

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mr. Morley D. Kirkland in his home at 20 Highland Avenue, Fort Erie, Ontario, and the date is July 26, 1985.

R.H: Good morning Mr. Kirkland.

M.K: Good morning.

R.H: Could you please tell me when you were born?

M.K: Yes I was born May 16, 1913.

R.H: And where were you born?

M.K: I was born in a small village in Bruce County. The name of it is Teeswater, Ontario.

R.H: So you grew up in Teeswater?

M.K: Well I was there till I was about fourteen years of age.

R.H: When did you first come to Fort Erie?

M.K: Well I learned my trade in Toronto. I was in Toronto for ten years and I learned my apprenticeship being a cutter-tailor in Toronto before I came to Fort Erie.

R.H: Do you remember where you learned, the name of the place?

M.K: Well I was at different tailoring houses, it was during the Depression, and at that time you couldn't always keep a steady apprenticeship job even, 'cause things were...well during the Depression I moved from different places and worked in King Street and Spadina Avenue principally.

R.H: That was quite the garment district, wasn't it at that time, Spadina and...?

M.K: Yeah, the better tailor shops were in King Street, King Street West Toronto.

R.H: So do you remember when you came to Fort Erie, what date or year?

M.K: Yes, oh yeah. It was in the summer of 1937.

R.H: And is that when you became an agency of Tip Top Tailors?

M.K: Right, yeah. It was called an agency then, but it was my own business from the start. I started in a very small way at that time, and it proved to be successful in the long run.

R.H: Was the name at that time Tip Top Tailors or was your name used?

M.K: Well we used both names because the Tip Top name was highly advertised at that time and often it was called Tip Top Tailors, but it was actually my own business. Soon after I took on the agency for Dack Shoes and other lines besides the Tip Top lines. So gradually the name Kirkland became more used than the original Tip Top name.

R.H: Could you tell me exactly where this store was on Jarvis Street?

M.K: Yes it was in the Mann Stratton Building and it's on the front of Jarvis Street not too far from...well right now Erie Jewellers is probably the closest to it. Currently there's a hairdressing store in it right at the moment, at this time.

R.H: Was there more stores in there besides yours, like when you say the Mann Stratton Building...?

M.K: Yes there was the Bank of Commerce had a branch there at that time in the same Mann Stratton Building.

R.H: So there was quite a few business's in that building?

M.K: Yes there was the Bank of Commerce, and a very important store besides the Commerce was the Gibson's Jewellers. It was right next door to me, right next door, and later they of course moved up the street where they are now.

R.H: Could you tell me about any of the other stores that were there when you were in business?

M.K: Oh on the street there? Why yes Madeline Morningstar had a photo studio up the street, and Atwood's Furniture and Funeral Services was a major store on the street.

R.H: Excuse me, what do you mean Atwood's Furniture and Funeral...did he have...?

M.K: It was associated with it. In the old days very often furniture stores had funeral associates with them, but today they're more usually sep rate.

R.H: But they were together at that time?

M.K: Oh yeah, yeah there was Ira Atwood, and John Atwood was the father and he was still around when I was in business, and then there was the sons that finally took it over.

R.H: And was Ira one of the sons?

M.K: Ira was one, and some of the other names...there was John, John Jr., and Lloyd Atwood. They were the sons of John Sr. John Sr., Atwood himself was a Funeral Director, and then they got into the furniture business, but John Sr. Atwood, that was his original profession. He was a mortician.

R.H: I see, and the other stores...?

M.K: Oh yeah, well there was Whittle's Bicycle Store on Jarvis Street.

R.H: Whittle's?

M.K: Whittel's, that was the senior that...his son Dan Whittel's later continued with that business, but they later moved up on Central Avenue. Then there was...did I mention Everett's Dairy? It was beside Whittel's Bicycle Store, and there was George Brothers, they were meat...they sold meat, they were butchers I guess, and then they also carried groceries. Then there was Fretz's Butcher Shop as well.

R.H: Who was the druggist there, do you remember?

M.K: Oh yes that's very important. That was Camm's Drugstore, and it was one of the major business's on the street at that time. A very important centre of commerce, and Merv Camm was the original owner. He also had a store in the Southend.

R.H: You mentioned the bakery?

M.K: Oh yes; there was Shaw's Bakery. Shaw's Bakery was alongside McMorrans there, and then there was Carroll's Grocery Store where Canadian Tire...Paul Myers finally went to that building where Carroll's Grocery Store used to be.

