

This is Shelley Richer interviewing Robert Disher in his home at 461 Ridge Street on July 16, 1985.

S.R: Hello Mr. Disher. What is your date of birth?

R.D: July 18, 1899.

S.R: Where were you born?

R.D: Ridgeway.

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

R.D: Practically, excepting for years when I'm away at school and for time spent in British Columbia.

S.R: Were there hospitals when you were born or was it done at home. Were there doctors? The name of your doctor.

R.D: The first doctor that I can remember is Dr. Culver in Stevensville and Dr. Sneider in Ridgeway. Later there was a Dr. Thompson and then Dr. Stewart and then the present Dr. Victor Thompson.

S.R: What did the area do for Hospitals?

R.D: Ridgeway had...it was located on Dominion Road, west of Ridge Road there was a home hospital. My recollection of that is, it seemed to be a place where the main activity is taking out appendicies and tonsils. I remember one of my children had her tonsils removed in that little hospital.

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

R.D: I attended the S.S.#11 Bertie. The big old public school which is still in existence. It is now used as Masonic Hall. By the time I got just about the right age, the public school had an extra room which was a continuation school, the fore runner of high school. That expanded to the extent that a wing had to be built on the original public school building and served as a continuation school until the new public school was built, as we called it, up on the hill at the south end of the village. The continuation school moved in as part of that building until the high school was built in 1927 at the north end of the village.

S.R: Do you remember the street that your original school was built on?

R.D: The original school was on Ridge Road.

S.R: Would you remember your teachers names or the number of students the school held?

R.D: I don't remember the number of students. There were three classrooms in the public school. In my book, I tell about one of the public school teachers. She must have been a very beautiful young lady because we, the kids in the room at the time, became definitely involved in reporting the sparking that went on between the lady teacher and the married principal. The result was that both the principal and the lady teacher had to leave town. Then I recall, there was another teacher in the public school who was there for a great many years. Some sort of cousin of mine, Maggie Disher. It would be recalled by many, many of the older citizens of the community. The man who stands out above everyone else in connections with the school days in A.M. Woodley, the principal of the continuation school.

S.R: Is there anything interesting you can remember from your school days?

R.D: Well, one thing that was interesting to some of us that found science classes rather facinating, we were able to learn just enough to be able to wire many of the young ladies seats and provide them with a very remarkable shocks out of the apparatus that we were able to conjure up. Another thing that I remember quite well from high school days was the fact that Mr. Woodley, when he wanted to enforce a point or was particularly enraged at our stupidity...he was a very big man with big hands and extremely big feet. He'd swing one of his fists around and give a crash on the board and shake almost all of us out of our seats. I don't remember him ever breaking the board, but he should have broke it. We had a lady teacher, another Miss Lang, no relation to the first public school teacher that I mentioned, she was quite a little person. She taught geography. She really got under my skin because she always pronounced...when she was talking about the geographies of the United States and she mentioned the state of Massachusetts, she would always pronounce it Mass-a-chezz-its.

S.R: You mentioned some of the changes in the school, do you remember when the school was origionally built and if there were any other changes?

R.D: No. I can't remember when that public school building, the original one was built. I know that my dad went to school in that building. His teacher, that he often spoke about, was Alvin A. Killman. A man that I got to know as a young person because when I knew him he was retired from teaching and was secretary treasure of the Bertie and Willoughby Farmer's Mutual Fire Insurance Company. There's a mouth full of names. He was also a taxidermist, this Mr. Killman. He had a wonderful collection of animals and birds which he had stuffed and mounted. He also had a very large collection of mounted insects, butterflies, moths. He interested me in the collection of butterflies and helped me build my first cyanide bottle to kill them before you mounted them.

S.R: Are you a member of a church?

R.D: Of a church?

S.R: Yes.

R.D: Yes, I am a member of the Memorial United Church in Ridgeway.

S.R: Where is it located?

R.D: It's on the south-east corner of Ridge Road and Dominion Road.

S.R: Was it always there?

R.D: Yes. That's where it was built in 1872. That's the Memorial Church in connection with the Fenian Raid.

S.R: Has there been any changes in the church since it was built in 1872?

