do you mean?

**R.B:** Well, if they give you a bawling out, which we say raise hell with us, a bawling out for something that you know damn well you didn't do, you know what our boss used to say to us? You don't have to work here. There's a sidewalk over there.

**S.R:** They knew you had to have that job to make sure...

**R.B:** If you had a wife and family at home what did you do? You had to take it. You stood there with your fist behind your back. Some of the bosses was a lot different. There was some good ones too. But the ones that was rotten, was really rotten. The unions today, I'm sore at the unions today, but there's one good thing they did, they stopped a lot of that. There used to be a lot of discrimination.

**S.R:** When did the unions come in?

**R.B:** Well, I don't know. They come in gradually. They come in gradually...on the railway it was later. When I started on the railway there was no unions for us at the round house at all. Then later on the machinists got one. See, there are different trades that have different unions. There's a machinist union, then there was...I was what you call a hostler. Now, do you know what a hostler is?

**S.R:** No.

**R.B:** Alright, I'm going to go back for you now. Years ago when the people had horses and the lady was out riding, when she come back in, she turned the horse over to the stable hand, and he looked after the horse and put it away. That's what a hostler is. But I did it with locomotives. When a locomotive come into the round house, the engineer got off, he was done. I run that locomotive up to the coal dock for the labourers to put coal into it. See on the railway I was an engineer inside the round house, but not on the main line. I would run that down to the...what they called the cinder pit, where they cleaned the fires. The ashes went down into a pit...a cinder pit. Because they had the...underneath the fire box there was a pit and you opened a thing and all the ashes went down in there. And they cleaned that fire and did all...because after all, they burned maybe twenty ton of coal between here and Saint Thomas. There'd be a lot of ashes down in that ash pan. You let it out and you cleaned the fire. I didn't do that, the labourers did that, but I run the engines down for it. I run the engines down to the train table and we'd turn it around, put it in the round house, and the machinists and boiler makers would look after it. They'd go underneath and he'd grease



it and oil it. Then when you backed the engine out of the turn table, you had to turn the turn table out so it was headed west because it would be headed east coming in. That's why you had...and I'd bring them out and I'd have to go around a little channel to a little side track and get it ready for the engineers. But I'd get it on the turn table. See the unions wouldn't let me do the work, that was labourers work. But I'd set up an engine while he was running around. Well I had a good job but...then when the diesel come oh...all they had to do was back them up for them to put sand in. Why they have sand...because the wheels could slip and they have a pipe that goes down, they turn the air on and it blows a little sand, it gives you grit see. And then they back them up for fuel oil. And they put the fuel oil into them. That's all there is to it.

**S.R:** Do you remember your bosses, what their names were?

**R.B:** Wilfred Vye was one. The first boss I remember was a fellow called Roy Grice. In 1923 that was, I remember him. Then there was Bert Olderieve during the depression years, I think he's got a son in town here now. Wilfred Vye was night foreman. We had a fellow...then later on the car department had their own foreman. A fellow by the name of Brindley. Well later on they joined together and Mr. Brindley was in charge of the car department and the locomotive department, which we was both. There's an old Wayne Brindley around town. Maybe you know some of them.

**S.R:** What were derailment teams?

**R.B:** Well, when the engine went off the track, why they...we had a derrick in the round house. It laid there...it had no fire or steam in it. But as soon as we got work we put a fire into it to get steam. It had a big end on it, and you run your derrick out, a locomotive would hook onto it and take it out where it was and lift it up. Wilfred used to run the derrick before he become foreman. Did he tell you that? Yeah, he used to and I used to fire it for him.

**S.R:** Oh, get it all going so you could take off.

**R.B:** Yeah, so you could take off. It was used so seldom but it laid around. They put it in a place where it was stored, but ready in case, you know in case they wanted it again. And coal and everything in case, so you could start a fire on it as soon as you got word, then you could go out.

