

Shelley Richer interviewed Miss Ruth Lichtenberger in her home at 2489 Sunset Drive, Fort Erie, July 3, 1983.

S.R: Hello Miss Lichtenberger and how are you today?

R.L: Pretty good.

S.R: And where were you born?

R.L: In this house.

S.R: And were there hospitals or anything like that or did you ~~have to~~ be born at home?

R.L: Not in Fort Erie I don't think because I don't think the hospital was in Fort Erie at that time.

S.R: Was there a midwife used or was there a doctor available to come and help?

R.L: The doctor came here to the house. Dr. Buell from Stevensville.

S.R: Have you always lived here on the farm?

R.L: Yes.

S.R: And how many years would that be?

R.L: Sixty-seven.

S.R: Is it being farmed now?

R.L: Yes, yep.

S.R: What's being done now, what kind of farming?

R.L: The whole farm is in corn this year.

S.R: Do you do it yourself, or...

R.L: No.

S.R: Oh, it's rented out now?

R.L: Yeah, Mr. Colmer is farming it.

S.R: What kind of farming used to be done before?

R.L: Mixed farming it used to be corn and wheat and oats and hay.

S.R: Any kind of animals or anything like that on the farm?

R.L: Not anymore.

S.R: What about before?

R.L: Oh, we used to have cows, and horses and sheep and pigs, but no more.

S.R: You used to have a dairy back then, right?

R.L: Yeah.

S.R: How were the cows milked and what happened next?

R.L: First they were milked by hand and in later years they got a milking machine.

S.R: Do you remember about when that would be?

R.L: Well about in 1940 maybe they got the milking machines, I think.

S.R: Did it help much?

R.L: I don't know I never went out to see, but I guess it worked alright.

S.R: Well did they have the same amount of people then or did the milking machines make things easier so they didn't need as many people working on it?

R.L: No we had the same amount of men working.

S.R: What happened after the cows were milked?

R.L: Oh they, they, the milk had to be pasturized in the dairy, then some of the men would go out and work on the farm. Different things.

S.R: Where was the dairy?

R.L: The dairy was here at first on the farm but about 1945 I guess it was they went to Fort Erie on Jarvis Street, I think. I think that was the year around there.

S.R: Why did they move to Jarvis Street?

R.L: Well, they wanted to be in Fort Erie I guess...they wanted to be on Jarvis Street.

S.R: Do you remember any of the prices of the dairy products?

R.L: Well I think the milk was 14 cents a quart if I remember right, I think and we sold butter too, but I forget what that was, and chocolate milk and cream but I forget the prices.

S.R: Do you remember about when that would be, the year approximately that it was 14 cents?

R.L: Oh about 1944-45.

S.R: And you said it was located on Jarvis Street, where on Jarvis Street was it located?

R.L: Oh...on the corner there. I think the Elricks have it now, Elricks Hardware Store, on that corner.

S.R: Has Jarvis Street changed very much?

R.L: Oh yes it changes all the time.

S.R: What are the differences?

R.L: I can't tell you that but...

S.R: How did the Depression effect the dairy and the family?

R.L: Well, the Depression never really bothered us very much because

we had the dairy and people had to buy milk and buy butter and things so we always had that for our income so it never affected us very much..

S.R: The name of your road is called Sunset Drive, was it always called that?

R.L: Oh I think, it was never any other name put on it , people just called it Lichtenberger road because we lived on it, but then Louy Detenbeck he's the one that named it Sunset Drive, really.

S.R: Do you know why he..?

R.L: I don't know why. It seems to me that he went, he was down to Florida and seen that name or something and he thought that well, that would be a nice name for our road. I think that's what it was, anyway he named it Sunset Drive.

S.R: Was it a very common practice to name the streets for someone that lived on them?

R.L: No, well I don't know. Then in later years they went, the municipality named all the streets and ah,you... I think Bert Miller was on that committee and he was from Fort Erie and he helped name the streets, they went all through Bertie Township I think it was and named all the streets.

S.R: What school did you attend?

R.L: Number two, it's closed now. The one I attended was just a little brick school house on the other side of the road, just a one room school.

S.R: And what road is that?

R.L: Bowen Road, it was there beside the railroad tracks, a one room school and Mrs. Hershey she was the teacher when I went there. When I started school Mrs. Hershey started teaching there and when she got married she quit teaching for a while and that's when I quit too. I tried my entrance but I didn't make it. Well in later years Mrs. Hershey came back and taught my brothers children, Marlene and Karen for a while. She just passed away here not too long ago. She was the only teacher that was teaching there when I went.

S.R: Did it have grades one through...

R.L: Yeah, grade one through grade eight. But it wasn't grades then it was first class, premier class, junior and senior third , and junior

and senior first.

S.R: Could you describe a typical school day?

S.R: You live very close to Niagara Christian College, was it always a school?

R.L: No it was a, was supposed to be a club house but they never really got started. They tried to have, dog shows was in there once and I guess they did a bit of gambling for a while and got caught and everything they tried they got caught or something but nothing ever worked.

S.R: Would you know why?

R.L: I don't know it was just a bummer from the beginning. People put money in there and they lost it. They don't know what...the one lawyer told my father it was the worst thing that he ever got involved in. It was such a mixed up affair.

S.R: What year was it built?

R.L: I'm not sure , I don't know. It was back when I was kind of young. My father and brother Paul did the teaming for that when it was built...and these days when you build a building like that they call in the bulldozers and trucks and things like that but back in them days they was all horses. They, my father had the two teams down there working and they dug her all out with the scrapers. A man would hold the scraper and another man would drive the horses and when you drove the horses you had to know what you was doing or you..how to hand the horses or you would throw the man that was doing the scraping with the scraper, and the same thing, this man that was scraping would have to know how to not to dig too deep or you'd be in trouble too with the horses, so it worked both ways.