R.D: Oh yes. It grew somewhat like topsy. There was a building built at the east end of it for sort of a kitchen. Then a Sunday school was added on the north side when I was quite a young person. Later a gymnasium was...no, no, before the gymnasium was built the church which had never had a basement. The church was raised and a basement built under it. The raising was quite a feature because the original spire was at least a hundred feet high and that was part of the structure. There had to be raised up considerably in order to put the basement under the church. Well after the basement was built, then a gymnasium was added on the property where originally the Boy Scouts had been permitted to build a hall, which it had to be moved away. Also on that area was the old church drive shed for the use of the members who brought, or came by horse and buggy.

- S.R:** Do you recall any special events the church had to offer the family?
- R.D:** Probably the outstanding event as a youngster was the annual Sunday school entertainment. In the area of the choir and pulpit, an extension was made, a sort of stage was built, curtains erected. We kids went through our very important exercises to entertain the very enthralled parents and grandparents.
- S.R:** What are some of the changes that have taken place in the area? Like your neighbours, who they were back when you were growing up and the difference in the land holdings then and now, the sizes.
- R.D:** I don't remember much change in the size of the lots from the time that I was a youngster. The building that I lived in as a child is now the dry cleaning establishment. One of the outstanding businesses which is still flourishing is Beeshy's China Shop. That has a steady place in the communities history right back to the beginning. J.A.Beeshy, the originator, was also a watch and clock repair man. He had the Western Telegraph Office in his store where...in the same location where Beeshy's China Shop now is. It started as a grocery store, then he expanded into crockery. Eventually his nephew took over the business and gradually faded out the grocery store and went exclusively into imported English China, going at least every other year to England, to the Wedgewood Potteries and other potteries. I remember one season that he had a new design which he imported and the design was called for his two children. And the design was "Kenwin" for his two children, one Kenard and one Winifred. I helped unpack china for him and was always amazed when the hogs heads and the big open crates...that after we had taken out all of the china and had taken it safely into his store it was impossible to put the straw, which was the packing, it was impossible to put the straw back into the crates.
- S.R:** You had too much straw, plus you had all the china in it in the first place...packed very well. Talking about stores and businesses and different people in Ridgeway could you take me down a little memory lane. Starting at point A to point B in Ridgeway, and whatever the two points would be? Describe what the streets were like. Do you remember when they were mud streets or the other stores that you would pass, store owners?

R.D: Well, as a small kid certainly. Ridge Road, the main street to the village was nothing but a dirt road. Plenty of dust in the summer time and plenty of mud in the spring and fall. Of course in the winter time, it was a grand time for cutters and bob sleighs to go through on the tightly packed snow. In the summer time, I recall one time my grandfather's store was a big old creaky windmill that pumped water up into a big hoghead on the tower. I'd stand out, probably get paid a few cents, in the street with the hose, watering down the dust in front of the store. Across from the store, my grandfather's store, my grandfather's name was Benjamin Moore Disher. He lived in a big house right beside the store. That house is still in use. Across from his store was the Queen's Hotel. The Proprietor at the time was Albert White. Between granddad's store and the railway was the station and on the other side of the railway tracks was the other hotel the McLeod House. Next to the McLeod House was T.L.Stone's tin shop and beside that the original Imperial Bank building. Next to it was Sherk's Hardware Store and then came Beeshy's China Shop. Then there was a big vacant lot and as a child, on back in that vacant lot among the shrubbery was a Chinese Laundry. The boy that lived there went to school with us, his name was Sido Quoi Hong. Sido Quoi Hong. A very, very facinating lad we all liked in public school days. Beyond that farther north, there was build a big building which became owned by one of the Willson's. I think a Willson built it and he had the first dealership in the area. Across the side street from him was what became a funeral parlor. It has served as a funeral parlor every since. It was started by H.B.Dell. Next to that was a vacant lot until after the first fire when one of the Imperial Bank Managers was A.W.Collard built a house. Still farther north from him was the house of, big old brick house where A.H.Killman lived. And the next door neighbour to him was Hew Sherk, owner of Sherk Hardware Store. And next to that was the Memorial United Church on the corner of Dominion Road. A few doors farther north was the town hall and next to it a house and then a garage, which had been, before the time of it being a garage had been a blacksmith's shop. And then it was turned into a garage and run for years by, what everybody in the