**S.R:** You mentioned before that you were either a customs officer or a railway man.

**R.B:** When I got laid off the railway in 1960 I got a job working for one of the truck companies. Which one was it now? And I went up working for the trucking company working at the Peace Bridge. Here's what a lot of people don't know. All the freight that comes through, a lot of it's got to be examined, and there has to be invoices with it, and there's duties got to be paid. That's what the brokers do, they pay the duty. Well, everybody thinks of a customs officer as a man as you go through with your cars to the bridge. Which there is a lot of them, but there's a lot of them back in there. They've got to watch these trucks when they're unloaded and what's on them, because there's stuff that could be smuggled in. We used to...when I worked in the car...we'd take it all off and put it all on, on what they call the dock...pulled all those goods off, and what they had invoices in and Customs would say what they want. We'd take it up to the inspector and he'd open it up and look to see what it was. They wouldn't do everything but they spot checked. Well there was an awful lot of comp...they were companies back in there, trucking companies. You've seen them on the road, the different trucks. And there's a lot of customs...a lot of jobs back in there. There was appraisers too. Sometimes when things come through they appraised the rate on it you see. A lot of people don't know that the duty must be paid directly, the brokers do. They pay the duty, the brokers, then the company pays the brokers. The duty's paid when it goes through. Now some stuff goes through in bond. When it goes through in bond we don't do nothing with it. It's got a seal on it and wherever it goes there's got to be a customs officer. If it's going someplace where there's no customs office...well most places don't have a customs officer...it's got to be cleared here. Well sometimes when the freight comes through, the invoices...I don't know what happens...isn't there. They just put the...it's kept there until the invoices come through. See there's a lot of work back in for the customs officers. Do you know the customs officer works back in the railway yards too for stuff going through? Oh yeah.

**S.R:** What do they do in the railway yard?

**R.B:** Well they go and...they, one of them opens up the cars and inspects stuff if it's being imported or exported. Oh yeah, it's a big job. There's much more. No, my son-in-law...Maise's brother was a customs

officer and he's pensioned off today. He was in Toronto. He worked down here at the Peace Bridge and he worked at the head office in Toronto. My son-in-law was a customs officer, my daughters' husband, and he worked at Fort Erie. Then he moved to St. Catharines...he got another job. He had to go up to the ships going through the canal and he had to go on the ships to do up the stuff...Well then he got a higher job and he went to London, and he used to go to the airport out there to do their stuff up. Now, he's in the head office in...I don't know exactly what he does...he's in Hamilton. There's an awful lot of jobs for customs that people just don't know about. They just see them when they're going through the Peace Bridge or at the Niagara Falls Bridge. There's lots of work for those people. But you know, did you know that there's an awful lot of lady customs officers today? Did you see some of them come to the bridge.

**S.R:** I see in summertime they hire the college students.

**R.B:** Now that's an ideal...well there's regular ones now. That's an ideal job for a lady. I believe in that because it's...but I don't believe in ladies out there picking, or shovelling or working on the railway, doing that. Customs officers they could be because it's not manual labour, they've just got to use this...

**S.R:** Your head, yeah.

**R.B:** That's alright for a lady to do that. Oh yeah, customs officers, there's a lot of background. They have a lot to do. A lot of people don't realize how much they've got to do.

**S.R:** When talking of customs you mentioned about smuggling. Do you remember any of the goings on with smuggling back during the rum running days?

**R.B:** Yes, I remember quite well. I remember the cars would come down, railway cars full of beer, they'd come down there at the foot of Courtwright Street. There was a railway track just this side of the International Bridge which crossed into the docks there, and with a boxcar full of beer they'd load up the boats that's consigned to Cuba...load the boats and they'd be back the next morning empty. They had been to Cuba off the Niagara River.

**S.R:** Do you remember anything else smuggled other than alcohol?

**R.B:** Oh yeah, there was quite a bit about it. We used to go down and watch them, see. We used to watch the coast guards...I don't know.

I hate to say anything...they used to come out and shine that big light and go way down the river and all the boats would take off full of beer.

