

This is Shelley Richer interviewing Mr. Rupheen Lichtenberger, in his home, at 2610 Stevensville Road, on October 21, 1985.

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

R.L: Just fine thank you.

S.R: What is your date of birth?

R.L: August the 18th, 1911.

S.R: Where were you born?

R.L: Well, I was born... when I was born the area was called Bridgeburg.

S.R: Where in Bridgeburg?

R.L: Well, it's on Sunset Drive now, but it was the Bridgeburg area. My birth certificate was addressed as Bridgeburg.

S.R: I never knew it went out that far.

R.L: Oh yes, it's Bertie Township, but it's the Town of Bridgeburg. That's what our mailing address was, Bridgeburg in them days.

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

R.L: Well, I attended S.S. No. 2, Bertie School, and that's on the Bowen Road, at the corner of Bowen Road and Pettit.

S.R: Is it still there?

R.L: No, it's not there anymore, but it was an old brick school, red brick school. When I first started to go to school there, they used to heat it with gas, a big gas heater. It was free gas in them days, they didn't have to pay for the, the gas company supplied all the schools with free gas, and they just turned the gas on and let her go.

S.R: Could you describe the school for me, what it was like, what it was like inside, and maybe the desks?

R.L: Well, it was a one room school, and it had the single desks for each child. There was two alleys, alleyways, and then there was four rows of seats. There was two entries. You came in the front door and there was the boys cloakroom on the right side, and the girls cloakroom on the left side. Then there was a wall between the cloakrooms and the main schoolroom. The blackboard was all the way across the room at the front of the school. There was a big pendulum clock that hung over the blackboard on the one side. That was the clock that kept the time in them days when there

was no electricity, in the school it was gas, it had gas lights and no electricity. The caretaker came in every night to do the sweeping and cleaning. The floors were just hardwood floors, there was no linoleum on them or carpets at all, it was just hardwood floors.

S.R: Do you remember any of your teachers?

R.L: Oh yeah, my first teacher's name was Olive Rankin, she was from Seaforth, Ontario, and she married Alvin Wale, that's her husband. She taught for a number of years, then she got married to Alvin Wale. Another teacher that I went to, her name was Miss Clark, and another one was Miss Holmes. My last teacher's name was Davis, Helen Davis. She married Percy Hershey. She lived in Fort Erie until she died, just died last year. That was my last teacher.

S.R: With only one teacher, was the teacher also the principal, or was there one principal to service those schools?

R.L: Just the one teacher and she was the teacher, the principal, and the she give the strap whenever they needed it.

S.R: How was it for discipline, or were the students good?

R.L: Well, they had to be good in them days because the teachers, they all used the strap in them days, they didn't fool around. I got a few strappings myself.

S.R: Were they picky... did you have to do a lot to get the strap, or just a little?

R.L: Oh, it was reasonable, there was no doubt about it. We had one school teacher who would throw the chalk or the eraser brushes at us. If you turned around and talked, she would just grab an eraser brush and fire it at you. Sometimes she hit the wrong one too.

S.R: Do you recall any interesting stories from your school days?

R.L: Oh yeah. We used to go across the railroad track and there used to be a big pond between the railroads. They used to freeze over with ice in the winter. We always went down there and played hockey during our noonhour. So, one noonhour the kids decided that they weren't going to go back when the bell rang. You could hear the bell ringing alright, from the school when they rang the bell. They always rang it five minutes before time to give us a chance to get back. So, one day the kids, they decided they weren't going to go

back when the bell rang. They were going to try to pretend that they didn't hear the bell. So, they didn't go back for about 15 minutes or more, I guess it was, and finally the teacher sent another kid down to tell us that we had better get back or they was all going to get a lickin'. So, finally they went back, anyway, and sure enough she licked the whole bunch of them. She was so tired after she got through giving them the lickings, the last ones only got about two swats.

S.R: You grew up on a farm?

R.L: Yes.

S.R: Could you tell me a little about that farm, what kind of farm?

R.L: Well, it was a general farm. My father raised everything there was on a farm to raise, grain and corn, wheat and oats, and he had a herd of cattle, and there was milk, and beef. He used to sell milk to the Shipyards. He supplied the whole Shipyards with milk, when I was just a small kid, before I started school even, he supplied all the milk for the Shipyards. Then when I got to where I was grown up, well, then I started to work in Fort Erie, then they started to take milk to Fort Erie. They got about a half a dozen customers who wanted milk, and I was working at the Superior store then, and I used to take milk, about a crate of bottles of milk down with a truck, and I'd go to the store. Then, when I'd be delivering my groceries I'd drop my milk off to people that wanted milk. That went on for about six months or more, and it got so that I couldn't impose on my boss to be dropping milk off when I was working at the Superior Store, so then Paul had to start going down with the car and delivering it. That's how the milk business started. That's how the Fort Erie milk business started, from that.