community claimed was the best mechanic, a man by the name of Clark. That Mr. Clark's first name was Charlie, Charlie Clark. If we were to cross the street and go back on the other side, that's on the west side of Ridge Road, we get back to the church corner. Across from the church was, my first recollection, a corner store operated by Dr. Brewster. Operated, if I remember correctly, as a drug store. I believe in the back of it one of his sons operated the first undertaking establishment. Then we cover quite an area of just houses and homes and get to a street corner where there was a business place run by Harry Box. His was the last, no, yes it was, it was the last building not consumed by fire in the 1930 fire that destroyed most of the west side of Ridge Road. Across a small side street there had been a home built there by, or at least lived in by Mr. Pollard. That home was entirely destroyed by fire. My recollections of this, this was told in detail in my book, but I can't recall those things just off hand at the moment. And I seem to be going in the wrong direction to have them come back into mind. Certainly there was Schwartz Drug Store, there was a telephone office. I can't recall whether that telephone office was the old Welland County Telephone or the Bell Telephone. Back in the early days, first of all, there was the Welland County Telephone Company and then the Bell Telephone Company came into the area. Both operated in competition. The merchants had to, in their advertising, state that they had both phones and they would not give any telephone numbers because there weren't enough telephones to be bothered with numbers. You just phoned Central and said who's place of business or house you wanted and you were connected by the operator in the telephone office. Then of course eventually numbers came in.

S.R: Do you remember approximately what year?

R.D: No. I have no idea when that would have happened. I was never very good on dates excepting when I found that was desirable when I got older with reference to lady friends.

S.R: You mention the fire in 1930.

R.D: '13.

S.R: In 1913.

R.D: 1913.

S.R: Would you know what caused it or how it finally went out or anything that you could remember about the fire. Approximately how much burnt?

R.D: Yes. All of the buildings from what was the Schwartz Drug Store. The whole block of buildings. And that would have included one, two, three, four, at least half a dozen business places and I think one home on the west side of Ridge Road were consumed in that fire. Completely burned out. When we were going to the site of the fire the next day as a child and sorting among the rubble for a keepsakes. Particularly in the location of the drug store. The boy scouts helped in the bucket line, passing buckets hand to hand from a big cistern that was across Ridge Road and beside Beeshy's Store.

S.R: Would you know how it started? Was that ever proven?

R.D: I have no idea how that, what caused that fire, how it commenced. No idea at all .

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

R.D: Entertainment. Well the only place where entertainments were held was the old hall, the Bertie Town Hall. It had a stage and some times when the crowd was more than adequate for the seating capacity why, people would be sitting on the deep window sills. I mentioned the old medicine shows that regularly came. Then there would be, minstrel shows were not uncommon. Those of course were the shows where most of the characters taking part were white folk with blackened faces. I suppose they used burnt cork to change the white man into a black man.

S.R: When we were talking about Fort Erie, I forgot to mention Disher Feedmill and Young Lumber. Could you, starting with Disher Feedmill... would you know about when it was built? Where it was located? Who owned it? What the feedmill had to offer? Is it still operating? And why not?

R.D: Well, what eventually became Disher feedmill had originally been a grist mill. That was a three storey building where all the machinery to turn wheat into first class flour. And it operated for years and years. I got to know the miller. The owner back as I recall was a company, the Ridgeway Milling Company and one of the chief

operators or owners in that company was Isaac Pound. He was not the actual miller. I can't recall the name of the miller but I got to know him well enough that every time I would go there to buy a bit of cracked grain for my chickens, I could go all through the mill. I loved to go up to the very top floor, the third floor where the powdered flour was sifted. And the sifters were fascinating, girating, huge coffin-like boxes with screens in the bottom. And these vibrated by some means to shake the flour through the sifts, through the screens and down in to the...the bottom of these boxes looked like the legs of a centipede. They were canvas tubes that ran from the bottom of the box down to pipes that delivered the flour to somewhere else in the mill. As the boxes shook these legs dangled and quivered underneath and were quite fascinating to watch. That mill eventually became just a grist mill, just grinding grain for local farmers to make into cattle feed. The milling of flour was discontinued and the building was eventually taken over by my uncle Ward Disher who operated it as a feed...then he expanded it into...because he had feed and grain chopping and sold coal. Then I think eventually they expanded when freezers came in. They expanded across the street from the mill and built a new building in which they installed freezer compartments. This was all located beside, on the north side of the railway at it's corner with Prospect Point Road.