R.H: And the post-office was, I believe you told me down close to you to, wasn't it?

M.K: Yeah it was the...the original post-office when I came here was where Rossman's Store was, right on the corner. It was on the corner of Klauck Street and Jarvis Street, right on the corner, and then about 1938 or 1939 they had that new building on the other side, the one they're in at the present time, but the old...the first post-office when I was here first, like I said before, was where Rossman's Store was and it's now of course burned down.

R.H: I guess it was very small at that time?

M.K: Well it was a fair size, not as big as it is today, but it was a fair size post-office.

R.H: You don't know who the postmaster was, do you?

M.K: Yeah I do indeed, his name was Bruce Hogg.

R.H: You mentioned Yeo's General Store?

M.K: Yeah, oh yeah. When I first came here John Yeo owned a Drygoods Store. They were beside where the new post-office is. That would be on the southside of the street. They had a very good business, and Mr. Yeo passed on I think in 1936 approximately, and then Mrs. Yeo continued to run it along with her son Ross Yeo. Ross Yeo's still...well he continued the business in various locations for many years afterwards.

R.H: What kind of goods did she sell?

M.K: Well yarn goods...you could buy findings for...dressmakers would find it the store to go to, but it was the main store in those days, and anything in the software they tried to carry.

R.H: When you first came here where did you live?

M.K: Oh my home residence? Well mainly Bowen Road, 11 Bowen Road. We lived there for twelve years, and we bought this lot here on Highland Avenue, and you are interviewing me here at 20 Highland Avenue. We had this home built, and that's about 35 years ago, 34 or 35 years ago.

R.H: What was Bowen Road like then?

M.K: Well it was a wonderful group of friendly people. There was the Williams family, and the Kavanaugh's, and the Schofield's, and it was a very happy community. We always had a lot of fun over there, and we called it the Bowen Road Gang. When the war came along there was quite a lot of changes because several of the Williams family went into the services so that...and then Mrs. Artt...Tom Artt lived across the road. It was quite a nice community, and we had some very happy times together over on Bowen Road. As a matter of fact I still have a great deal of nostalgia for the Bowen Road area, but of course things have changed quite a bit from those days, but we're not far away from the people.

R.H: Your son! when you mentioned Madeline Morningstar, was it...? Morningstar's Photo-shop...[Was it through working there that your son developed an interest in photography]?

M.K: Yeah it was Morningstar, Madeline, Madeline Morningstar's. My son Doug (we used to say laughingly) was born with a camera in his hand, but anyway he had a very strong instinct for cameras, and one of his first jobs was working after school and weekends for Madeline, Madeline Morningstar. Then he soon got a job with Eddie Johnson at the Times Review. They offered him more or less a fulltime job over there and as a matter of fact Mr. Johnson bought him a very expensive camera, which it was considered in those days. He was all set, but he wanted to move up, and he was offered a job at the Welland Tribune in Welland and so forth, and he went from there to Richmond Virginia, and then to New York, and on his way but he started in, basically here in Fort Erie.

R.H: So now he's a world famous photographer?

M.K: Yes he's considered by many to be one of the top glamour type photographers in the world. There's many different categories of photographers but he's well known in Hollywood. I've been in Hollywood with him many times, and you walk down the street on Sunset Boulevard and everybody looks and yells at Doug so he's well known...Elizabeth Taylor was one of his first clients and she liked Doug very much, and that was a very big help to him in those days.

R.H: That is fantastic. You have another son of course?

M.K: Yes we have a son who has become a professional lawyer in St. Catherines, and he went to Western University and then Osgoode Hall for his education. He worked in St. Catherines as a lawyer for twelve years and he was appointed to the bench to become an Ontario Provincial Judge, and he now resides with his family in Belleville, Ontario.

R.H: What was his first name?

M.K: Oh, Kent.

R.H: When you had your business you had people working for you who were tailors, do you remember any of their names?