S.R: Where was it located in Fort Erie? It moved to Fort Erie after awhile, didn't it?

R.L: Well, the first dairy buildings was built right on the farm. They're still there yet. When the business got too large to handle it from there, then they bought the lot on Jarvis Street, and Paul and Nelse [Paul and Nelson Lichtenberger, his brothers] put up a new building

there, it was right next to the Canadian Tire store, at that time. That's when they put up the new building, for the dairy in Fort Erie.

S.R: That's where they did all the work, pasteurizing, bottling, et cetera, or was it just a store?

R.L: Well, that was just the dairy. There was only the dairy building there in Fort Erie, on Jarvis Street. That's where the farmers all, they brought the milk in there, from the farmers with trucks, and then they pasteurized it there, and processed it. All the milk was put in refrigeration, and was delivered with the dairy trucks, from that dairy building.

S.R: What happened from there?

R.L: Well, it was put up during the war, then the war came on, and they got in difficulty with the drivers and things weren't going very good, and finally they put it up for sale. They had a shortage of drivers and a shortage of men and they couldn't get men that were reliable to run trucks, and finally Nelse and Paul decided they had better put it up for sale. So, they sold it to a man from Thorold, he bought the business then.

S.R: What was this man's name?

R.L: Oh, I forget his name. I can't remember what his name was.

S.R: What was the dairy called?

R.L: North End Dairy. Well, it started out with Lichtenberger's Dairy, then... no, it was Lichtenberger's Dairy. No, the North End Meat Market is what I had, but it was Lichtenberger's Dairy. It was always called Lichtenberger's Dairy, the dairy part. It always went by Lichtenberger's Dairy. There's some bottles around yet. Once in a while you see somebody that's still got a bottle around yet, Lichtenberger's Dairy.

S.R: When did Lichtenberger's Dairy go out of business, when was it sold?

R.L: Well, it was just after the war. It was just after the war that it was sold out. I forget now what year it was. It must be about '42, about the year it was sold, I think, '42 or '43, one of those years.

S.R: What was it bought out for?

R.L: Well, because they were having problems with people on help, and they got into financial problems. They borrowed a lot of money to build the new building and they went in pretty deep and they decided that they would just unload it.

S.R: No, the man that bought it, what did he buy the building for? Did he want the dairy itself or...?

R.L: Oh yes, they operated for about two years afterward.

S.R: Was it still called Lichtenberger's Dairy?

R.L: Yes, it still continued on under the Lichtenberger's name, yeah, they never changed the name. They didn't change the name at all.

S.R: You mentioned in the beginning that when you were a boy you used to deliver milk to the Shipyards?

R.L: Yeah.