**S.R:** Oh, they'd wait until the coast guards were out of sight then?

**R.B:** No. That was a signal as far as I was concerned. They were unloading and back again before he come back up the river again. We'd sit there for hours watching it. You figure, well...I don't know if it was a coincidence, unless they knew he'd be gone that long, I don't know. But it looked...

**S.R:** Too much of a coincidence.

**R.B:** It was suspicious anyway.

**S.R:** Was there much violence involved with it?

**R.B:** No not...no there wasn't much violence like there is now.

**S.R:** With the smuggling... as far as the local police and the people doing their duty trying to stop it?

**R.B:** Well, I know fellows that used to bring loads from St. Catharines. There's a brewery in St. Catharines called Taylor and Bates. I'm not sure if it was St. Catharines or Welland. And they used to go down and get a load in the back end of their car and bring it down here, and they'd get twenty-five dollars for that. Oh yeah, they were breaking the law. Some got caught and some didn't.

**S.R:** What happened if they got caught?

**R.B:** Oh, they got fined. I never heard tell of anybody going to jail. I don't remember what the fine was. They made lots of money, they could afford the fine.

**S.R:** Did you hear anything about the Chinese people being smuggled?

**R.B:** Yes, way back...I'm not going to name the family but there was a famous family, been around here for years. You've heard the name too. I've no doubt you have. They used to smuggle...take Chinamen to...and I know of a case, my father told me about this, because he remembered. They rode up the river and they, the coast guard or something would come along, I forget what they called them in them days, they'd just dump them. They all drowned.

**S.R:** Why didn't they swim? Did they do something to make them drown?

**R.B:** Well, maybe they couldn't swim in the river or something, I don't know. But that river's pretty swift you know even good swimmers drown. Then another case where they used to take them over and put them on the breakwall. Well the breakwall over there, you still

got to get through that water. You know another thing they used to do in the later years? You know the basket that goes over the Whirlpool in Niagara Falls? (they'd say) Go on that. Over on the other side is the United States. They were still in Canada see. They don't know. Because one time that used to get on both sides. Now you can only get on one, this side. You used to be able to get on the far side too as well.

**S.R:** Oh, so people used to come over and bring stuff?

**R.B:** No. It was all in Canada. See you go across the Whirlpool in that basket, that's still Canada here. It's still Canada there. But that round circle fools them...

**S.R:** Oh, now I understand what you said, yeah. We were talking about Crystal Beach before, could you compare Crystal Beach to Erie Beach?

**R.B:** No. I liked Erie Beach very much. That dance hall they used to have there, and I never danced but I used to go and watch. It was all right over the water. It was wonderful then. We used to, we used to...they had these four dolls and they're set up on a platform. You had to knock them off with three balls. The Jewish people run it. We had a fellow...and you got a box of chocolates. A pound box in them days, or course chocolate was dear. And we had a guy who was a baseball pitcher, he could knock them down. And there's this little lady that used to say, oh please don't come play anymore. Because you know, she says, you're breaking me. He'd go over there and get a couple then he would, he would be...Oh yeah we like this beach real well. There was a little train that used to run to it. It run from the ferry.

**S.R:** Do you remember the name?

**R.B:** They used to call it the Snake Hill and something. The ferry dock used to be there. You know the ferry dock about...you know where Agrette's Store is? On that side of the boulevard up.

**S.R:** At the south end on the boulevard?

**R.B:** Yeah, yeah. Well that's about where the dock was. But if you got a high wind and the water got held up in the lake, the river would lower and the boat couldn't dock. But that only happened on a rare occasion. When we used to go...we used to go from one country to the other for a nickle. And I was telling one of the old timers...what's his name now, Ken Minor. He's about eighty-four, you can get information

for him. I told him about going from one country to the other for a nickle. He says, I can remember back farther than you. He said, you used to get two tickets for a nickle. Yeah, Ken Minor, yeah.