M.K: Yes. Oh yeah I had very interesting tailors. I had many nationalities, and as a matter of fact I used to try to learn a few words like good morning and so forth...to my Italian tailor I would say "buon giorno" you know and so forth. I had Dino the last ten years. Dino's last name is a very hard name to pronounce, it's Virgano but don't try to pronounce it. Dino was with me the last ten years, but I had a very interesting tailor by the name of Mr. Joe Werner and he was wonderful with languages. He was like a linguist himself. His father was German and his mother Hungarian, and he had his own business in Yugoslavia for quite a while and he was a very interesting man. As a matter of fact I learned quite a bit from him about the tailoring business although he worked for me. He was a very fascinating man, and he was with me many many years, fifteen years at least, Joe Werner. Then I had Finish tailors, I had Danish tailors...I'm just trying to think, oh a Scotch tailor, I had a John Laurie from Scotland. That's a good Scotch name isn't it, John Laurie? I had a Hungarian tailor.

R.H: All Europeans?

M.K: Yeah all Europeans. I did have one or two Canadians. I'm just thinking of one Canadian. Roy Fielding from Aurora, Ontario and he was a Canadian born man. Most of them were Europeans because they learn their trades so well over there with the tutelage they have to go through, and it's a full apprenticeship. It's better than we have today, and you have to really know the business.

R.H: And did you have the contract for the Peace Bridge and Immigration uniforms?

M.K: Well the Peace Bridge Company, I had their contract for several times and the immigration men were given cheques or requisitions, and they could go to any store in town to fill the requisition or get their uniforms. But I think I made the majority of them because I was obviously the main supplier at that time. And then I used to measure a hundred and fifty to close to two hundred customs men on a contract for the Canadian Government. I had also the Fort Erie police contract. I had it for many years off and on, and I also measured the guards up at the Welland jail. The guards up there, I had their contract so that I guess I did quite a comprehensive uniform business. I hadn't thought about it so much until this time, but yes we did a lot of uniforms.

R.H: Did you do any ladies uniforms, like was there ladies that worked on the customs?

M.K: Oh yeah, well when the ladies became part of the customs service we had to measure them as well. To begin with there was only half a dozen and today there's quite a few.

R.H: Have you ever heard of a lady called Addie Trench?

M.K: Oh yes she lived two doors away.

R.H: Was she on customs or immigration?

M.K: No customs, Canadian Customs, and she was one of the...one I'll never forget, she was a colourful lady, and a wonderful person, and she was I think one of the original of the...one of the original customs, of the ladies customs. She departed the scene here about six or eight years ago and I still miss her out the back.

R.H: She lived two doors down?

M.K: Right next door, two doors here. We knew her very well.

R.H: Well her name came up in one of my interviews, and I just wondered if you would have known her.

M.K: Oh yeah, very very well.

- R.H:** Do you remember any of the other customs officers? Have you heard of Graham, Mr. Graham?
- M.K:** Yes, well there was Russ Graham and he's probably the one your thinking of, but there was so many of them. It's so comprehensive cause there was hundreds over the years, but Addie Trench back here, did I use the name Trench? did I say Trench?
- R.H:** Yeah.
- M.K:** Yeah cause she was remarried after that, but anyway that was the name she was best known as.
- R.H:** Have the uniforms changed in colour or anything like that since you first started out doing them?
- M.K:** Yeah, well yes they've changed a lot. In the old days both the immigration and the customs were navy blue, and today they're giving them very comprehensive colours schemes. They have designers now that think up ideas to...I suppose it's a change but in the old days everything was navy-blue serge in the winter, and then in the summer they allowed them a terylene lighter weight cloth for summer uniforms. I won't forget the Peace Bridge Company. There was a manager there at that time at the Peace Bridge on the other side of the river. There was a man by name of Joe French, and he used to phone me up and he'd say "come over, we are going to consider you for making the uniforms when the Board of Directors meet" but he said "I want them all green". He wanted green uniforms for the men that actually worked for the Peace Bridge, nothing to do with the customs or immigration. This would be the company itself. They wanted them green, and I said "well I don't know where I can ever get some green cloth" but I managed it in this way. I bought some cloth and sent it to Cobourg Dye Works and had it dyed green. So I fulfilled his wishes and got green uniforms for the Peace Bridge. It's an interesting part of my life to think that I was able to get green cloth for uniforms.
- R.H:** Why, was it hard to find then?
- M.K:** Well yeah, to have a consistent colour or shade of green that would be available both for their overcoats. You see their greatcoats were to be green as well as their uniforms themselves. Even the caps had to be the same shade of green, so I had to be very careful that the dye would be a good dye too. You could run into difficulties in having cloth dyed. It has to be dye proof, it can't run or anything

like that so I had to test it several times before I went ahead with it. As I look back it was an interesting experience. Joe French as I said, was very definite I could have the contract if I could get green cloth.