S.R: Is it still in operation?

R.D: No. The building was torn down. Of course the freezer business, with the advent of home refrigerators, the freezer business went out and it is now...the building is being used by the, I believe a safety company selling safety equipment of different kinds. The mill building was entirely torn down. It wasn't there at all any more.

S.R: Could you describe Young Lumber in the same way?

R.D: Young Lumber. The building where, from which they operate was originally the Ridgeway Planing Mill. Back in the early days the lumber that came into the community came in in big slabs of very rough lumber. Came in on the freight trains and was unloaded by what had originally been the station and had been turned into a freight shed. From there it was sawn into two by fours and other types of lumber and the boards were planed in planers that I can

still hear operating, whether from early in the morning or late at night. This was a very active building, business employing a considerable number of men in the mill both sawing and planing lumber. They also built all kinds of window casings, window frames, doors...all that sort of thing was made locally. The man who built and operated that mill was a man by the name of E.W.Near. His son, that we nicknamed Bandy, was one of my best chums. As kids we played around with the early days of radio, when radio was just wireless and all that you heard was the buzz of the morse code. And he had a shack behind the mill, in what had been a pumping station before he took it over. Now, behind that mill there was a big barn which they used for their teams of horses and their wagons which delivered the lumber to various customers. And that barn had originally been the peg-leg railway station. Another point I remember about the peg-leg railway was that my dad who was an amateur electrical enthusiast, in the early days of electricity, he had, when the peg-leg railway went to pieces, he got a lot of the "flange" battery jars and carbon, positive parts of the battery. I can remember these being at home and that once in a while we would get these batteries operating again for experiments in electricity. That mill operated successfully, that planing mill, for many, many years. As small kids, we used to find it quite fascinating to go to the mill, watch the operations going on, but also take the small wagons and load up with the pieces that had been cut off and were discard material. We would cart these all home for our own carpenters projects. We got lots of free lumber that way. Eventually, the changing times, the business went bankrupt and finally was taken over by Mr. John Young who had acquired the first distributorship for Canada Cement in this area. Then his sons took over the business and went into general merchandising of lumber products and tile and all sorts of building materials. The present operator is Douglas Young, grandson of the original John Young.

S.R: You were talking about the peg-leg railroad. Do you remember what years it operated and...you said the railroad went from where the lumber mill was, to what was the other point of destination? Or describe the railroad in any way.

R.D: It started...it's station was west of the, what is now Young Lumber.

A big building that eventually became used as the barn for the planing mill. It was located there because it was near the Buffalo and Goderich Railway. The station, the original station was located on the south side of the railway just west of Mill Street. The peg-leg railway, I do not know when it was built. I don't recall what date it was. I remember the tunnel under what is now Farr Avenue, just west of the old Ridgeway Cemetary. That tunnel was a means of going under the road. Then the peg-leg railway, when it had to cross Rebstock Road farther south, it went over the road on high poles. The whole railway ran from the station in Ridgeway to some point at the Crystal Beach end. Possibly about where the original scenic railway was built at Crystal Beach. It ran on top of fence posts. Special heavy oak posts were set it the ground. I don't know quite what the method of permitting the single track car to balance. But one thing is sure, electrical power which operated it was not sufficient to, when the car, when the train was loaded to permit it to make the grade over Rebstock Road. So quite often I'm told, people, passengers would have to get out and use long poles to push the car up over the grade so to get over Rebstock Road. It was electrically operated and I'm quite sure that the electricity was created by a tremendous bank of, the equivilant of todays dry batteries. But these were wet batteries built in big glass jars. There must have been a tremendous number of them. It was called the 'le clanch' battery. Why it failed to operate eventually I'm not sure, but I think the possibility is that it was never probably a real commercial success so probably just faded out of the picture for dollars and cents reasons.

S.R: You said you thought the railroad ended in Crystal Beach. Two other places in Crystal Beach are the Ontario Hotel and Ridge Dairy. Could you tell what you remember about either one, starting with the Ontario Hotel?