**S.R:** You said you like the dance hall, could you describe it?

**R.B:** Yes, it...the dance hall was up above. It was over the water. Down below was a hot dog stand and ice cream, different stuff like that. You'd get it all in the other platforms. There used to be some...not dancing I didn't bother with too much but it was a nice looking building.

**S.R:** Was there anything else other than the big dance hall? What other attractions were there?

**R.B:** Well, there was Bumpity-Bumps and the Blue Streaks and the roller skating and...oh what was that? In the boat when you went through the tunnel and you went through a dark part. That's where you took your girlfriend and you'd get a kiss when you got to it. I think they called it the Tunnel Of Love. In them days that was all they kissed.

**S.R:** And they had an olympic size pool?

**R.B:** They had the largest, outdoor, freshwater pool in the world at that time. On this side of the dance hall here. Oh yeah, the other side, yeah.

**S.R:** They had a track in a field or stadium, do you remember any events that took place there? Did any famous people come?

**R.B:** I can't remember anybody. I remember the car...my father worked on the railway then, although he was a carpenter, and they used to have a union. They used to have a picnic every year and they used to have it at Erie Beach. Everybody took their own food, you know, baskets and things like I told ya. Then they had races for all the children. They'd have a thirty yard races. It was nothing, just made up between ya's, you know. It wasn't a regular thing you know, the unions did that in the car shop. That was going every day for somebody. Oh yeah, there'd be different unions there. People don't have much money, but they had a good time, they made a good time. Everybody brought baskets of food, you always had food. And everybody...if you didn't have much, somebody else had too much...come on we don't want to take all this home.

**S.R:** Everybody was willing to share, not like nowadays.

**R.B:** Do you know we used to...I had an uncle killed on a motorcycle in '18 or '19, somewhere...1917, and they lived right down on the corner of Dufferin Street and Robinson. There was no houses up this way,

it was the last house. That house still sits there. There was so much food come in from neighbours and stuff, she had to find a place to give it to somebody else. We couldn't use it. They don't do that anymore now...from neighbours and everybody. Of course, don't forget, in them days...this is, I don't like this subject but...he wasn't taken to the funeral parlour, he was in a casket in your own home, right in your front room. And you always used to have somebody sit up with them every night, all night and it was three or four days before he was buried. We always had somebody in the family sit with them all night. You know why? I hate to get on this subject...rats...dead body. You see the houses didn't have basements in. I can remember my grandmother was in our front room, wasn't she? 1925 that was, yeah. We lived on Jarvis Street. You don't know what a wonderful world you have today.

**S.R:** We have luxury compared to that.

**R.B:** But ah, you know what I mean, we didn't know any different. We were happy. In fact, I think we were happier than most people are now because we didn't know...because we don't know about these things. We played lots of games.

**S.R:** What kind of games did you play?

**R.B:** Snakes and Ladders, Run Sheep Run, Tap The Icebox. In Run Sheep Run you choose up sides, and then maybe, it's according to how many you got. Say we got twelve, six on this side and six on that side and you have a leader. Each one elects a leader. He takes his fellows out and he hides them and you come and take your six and go and find them. And when you're looking for them...now this place where you start is call your goal. You generally use a telegraph pole or something like that. He would say...the opposite leader that hid his men would come back and you had to go and search and he'd go with you. Well, when he figured he was far enough away, that his men was closer, he'd holler Run Sheep Run, and if they got back first he lost.

**S.R:** Something like Hide And Go Seek is today?

**R.B:** Yeah, Hide And Seek. Tap The Icebox, you remember that, you played that. Well that's very much like Hide And Go Seek, only somebody hid their eyes on a pole...always a pole. They'd tap you on the back and you had to turn around and guess who it was. If you guessed, well then they had to take a turn, and if you didn't