R.H: And you got it, right?

M.K: Yeah.

R.H: Do you remember who the mayor was when you first came here?

M.K: Yes, his name was Dr. Mencke.

R.H: He was a medical doctor?

M.K: Yes he was indeed, yeah. He was a medical doctor, very tall slender man and he was the mayor in 193?...well he was in 37 he was, but several years before that as well, before I came here.

R.H: Was the mayor a part-time job?

M.K: Well it was so much different than today. I think his salary was a hundred a year, so it was very much a part-time job. Yeah he went to his medical practice, and a few hours at night he devoted to the local municipal affairs. There's quite a change today.

R.H: Yes there is. What about the Central Avenue Bridge, do you remember when that was built?

M.K: Oh yeah. I can't give you the exact date, but I do know of one mayor who had a lot to do in having it put through, along with the council. It was my friend Charlie Price back here, and he was the mayor as a matter of fact of Fort Erie during the time, and before they built the Peace Bridge. Charles Price, he was a very good friend of ours and in fact he lived on Bowen Road. I mentioned Bowen Road people and he was one of the very important ones. Anyway he was mayor of Fort Erie, and he pushed that along with a lot of supporters to have that bridge put through. It was a very important thing now that you look back. All the traffic from Buffalo had to go along the Niagara Blvd., and it was too much traffic, and this was a very important step. Today local people probably don't remember, or many of the younger people, but there was no way of getting across over the railroad tracks, but when that came about it certainly relieved a lot of problems. In fact it helped to develop our whole town.

R.H: I was just going to ask you, did it help to develop the business's?

M.K: Oh yes, oh yes both sides.

R.H: You felt that it was a good...?

M.K: Oh yeah sure. It just was a very important thing for the whole community. It looks so normal today as if it was always there, but it isn't all that many years since it was built.

R.H: It's hard to imagine being without it. I mean like for myself I can't imagine what it was like without that bridge.

M.K: I know the Boulevard was the only way to go between the two towns unless you went away up around in a very difficult circle, but of course the railroad tracks was part of this community. This was a great railroad town, and that was the main industry for many years, the railroad.

R.H: Could you tell me when you first came, and you had the Tip Top Agency with your name, what the price of a suit was then?

M.K: I was just thinking about that this morning. Oh my goodness! It's hard to believe that when I started you could get a custom...come to me and have a custom-made suit that was really handcut, plus cloth of your own selection, a three piece suit mind you, and that was including a vest, for \$24. 95. We used to sell quite a few tailored odd slacks, (that's pants, and in Scotland you call them trousers, or whatever) and anyway you could get a pair of custom-made for seven dollars with any kind of pockets or flaps on them. All handcut for seven dollars. I find it truly changed a lot. Today a custom-made suit, even just a middle of the road suit is three hundred or four hundred dollars, and that's without a vest most times. The vest is fifty or seventy five dollars extra. So \$24. 95 for a custom-made pick your own cloth suit. Imported too.

R.H: Beautiful imported cloth?

M.K: Yeah, oh yeah good cloth.

R.H: I notice that the vests have a lining at the back, is that what it was then?

M.K: Yeah, well that's what it was then. We used to make ladies tailored clothes, and their vests were the same cloth at the back. That was the type of vest for ladies, in fact there was a period when ladies bought slacks and vests from me but the backs of theirs was always made of wool, all wool. The men's are the satin or silk lining.

R.H: Did you sell shirts to?

M.K: No, no I was pretty much of a specialist in my day. We had the franchise for the famous Dack shoes in Canada. They are one of

Canada's top lines of shoes, and it turns out I was, in my store, the third agent in Canada for Dack shoes. Previously they sold all their shoes from their own stores, and then Mr. Stan Dack got the idea that probably they should have independent agents have his line as well as his own stores. So there was a man in Peterborough, and a man in Niagara Falls, (Burleigh Brothers in Niagara Falls it was. They were the second) and I was the third one to have an agency for Dack shoes, but today there's probably several hundred agents.

R.H: So you had your shoes in the stores which was to me, a really good idea.

M.K: Well a prestige line in those days helped to...I sold Burberry coats in England you see and the Dack shoes and the Burberry coats gave a good image of any kind of a store.

R.H: Who were some of your clients, do you remember some of your clients?

M.K: Well I had a very very large clientele in United States.

R.H: In Buffalo?