R.D: Well, I remember the Ontario Hotel being on the east side of Derby Road at the bottom of Derby Road where it ends at Erie Road. It was quite a big hotel and was a flourishing business for a good number of years. With the decline of Crystal Beach it seemed to go on bad days and a few years ago there was an attempt to resurrect the business activities. Among other things the old Ontario Hotel

was turned into a, what was supposed to be part of a big Bavarian Village. But this never succeeded. There were more facinating hotels in Crystal Beach in the early days. The one that stands out in memory was the Bon Air Hotel which sat on top of the sand hill. That was a flourishing, and a really going, going concern in the early days. But I was just a small child then and hotels and their activities didn't interest me so I don't recall much about it. The Ridge Dairy is another matter all together. The Ridge Dairy was, and still is, a flourishing business at the corner of Derby and Rebstock Roads, that's the north-east corner. It was established as a business there. Then it was moved from it's location in Ridgeway where it had originally been established by a man by the name of Doan. Mr. Doan started into the milk peddling business and eventually he called his business the Ridge Dairy. His son operated the business. I went to school with his son. I think his boys name was Wilfred. This was located north of Ridgeway on Ridge Road. The original building was on the west side of Ridge Road. A very small building, the dairy building. Then a larger dairy building was built on the opposite side, on the east side or Ridge Road. And then from that building the Ridge Dairy operated for a great many years. Eventually it was taken over by Silverwoods and was moved to Crystal Beach.

S.R: In Crystal Beach there is an amusement park. Did you have an occasion to frequent it very often?

R.D: An occasion to which?

S.R: Did you used to visit Crystal Beach?

R.D: Oh very much I visited Crystal Beach.

S.R: The amusement park? Could you describe what you can remember?

R.D: Well, the means of getting to Crystal Beach of course was important to me because my dad, as a printer, printed the bus tickets for Alf Willson's bus system, which ran from the new station in Ridgeway out to Crystal Beach. Doing the service that the peg-leg railway was originally set up to do. Dad printed the tickets for Alf Willson and dad's family rode the bus for free. And so I was at Crystal Beach many, many times when I was a child. It was always a fascinating place. Later I would go out by bicycle. That was back in the days when it was alright to ride a bicycle, even to a place like Crystal Beach, park you bicycle beside a building, spend the afternoon and

evening poking around the amusements and come back and find your bicycle right where you had left it. Now, even if you have it chained fast, it probably wouldn't be there nor would the chain be there either. Back in those days, one of the things that I recall was Moxi Kiama. Moxi was a little girl of Japanese origin who was pulled around the beach and was always smiling at everybody. Her Japanese parents ran one of the concessions on the Midway and was there for years. Their concession was highly decorated with Japanese art and their little child Moxi was one of the attractions on the Midway. Some kids were always pulling her around in the small wagon. The miniature was railway started by a man named Buttler. The miniature railway was a great attraction with it's actual steam engine, coal fired. One of the engineers on it was a man by the name of Mr. LeJune. Years later, by accident, I discovered by accident, that the locomotives of the railway were still being used way up in Northern Ontario, not far from Sault Ste. Marie on a miniature railway which operated monday, wednesdays and fridays, for the local children of the area. Provided you could find the railway way back in the bush. But getting back to Crystal Beach. In the early days the dock had to be replaced almost every year. At least vast parts of it had to be replaced because they was so temporarily built that the ice in the winter time would destroy large parts of the dock. Eventually Manny Near who operated the planing mill in Ridgeway, Manny Near who got into the concrete contracting business built the dock which is still there. It will probably last as long as time because it was extremely well built. The boats that I remember was the Canadiana and the Americana. Two very, very fine steamers that plied between Crystal Beach and the Buffalo dock at the foot of Commercial Street. It was always a pleasure to go across the lake on these boats. About a three quarter hour run. They left almost every hour from both Crystal Beach and from Buffalo. Passed one another in the lake. A thing that I can remember about a journey at the Buffalo end, was the smell of Buffalo Harbour. That was a thing never to be forgotten. The boats that plied the harbour stirred up the water which, I presume, received a good bit of the sewage of the city of Buffalo and the smell was