guess everybody went and hid. We used to play Palm Palm Pull Away. I bet you never heard tell of that. All right, ya choose up sides, and somebody got on each side of...say a lawn or a small park, a small place. This side one gang, and one gang on this side and there'd be so many guys in the centre. You had to run across like that without them touching ya. You'd wait for somebody to run and they'd run right through. Then you got on that side and whoever had the most guys on the opposite side they started out from won. We used to play it at school...recess. And you played tag I'm sure. Oh yeah, we...you had...well we never used to...see all the parcels you got from the store in them days wasn't done like now, they were done up in strings. Nothing come, your sugar was all in bags and he'd put it in a smaller thing and do it up with string. See he didn't have it up on the shelves and it didn't come like it does now. And even if you got crackers, they come and take them and put them in your bag. And everything was...save that string and we used to wind it and make a ball out of it, then wrap tape around it. That's what we used to play ball out in the field there with when we were kids.

**S.R:** Oh, a ball for catch or playing stickball or something like that?

**R.B:** Yeah, yeah, and they used to play football over there in this field. Right over here. And right over here at this store, right up at this little store on the corner was a garage.

**S.R:** Simpson's Store?

**R.B:** Yeah, this little store right here, Simpson's. This little store here, there was nothing...there was nothing over in that field, and we used to play ball over there, and he used to see us playing ball...and that's the picture Wilfred Vye showed you. That's where we used to play. That's where that picture was taken, right across from there. And anyways, he seen all these people around, and he thought, gee, I'll get pop in. And he started selling a lot of pop....you know all those people over there in the hot weather. Then pretty soon he had a few groceries on the shelf. It gradually got to be a store, gradually over the years.

**S.R:** Oh, so that's how it became a store then?

**R.B:** That's how it began. It was a gasoline station when it first started.

**S.R:** You mentioned before about the ferries, why did people go to Buffalo so much? Why didn't they just buy their stuff here or have their



entertainment here?

**R.B:** Well, you don't get the entertainment in a small town you get in a big city, you don't have the facilities. We used to go over there a lot to go to the show. I can remember when there was no show in Fort Erie in my time, when we used to go over on a little car. It used to go across this bridge...there was no Peace Bridge. They called it the Dummy. You've heard that expression about it before. It had seats into it and there was a customs officer rode it with me on the way over so it wouldn't hold it up. You went down a few steps...we called that Black Rock over there...and there was two shows, there was the Amherst and the Jubilee. They were open on Sunday too. We used to go over there to go to the show. Then there used to be two. There was a couple big stores over there. There was Davis's and AB's, I think. After the Peace Bridge went up them stores went out of business. Do you know why? No business. And if you wanted to go up into the city you got a street car up.

**S.R:** Oh, one of the electric powered street cars?

**R.B:** Yep. With the overhead thing you know. And they used to run one up Niagara Street if you wanted to go up town. But we didn't go up to the city that often.

**S.R:** Could you describe the dummy a little bit more?

**R.B:** Well, it looked like a passenger car but one end of it had the motor and the engineer and the fireman into it...electric. You couldn't get in that part. And the other part had, like a bus, seats along each side...double seats...wider than a bus because the seats was double, two could sit in. There was several, quite a few of them. On a saturday night, you know, you used to have to watch the drunks that would come from over there. Booze and all that was out. And another thing we used to do...my father used to go over to get his beer...fish fries was free. He'd take all us kids, and us kids didn't drink any beer. There was five of us and my mother, she didn't drink any beer. He only paid about a nickle for his beer and you got fish. You didn't have fish and chips in them days, you had fish and potato salad, and it was free...we'd all have our fish and chips. They used to have a free lunch counter in the bars in Buffalo. That's another thing that they never had over here. They had sandwiches and meat and roast. All of you help yourself...free.

**S.R:** Just if you went in and bought a beer?

**R.B:** Yeah. That's before '20. Then Prohibition came in. I remember taking Wilfred Vye, I guess I told you about this, taking his father over. My brother was in the Lafayette Hospital over there...there was no hospital in Fort Erie. I took Mr. Vye over and we stopped in to get a beer...he wasn't a heavy drinker. We just had...this free lunch counter...oh, he said, you must have, you can't have it free...the food. I says it's free you know, help yourself...pretzels, big bowls of pretzels.