M.K: Oh yeah, well mainly Buffalo, and then I had clients in New York, and Boston, and Philadelphia. People would come here in the summer, and often people would come on their summer holidays from New York, and Boston, and order a suit or two from me, so sixty percent of our business eventually came from the other side.

R.H: Was the dollar at that time...you know how the dollar is so high, did it fluctuate then?

M.K: Well it wasn't as radical or anything as it is today, but there was one period when it was...they got about 15 percent more on their money, but there was another period would you believe, when our money was more than theirs. It used to be difficult to tell them "now look you got to pay me two, three, or four cents more on your dollar than ours". This is hardly conceived right now isn't it? We went through the throes of those periods.

R.H: It is hard to believe. I think that's only happened once since I've been here.

M.K: Well it was two or three cents one time and our money was worth more than the American dollar.

R.H: Did they always park on Jarvis Street? Was that always there, the parking for business?

M.K: Yes, we didn't have...well I could put two or three cars at the back

of my store on a busy saturday but mainly it was just on Jarvis Street. There was no off-parking places like there is today.

R.H: Was there parking meters too?

M.K: Well not when I started, but probably in the early forties they started having parking meters.

R.H: But before, there wasn't any?

M.K: No.

R.H: What else can you tell me about Jarvis Street? Is there anything else you'd like to tell me that I haven't asked?

M.K: Fort Erie is a very very nice town and I'd like to express myself that way. It's been very kind to me and I think it's a wonderful place to live. The reason I say that is, I don't know whether local people can always appreciate it but they should. We're a quiet town here, we do not have much vandalism. We think we have at times, but nowhere like they have in cities. We're a quiet little town, we're so close to entertainment centers, we're right across the river from New York's second largest city, we have the very famous Niagara Falls, we are only a couple of hours away from Toronto and nearby Hamilton, and we have our Crystal Beach type of operation so what more can anybody ask. We have just about everything.

R.H: The best of both worlds?

M.K: Yeah the best of both worlds is a good way of saying it. So I think we're very very fortunate people and we have a lot to be grateful for. This is a fine town and I'm very happy that I've spent forty seven of my years right here in Fort Erie. It's been a great town, and I love the people and it's just wonderful.

R.H: When did you close your business?

M.K: Oh I closed it...I tried to sell it...I made some effort to sell my business in 1977. I had people that seemed to be interested in it, but when it came down to the final bargaining they one or another couldn't get together so I liquidated the business (it seemed a shame) in 1977 and it no longer exists but it's a...We put on a number of sales and finally cleared all. We sold even the pictures on the wall. I had some very fine pictures that I sold. I bought some of them in the Louvre in Paris, some in Scotland, some in England, and some of them are paintings, many of them are prints and I sold them to a number of people and they're spread around Fort Erie here. It is

rather a shame that this type of business doesn't exist today but I guess things have changed. People buy mostly ready to wear clothes. We were in the ready to wear clothes business too for a number of years, but it didn't seem to be that anybody just wanted to pick up where I left off.

R.H: Yes your business was kind of special wasn't it?

M.K: Yeah we were specialists, and I suppose the problem would be that if I wasn't there, (I'm so well known in the Buffalo area, I belong to several clubs. I belong to the The Buffalo Athletic Club, and the Buffalo Canoe Club, and I was in the Lions Club, and the Chamber of Commerce. I was well known in all areas) and I suppose for somebody to buy my business wouldn't quite follow my footsteps.

R.H: They wouldn't be as well known?

M.K: No, and they might falter a bit, and it might be that I would have to be running up to the store to see John Jones and this sort of thing. So it turned out to be much better in the long run for my health's sake just to close it.

R.H: You wanted to retire?

M.K: I wanted to get out of it, yeah forty years was enough. I was forty years in my own business there, I was ten years in Toronto, so fifty years was enough years.

R.H: That's a good many years.

M.K: I enjoyed the business, I enjoyed doing business with the public. I like people, I'm very fond of people and I made a lot of great friends over the years.

R.H: I guess one of the rewards of being in the public eye is the people you meet.

M.K: Yes I suppose. There's some wonderful people, wonderful people, and I love them and I have some great nostalgic memories, and I could tell some great stories, but I can't get into that. But I say 95% of the people are just great.

R.H: Good, that's a good ending, and on behalf of the library Mr. Kirkland, I would like to thank you for taking the time out to give us this interview.