S.R: What led to it being a school?

R.L: Well, Charlie Miller owned it, the property and they started building and they..they this one man he was building it and he went bankrupt and I guess another man bought it and finally Montanna got a hold of it , Montanna Truck Lines in Buffalo ...and Charlie Miller he finally, it got back on Charlie Miller's hands and he paid taxes until he almost went broke, and he sold it to Montanna I guess that's the way it was. And then this church needed a school and they came

here and wanted to know how much my father would give towards building a new school, and so that night I went to bed and I had been thinking, now wouldn't that be nice if there was a school just close by so that I could go and so I thought now where would a nice place be? And I was thinking before I went to sleep, I don't know, that club house came to my mind and I said well now would that be nice if I could walk to school or I could just ah...not far away I could go to school. So the next day at the dinner table we were talking about, they wanted to build this new school and I said well wouldn't the Biltmore Club House make a good school? My father said well why sure, so the next day was Sunday and we went to church and my father went to Wil Charleton and he told him. He said, wouldn't, about this building, he said that would make a good school. So Wil Charleton said he would tell Bert Sherk but Bert Sherk wasn't in church that Sunday. So he told Bert Sherk and the next day Bert Sherk and Howard Fretz came down and wanted to know where this building was and my father told him and they went down to look at it. So when they came, went home they stopped in here and they said it would be a nice building but Howard Fretz said we could never afford to buy that building. Well my father said let's go to Buffalo and see Montana and see how much he wants for it. If he gives you a good price he said then pay something down on it. So they went to Buffalo to see Montana and Montana gave them a good price. I forget just what it was, fourteen thousand or something like that but they didn't pay nothing down on it. And in the meantime another man heard about it and he tried to get it for dog shows or something and so he offered Montana a little bit more so then the church had to pay a little bit more to get it. So then that's how they got it.

S.R.: Near the school there is a marina, was it always a marina?

R.L.: No. Well during the second world war they started building the ships there, that's why it was called the ship yard. But they only built the one, they only launched the one boat and I don't know what happened after that, did they close up or did they go bankrupt or what, I don't know. They only launched one boat. They put them slips in there to launch that boat.

S.R.: Do you know if there was anything else built there or was it just the one boat launched or was anything else ever built there?

R.L: I don't know if they started on another boat or not. I know they just launched the one boat. But that was a thriving place down there for a while. They had a post office there and our mail used to come Shipyard Ontario, our address was, and then later on Bridgeburg, now it's Fort Erie, Ontario. And the hotel, they had a hotel down there and it's still there, Mr. Eden lives in it. But there was houses built all the way back to where Mr. Eden lives, and there was a post office in there, and there used to be a railroad tracks went through there to Niagara Falls . They used to get off of the train there at the ship yard. They could go to Buffalo or Niagara Falls.

S.R: And what was the name of the hotel?

R.L: I don't know what they called the hotel. There used to be, I don't know, one or two great big boarding houses. They called the one the Green Goose , I don't know what they called the other one. People boarded in them.

S.R: You don't know why it changed then down there?

R.L: I don't remember why it stopped, they run out of money, I don't know.

S.R: About when was it made into the marina? Was it ever just left idle?

R.L: Yes , for years it was just idle there. People used to go down there and go in the slips and swim. Then nothing went on until they started the marina. But I don't know much about..maybe twenty years when they started the marina.

S.R: Before you had cars and trucks, how did you used to deliver your milk?

R.L: When the shipyard was going on my father delivered his milk with a horse and I think they called it a little buck board, then he called it . It was like a buggy only it was open and he delivered with his horse and no milk bottles. He used aquart measure and a milk can and the women would come out with their pitchers and get their milk. And later, there was no name then because we didn't have bottles to put your name on; there was no carriage to put your name on, not until we started peddling milk in Fort Erie. Then we got milk bottles , by then milk bottles were on the market. Then we got our name on it; Lichtenberger's Dairy.

S.R: Where did you go to church?

R.L: We used to have, like a community Sunday School over here in the

little brick school, where I went to school. All the people from the...the children from the community went there for Sunday school, and the ladies in the community taught the classes. I forget who the superintendent was. It was just a little local Sunday school.

S.R: And then where did you go to church?

R.L: Then we went to the Bertie Brethren in Christ Church.

S.R: And what year would that be?

R.L: 1925 about.

S.R: How long was it that your little school had Sunday school?

R.L: I don't remember. It still went on when we didn't go there anymore. But I don't know how many years it carried on, I forget.

S.R: You have a little story about your great grandfather?

R.L: Yes, um, my grandma Benner was a Rathvon, Elizabeth Rathvon before she married. And her father was Henry Rathvon and he married Martha Kazzie, and lived up...he had a farm of one hundred acres up near Ridgeway that bordered on Lake Erie I guess. And he was murdered, Henry Rathvon was murdered. When he got married he had five dollars that's all he had, and when he died, was murdered, he had a hundred acre farm. He sold a load of wheat and went to Ridgeway, I guess to the hotel, and when he came out of the hotel he came out with another man. A Mr. Rutter came out of the hotel with him. And he brought a piece of iron to do some work on the farm or something and he walked down the railroad tracks to go home. And they found my grandpa Rathvon dead in the ditch along the railroad tracks. My grandpa Rathvon had this hundred acre farm and where it bordered on Lake Erie it was all sand hills and I guess he thought well, that's not good farm land it's no good to him so he gave it to his hired hand. And in later years the Americans came over and bought some homes along there. I thought that was quite interesting.

S.R: Thank you very much for the interview Miss Lichtenberger and thank you for the hospitality.

R.L: You're welcome.