**S.R:** And you don't know why? Was it just too cheap over here?

**R.B:** No I wouldn't say that, I would say, you are comparing a village with a city. You can't compare them. See a village...don't have things like that. See, Fort Erie was a village at one time. Fort Erie never had a mayor, Fort Erie had a reeve.

**S.R:** Who was the first reeve that you remember?

**R.B:** Mr. Hogue I think.

**S.R:** Do you remember what year that would have been, approximately?

**R.B:** I can't tell you for sure. Well, 1915-16, or something...between '15 to '20. Hogue's was an old family around here, you've heard the name before I'm sure of that. They had the...you know where the Oddfellows Hall is on the corner of Jarvis and Central...that flat building? Well that was Hogue's Store there, and I used to pull a wagon around and deliver groceries for him every saturday...a little wagon full of groceries...just in the Fort Erie area.

**S.R:** How much would you get for a saturday doing a little job like that?

**R.B:** We used to get about a quarter. That was Bridgeburg then. You didn't get much, as long as you got a little bit. When I started at the Pratt and Lambert in '19 I got twelve dollars a week. When I started in the Pratt and Lambert in, the war was over, in 1919 I think it was. In 1920 a friend of mine came down and said, there's a callboy job open and it pays a hundred dollars a month...and I was making twelve dollars a week. Well it wasn't quite a hundred, it was \$49.60 every payday and you got paid twice a month. You know, I quit that job at noon and went and started at four o'clock over there.

**S.R:** That was on the railroad?

**R.B:** Yeah. On the Grand Trunk

**S.R:** Why was it that the Grand Trunk paid so much more than the other places?

**R.B:** They didn't pay more than the other places, Pratt and Lambert's paid less than the other places. That's what it was. New York Central paid more than the Grand Trunk did.

**S.R:** The Grand Trunk is the CN now?

**R.B:** Yeah, and the Grand Trunk...I got a fellow, a man down the road, I guess he's in his nineties. He was on the same job as I was on and he worked on the CNR. He was a hostler doing the same kind of work but working for the CNR, which it was the Grand Trunk, and this is in the later years, I was making five dollars a day more, doing the same work working for an American railroad.

**S.R:** You were making five dollars a day more than him?

**R.B:** He was making sixteen something and I was making twenty-one something. That's the biggest salary I ever made. And do you know I only made about five thousand dollars once in my life. I made fifty-two hundred in a year. And now It's the best money in Fort Erie and they go on strike. And we got a home, but I never had a car. I was almost fifty before I had a car. I walked to work to pay for our home. It's paying off today though isn't it?

**S.R:** Yes, the way the prices of them are today.

**S.R:** Would you know what year the Peace Bridge was built or opened?

**R.B:** 1928...'29, '28.

**S.R:** Did they have anything special for the opening?

**R.B:** Yeah, the Prince of W ales was there and there was several people from the States that was important too. I forget who it was, and they met right in the middle of the bridge like...to open it up.

**S.R:** What kind of festivities did they have?

**R.B:** Well, I was on down the river to see all the people lined up waiting for them to come ...they knew he was coming. I didn't go up to the bridge you see, but I guess they had quite a do up there you know, speakers and things like that. But, yeah, there was quite a do at the Peace Bridge. We were also there for the fiftieth anniversary.

**S.R:** Could you describe that, the fiftieth anniversary?

**R.B:** Greg Wilson spoke. He was chairman wasn't he, of the Bridge Committee then? That's been a lot of...did you realize that the Peace Bridge...more cars come by than any other port between Canada and the United States, and in Detroit and Windsor it's bigger than us? More cars cross this Peace Bridge than any place there is access between the two countries.

**S.R:** Would you know any reason why? Could you hazard a guess?

**R.B:** I don't know why, ah, because they have to go through this way to go to Toronto and...

**S.R:** Oh, to get to another major city?

**R.B:** Major cities...Toronto.

**S.R:** And we have the Race Track and Crystal Beach and...

**R.B:** Well, that keeps your Race Track going up here. You know that ninety percent is from the other side of the, across the river. Have you ever come across the Peace Bridge when the races was on? Then you know what I mean.