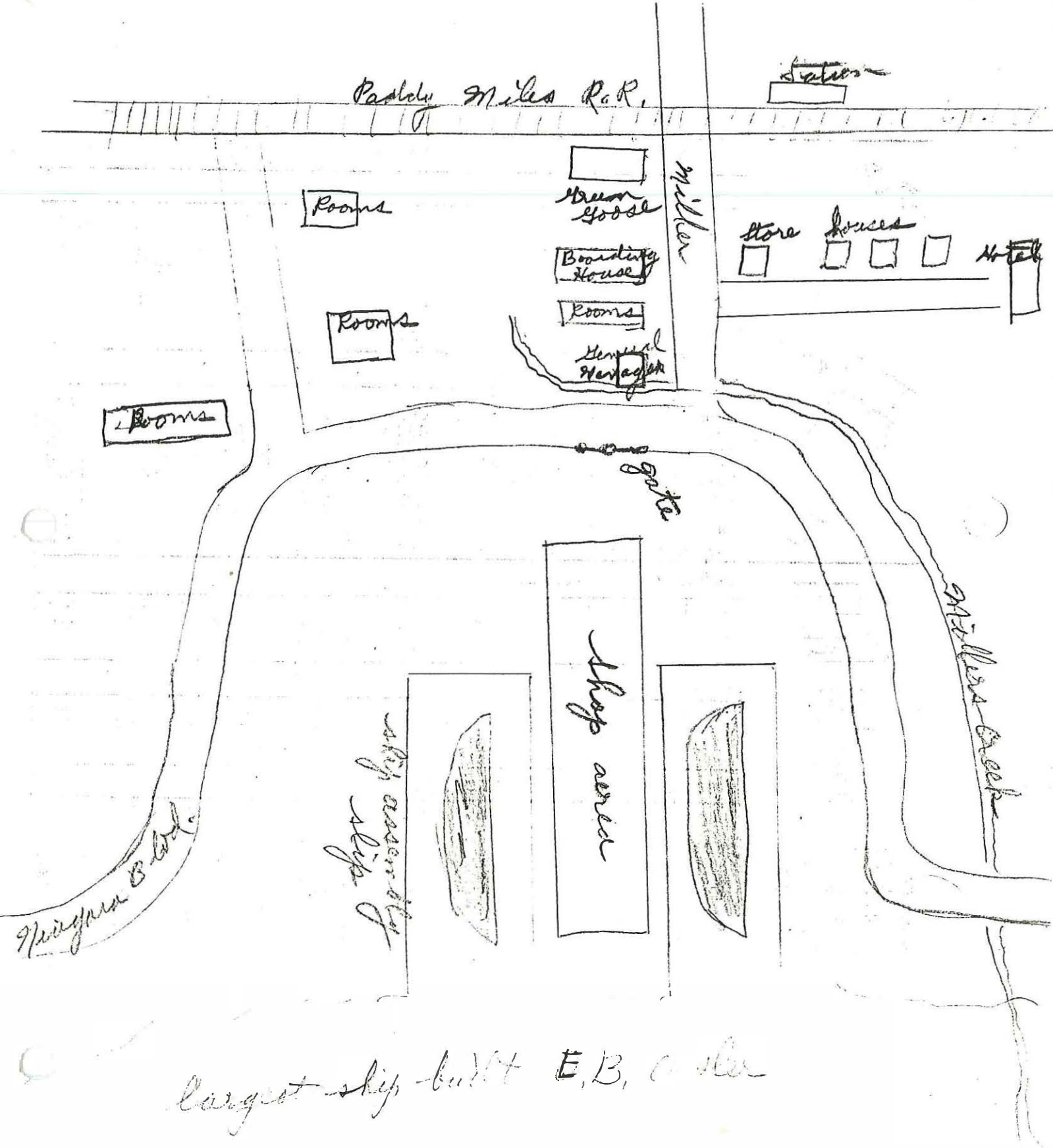
S.R: Could you tell me what you know about the Shipyards?

R.L: Well, that's where they used to build large laker-ships, mostly for the lakes, mostly all lakers, built for the Great Lakes shipping. The E.B. Osler was the largest ship they ever built. There used to be two slips there. There still is one there yet, but the other one, the one on the south side, that's all been filled in now, there's not... it's no longer there. The entrance to the Shipyard was right at Miller Road. There used to be a double gate there with a watchman. That's where they entered the yard, all the material coming in, the men used to come to work through that gate. They all came to work with horses and buggies, there was no cars. Nobody drove cars then at all. They had a building, a shed in the yard, to keep the horses and the buggies. They'd tie the horses in the shed and bring feed, and they'd feed the horses at noon there, then the horses would be tied up all day while they were working. They'd pick their horses up and go home at night, then. Everybody came to work with horses and buggies, there was no cars.

S.R: Were there any buses, horse drawn buses, at all?

R.L: No, most of the people came to work with just ordinary buggies. Some of them would have a, would maybe have a horse with a

The Shipyards



double seated, like a carriage with two seats on it, and maybe three or four men would come on a rig like that, instead of just one, they'd have riders. Some of the men would pay some money toward their transportation to run with somebody, something like that. There was no stone on the road. In them days the roads weren't stone and when the roads were wet and muddy, the ruts, down past my folks there, the ruts could get a foot deep. The ruts were so deep that they even used to drive along between the ditch and the fence, because the road had such deep ruts they couldn't hardly navigate anymore. If they were to crack the buggy in the ruts, sometimes, if they weren't careful, they would just break the wheels from trying to get out of the rut.

S.R: Then how did they fix that? What did they do with the holes?