something else. But the lake ride across to Crystal Beach was always a great pleasure and was one of the great reasons for the success of Crystal Beach. That and its remarkable natural beach. One of the finest you'd find any where in the world. Excellent sand, you could wade out for a great distance, and it attracted crowds. The Midway was an extensive one. One of the earlier rides, in fact the first ride I think that was built was the figure eight. That, to me, was a thing to stay off. My father took me on the figure eight as a small child and I had one of Crystal Beach's famous all day suckers in my mouth. This crazy ride so shattered my enjoyment that when I got off the figure eight car, I still had the sucker in my jaws and the stick broken off and clenched in one fist. I never rode the figure eight again. Then there was 'the bump the bumps'. An incline, I never seen one anywhere else, that you slid down on a carpet. You couldn't possibly avoid a big, sort of boils built into the road. You had to go bumping over these things, and it was really 'bump the bumps'. Then the scenic railway was a fascinating place. Quite a romantic voyage through that as you got older. Dark, very dark most of the way. And the boats bumped along propelled by the water which was forced to flow through the mill, and because of the operation of the big paddle wheel out at the entrance end. Along the way there were some scenes of various kinds. You'd turn a corner and would be confronted by one of the scenes which might be one of blood and gore, or might be, suppositively, one of beauty. I remember one particularly, in which a darkie was sitting on a chair. A darkie child sitting on a chair under a single electric light bulb. There was a sign 'A Little Light on a Dark Subject". The scenic railway, which for years operated, was a fascinating ride. Quite different from the old figure eight. The scenic railway had a long tunnel. It had a switch-back in which the cars would go up a track, stop, and then back down through a hole in the tracks, and back up through another place where it would stop again and then go ahead through another hole in the tracks as in went on its way. We kids used to use the scenic railway for the winter time, or the early spring and fall when the beach was closed. That was back in the days when in the winter time you

could go down and wander around the beach at your ease. Now it's all fenced in. But back then, we kids would take our bicycle. We'd push these bicycles up the long inclines as far as we could push them. Then we'd jump on and ride clattering down over the boards between the tracks, and up the other side as far as it would go and jump off our bikes again. That was great fun for the youngsters in spring and fall. The great ride of Crystal Beach of course was the cyclone coaster. I remember this remarkable ride which I never rode myself, but a friend of ours came to visit us and he wanted to go out to Crystal Beach. We took him out to Crystal Beach and there he decided that he wanted to go on the cyclone coaster so that he could brag when he got back to his farm community in Northern Ontario. So Harry went for a ride on the cyclone. His main comments for some time after he got off it was, what was going through his mind when he, when the roller ride finally started. He thought to himself 'What a fool I am, what a fool I am. I'll never get back to my kids, I'll never get back to my kids'. Anyway the cyclone was a truly remarkable ride. A bigger description...it had to be seen and particularly it had to be ridden to appreciate it. During it's buildings, it was so well engineered and so complicated a structure that for long, long testing periods when it was completed, the cars were loaded with sand bags in place of people and sent around the tracks. And not until the cars would make the full circuit of the absolutely frightening things that happened during the trip...the cars would throw the sand bags out until the tracks were eventually adjusted so that the sand bags would stay in the cars. And therefore it was safe for people to ride it. There were a few suicides committed on the cyclone by individuals boarding it standing up in the cars and being thrown out. Now wether it was accidents or suicides of course never could be told. It would seem that they likely were suicides. The Crystal Ballroom was a fascination for teenage years. The most glorious dance hall is still there, partly now concrete floor. There's a bit of the old original hard wood dance floor left. We...big time bands would play from a stand in the center of the dance floor. Above them was the crystal ball with all the little mirrors and lights shining on it, and this rotated sending rainbows of different coloured lights circling around the dance floor. The old time bands with their lovely dance music, that was where I