**S.R:** It's jammed.

**S.R:** Is there anything else from way back when, that you can think of that you'd like to add?

**R.B:** Yes. I can think of...my, on my grandfather's farm when I was a boy...

**S.R:** Where would that be?

**R.B:** At Ridgemount, seven miles out of town, near the graveyard at Ridgemount, the farm was very close to it...we used to have square dances in the winter. He used to come in what you call the hay racker, a big rack, and he filled it all full of straw, and he'd take all the people out. There would be twenty-five or thirty people on there all sitting in the straw with blankets, and they'd be singing all the way out because there wasn't no music...and they'd have the square dancing. We square danced quite a bit in the winter because the farmers generally wasn't busy in the winter. He's only generally got to feed his cattle. We used to have square dances over there in his house. And this original coloured man, his name was Lam Bright, the grandfather of all these people, played the big bull-fiddle, and he was a great friend of my grandfathers, and that's why my grandfather donated that property at the end there.

**S.R:** Oh, and you said the original coloured man?

**R.B:** The original coloured man, yes one of the originals. But these Brights, their mother was a white woman. I remember her from when I was a boy. So they're half and half like. Oh yeah, remember the old...but I can hear him yet with his kids. They used to take use kids out, the mother and father would, they'd take us up and put us to bed. But we could hear them dancing down below in the parlour.

**S.R:** Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**R.B:** Well, I told you about my father, he was born in '66, didn't I? They all said he was a year older than Canada. Well, he was born in 1866, and Canada became a country in 1867. He always said he was older, a year older than Canada. His parents come from Edinborough, my father's parents...mother and father.

**S.R:** From where?

**R.B:** Edinb urch, Scotland. See, the old ones ways back was from my mother's side. The Dennehower's we're talking about from...The Browns come from Edinb urch Scotland. I've been in Edinb urch in the wartime.

**S.R:** What was...you said your father was born a year before Canada became Canada...a country. What was it before then?

**R.B:** Well it was Upper Canada and all that, but it joined as one in 1866. See it was only a hundred years old. You remember that, not too long ago...in 1966, yeah. But ah, '67, I should say. Yeah , well there was Upper Canada and Lower Canada and all that. See that's when Niagara-on-the-Lake was called Newark. That was the capital of Upper Canada. But I don't know too much about it.

**S.R:** Is there anything you'd like to add in closing?

**R.B:** Yeah. My grandfather had a thrashing engine, and he used to do thrashing for all the farmers in them days. All the roads used to be mud. There happened to be rain, and when they went to one farm they had to have eight or ten teams of horses pulling this big iron machine out to get there. When they would thrash it, the wheat of each farmer, all the different farm women would come and cook. And all the pies and cakes, oh boy, us little kids would go out there and oh those good homemade pies. Oh, really nice, yeah. But they, that's the way they lived in them days. And my grandfather was, they say the Germans is mean, but there was never a fencepost crooked on that farm. When you went through that little gate that went...and went into the front of the house and left it open, oh he was stern. But ah, no it's a, why I always remember my...see I never seen my father's father, I seen the grandma, I never seen the father. I don't know what he looked like even. And Maisie and I went up, we were trying to look up the old farm, it's up near, you know a place called York? It's on that river. What's that river that runs through there? It's on the Grand River. So we was up, but we just tried to trace it, because...do you know Bob Wilson? He used to

be a customs officer, he's retired, well he's a...his mother was my father's sister's daughter. You know, we tried to look the family up. So he's taking it from the other side but the Brown's can't go too far because the great grandmother and great grandfather, they both come from Edinb urgh, that's all I know about them. Before that I don't know anything.

**S.R:** Thank you for the interview Mr. Brown.

**R.B:** And thank you very much, you've been very nice.

**S.R:** Thank you.