learned to dance and have been dancing ever since, and still love a dance. It...the dances were very short. You bought your tickets on the midway, paid one or two tickets to get onto the dance floor and you just got nicely started dancing when attendant boys moved toward the middle of the floor from four corners with great ropes. Then they would move out with these ropes and push you gradually off as the music stopped. An you'd be out in the outside hallway ready to drop another ticket in the slot to get back on the dance floor again for the next piece. The power house...Ridgeway and Crystal Beach had it's own power house. It created it's own electricity. They were very large internal combustion gas engines. These, through long, long belts operated a electric generators which supplied the electric power for the use of all the concessions and rides and so on in Crystal Beach. It was on before Canadian Niagara Power Company supplied electricity for Crystal Beach. That power house had windows, long windows along each side and along beside it, on either side was a walk way that went to the foot of the stairs that went up to the toilets on top of the sand hill. People would walk along these walks back and forth and could look through the windows at the big engines and generators. Unfortunately, one or two of the windows were at the ends of the long belts that drove the generators. You'd stand looking along these belts. Once one of these belts broke when a family, apparently a little boy, was standing at one of these windows fascinated, and the belt broke and smashed through the window and killed the boy. The pavilion was the attraction after dancing or going to the moving picture show. In the pavilion you could get a cup of coffee for a nickle and a piece of pie for probably ten cents. Another chap and I, many a time in our teenage would, after spending an evening in Crystal Beach, would go into the pavilion and have a piece of pie and coffee before we'd go home on our bicycles. In the early days there was a moving picture house at the east end of the midway. That was back in the days when the movies of course were silent. Charlie Chaplin and his fascinating bits and Fatty Arbuckle and his escapades. The light operating the projector of course, was an arc lamp and all too often just in the most fascinating part of a movie, the arc light would go out. But we still went to the movie house. That

was in the very early days of silent pictures. I think that is a fair bit of Crystal Beach. The carousel, one of the oldest and one of the most beautifully built carousels, merry-go-round...enough of that maybe.

S.R: Could you compare Crystal Beach to Erie Beach?

R.D: I was not too familiar with Erie Beach. My recollection...I went once to Erie Beach by train. And there was a little station that you got off the train for Erie Beach and walked over to the beach. But, there were two outstanding differences between Erie Beach and Crystal Beach. Erie Beach had no comparable bathing beach like the marvelous beach at Crystal. In order to provide bathing they had to build a huge pool. Along with this pool was the big dancing casino which was comparable in its' different way from the Crystal Ballroom at Crystal Beach. But another thing which Erie Beach lacked, which Crystal Beach certainly had, was the long boat ride from Buffalo to the beach. It was just a very short trip across from Buffalo to Erie Beach. Nothing like the three quarter hour lake journey to Crystal Beach. In the hey day of both beaches travel from Buffalo, which was the main source of customers, travel was practically entirely by boat. That was before the days of the Peace Bridge and the only way across to the river was by ferry.

S.R: Do you know where the ferry docks were located?

R.D: The ferry docks were down where, I think now is the bus stop. I believe there is a store there. The parking lot of the store, whether it's a Red and White I don't recall, the parking lot of the store was the approach to the ferry dock.

S.R: Could you tell me anything about the railroad era?

R.D: Well the railroad era was a fascination to me as a boy. I suppose all the boys dreamed about becoming a railroad man. The building of the station in Ridgeway, that station which is now part of the railway museum to Fort Erie. And incidentally, that station as it now is to be seen in Fort Erie, is not as lovely a building as it originally was. What was the west end, has been altered when the station ceased to be used for passengers. That west end was the waiting room. It's western wall was a semi-circle. I can remember as a small boy, when that building was being built, being fascinated by...when going down and seeing the intricate work being done to

create the semi-circular roof. The way the rafters and so on were built. That west end, the windows were all curved, semi-circular. The frames, the sash and the glass itself, all conformed to the curve of the west wall. Inside, the radiators, the seats, everything went around the half circle and it was truly a very, very beautiful building both inside and out. That was the Buffalo and Goderich branch of what became, eventually, the Canadian National, which before that had been the Grand Trunk Railway. I have taken pictures of the terminus at Goderich where the stations up there, of course, are closed today too. The original station, of course, was much farther west. The new station was built on the east side of Ridge Road. The original station was on the west side of Mill Street near where the peg-leg railway station had been built. When this railway land was being built, I believe that various municipalities were encouraged to buy bonds in the original railway company. I understand that the township of Bertie had bonds in the original Buffalo and Goderich Railway Company.

S.R: About how many trips, how many runs a day did they have?

R.D: There were probably six trains a day. A train came down, the mail train. The main train was a train that came from west to east through to Buffalo at about noon time and remained in the Buffalo terminus until late in the afternoon and made it's return trip through Ridgeway some time around five o'clock in the afternoon. That was the mail train. Mail express, baggage, passengers and so on. Then there was another train that went through in the early morning and back, I think in the middle of the afternoon. There may have been more trains than that. At some time a self powered dummy car operated on the line. I don't know wether it went farther west than Port Colborne and wether it went across the bridge to Buffalo or went beyond Fort Erie, I don't know.

S.R: Do you remember the Bertie Fair at the Old Fort Erie Race Track?

R.D: Yes. The Bertie Fair was an annual affair held at the race track. We kids got a day off school. Were likely given a ticker or, maybe we had to buy it, I don't remember. But we went down on the noon train and got off the station at Amigari, and walked over to the race track to attend the Bertie Fair. That was quite a considerable fair. It carried on for a great many years in my younger days.

It was one of the annual attractions for everybody. Everybody went to the Bertie Fair.

S.R: What kind of activities did it have?

R.D: Well, there'd be games, bands, races on the track, competitions of one kind or another. The value, as I recall as a child though, was the excitement of the crowds of people and the smells of hot dogs and all that sort of thing. The sounds, crowds and smells of that kind of activity are always fascinating to young people, and I think the older ones as well. I know as far as I'm concerned I could still enjoy the midway and the smells of the Canadian National Exhibition.

S.R: Could you describe what the race track looked like then compared to now, or hadn't it changed much?

R.D: I would broadly say, not a great deal. It has been improved. The buildings have been improved, no doubt about that, but generally...I know when I've gone down in recent years with the seniors, I didn't have the sense that it was greatly different than I remembered as a child, just improved and enlarged.

S.R: How old were you when you got your first car?

R.D: How old was I when I got my first car. Well my first car was a Model T Ford, that I had bought in Spokane Washington, for a hundred dollars. I drove down with the Monypenny's from Trail, climbed the Mountain to Rosalind, went down through Wonachi, across the border, across the Columbia River by ferry, through Calville, and on to Spokane. They left me to get my, to do my shopping while they went to do theirs. When we met again, at the appointed place and time, I displayed my one hundred dollar purchase of this slightly used Model T. They weren't very sure which was more sensible, the car or it's new owner. Anyway, I was to follow them back the mountain roads, back to Trail. Monypenny would get a little impatient. He would drive ahead. I think he had a very fine car for the time, I don't remember what the name of it was now, but he would drive on ahead and I would try to follow. Eventually I would see him stopped way up ahead. Then he gave up that I could possible follow him and I lost him altogether. But I managed to get back to Trail through the mountain hairpin turns and so on, and drove that car around Trail and the mountain roads for two or three years. I would

have been how old then, twenty-three or four.

S.R: Do you remember the price of gas and the speed limits?

R.D: I don't recall what the speed limit was in Trail. It didn't interest me because no matter what it was, my Model T couldn't have made it. Anyway, it wouldn't have been safe to try to make it. The roads weren't that good. Long before that, driving my dad's first car, an Overland 90, the speed limit then, I think, was 15 miles an hour. You did very well with the type of tires and springs that the car had, and the type of road that you had to go over, you did very well to make 15 miles an hour. Maybe it was foolish to try to. The gasoline. I don't remember what it was, but I do recall that it upset me greatly when, owning my own car, the gasoline price went from twenty cents to twenty five cents a gallon. I thought that was an outrageous increase.

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

R.D: I think probably I'll make a comment with reference to our new Greater Fort Erie, in relationship to Ridgeway, Crystal Beach, Stevensville, Fort Erie. I am still of the opinion, as one of the old die hards, that it was not a wise thing when the area was consolidated into one political unit. It was not a wise thing to use the name of any of the original communities. It would have been much smarter if the same thing that had been done with Galt, Preston and it escaped me the third name...when they were amalgamated into the present town of, oh, what is the name...Cambridge. There has been ill feeling in this area every since one of the original names was supplied to the whole community. If an entirely new name had been sought and applied, a lot of the animosities would not have developed.

S.R: You mentioned, a couple times on the tape, about the book. Could you please tell me what the book is called?

R.D: My book that I refer to mostly I think, was called 'Robbie, his village, his love, his life'. A book that I wrote and which is still available, directly from myself at 7.95. The other two books have to do with the story of the town hall and the story of the Memorial United Church of Ridgeway. They are historic documents.

S.R: Thank you very much for the interview.