R.L: Well, when the roads would get dry, then they'd come in with a scraper and graders and level it off. But while the wet season was on, during the spring of the year, the ruts would get so deep that they couldn't hardly pull the buggies through them anymore. There was so many buggies going through them every day, that those ruts kept getting deeper and deeper. There was a set of ruts on one side of the road with the buggies going one way, and another set on the otherside where they go the other way, and they would just be going along in that rut all of the time. They'd just keep wearing it deeper all of the time, because it was mud. There was no stone at all, it was just bare mud. Everytime you'd go through there with the buggy, the rut would be full of water, and it just kept going down, sinking deeper and deeper. That's why the ruts got so deep.

S.R: Is there anything else that you could tell me about the Shipyards?

R.L: Well, the manager's name was Mr. Smith, I remember from when I was a boy. He lived right at Miller Road, the corner of Miller Road and the Niagara Boulevard, at that time. There used to be a big white house right in there. The railroad that supplied, brought in all the supplies for the Shipyards, was called the Paddy Miles Railway, and it runs from Niagara-On-The-Lake to Fort Erie, the Paddy Miles Railway. It was a single track railway, and it run

along, right along with the power lines, the Canadian Niagara Power Line that brought the power from Niagara Falls to Fort Erie. It run right along, followed along that railway. The power line is still there yet. Where that power line is is where the railway was, right in along that power line. There used to be a station right there on the north side of Miller Road, that's where the railroad station was. Across the... just across the Miller Road, on the opposite side, that's where the Green Goose was. There was a big green house, like a boarding house, that the people lived in it, the Green Goose. They always took in boarders. They had a number of bedrooms in there, and they had these boarders that used to board there. In fact, I know, there's one man in Ridgeway that I still know... I did a job for him last summer... he mentioned it. He said he lived in that Green Goose, that's where he lived. That was right next to the... just down the road a little ways there was the main boarding house. One of the managers names in the boarding house was... when I was there, before I went to school when I was just a small boy... his name was Waters, Mr. Waters. He was the first manager of the boarding house that I can remember. Across the street then from the boarding house was the store. They used to get the mail there, a general store, where they sell groceries, and tobacco, and candies, and whatever they wanted to sell in them days. That was the general store. That was the only place they ever sold anything in the area there. There was... The hotel there, the hotel was right back at the end of the street. That's where they had all their booze, right back there at the hotel. That's where all the men from the Shipyards went for... to get their drinks after work.

S.R: Do you recall who owned that?

R.L: I don't remember the owner of the hotel. I don't remember his name, I've forgot that. Then there used to be about five or six houses between the store and the hotel, along the same street there. There was a whole line of houses there. There's a big shack up at Pettit, where Pettit Road goes off the Boulevard there. There used to be what they called a long shack, right up there.

That building was about 100 feet long, and about 20 feet wide. It just had a hall down the centre of it and rooms on both sides, just rooms big enough for a bed and for one person to go in it. They just went in there to sleep. They would go down to the boarding house to get their meals, and just go into that building to have a sleep. There was up to 200 or 300 men that used to work in the Shipyards there.

S.R: Oh, and a lot of them boarded there?

R.L: Yeah, they boarded there, yeah. There was only a... oh, there was only about... the ones that used to commute in there with their horses and buggies every day, I would say about, oh, about 20 or 30 buggies, horses that used to go through there every day. The other men, they stayed right there, they didn't go home at all. That's why they had all those buildings, so they could live right there. They lived there permanent. That was their permanent living quarters.

S.R: Do you know who the Shipyards was owned by, and what it's proper name was?

R.L: No, I don't know the... well, they operated under a couple different names, but I don't remember what their names were now. It just went by Shipyard usually, but the management was... there was different management from the first time that they opened up there 'til... I think it was owned by two or three different companies, really. This is during the history of the Shipyard, but I don't remember what their names were. The local people around there just called it the Shipyard and that was all it went by. I don't remember what boat it was that they launched one time, it wasn't the E.B. Osler, it was another smaller boat, but we went down to see the launching and they had this ship, it was sitting in this slip. They greased the planks under the ship. The ship was hanging in, like, big straps. They had these straps that were under the boat, the boat was supported on these large straps, and then they had a man on each strap with an axe, on each side. When they were ready to launch, they blew a whistle, and at the time when they blew this whistle, each man was supposed to chop this axe into the strap and cut the straps off, all at the same time. When they blew the whistle every man that

had an axe had to cut his strap. So then they had two men, one on each side in case one would miss, then the other one would be cutting it on the other side anyway. So, they would cut them straps and that boat would drop right down into the water, right down on the... first it drops down onto these greased planks, and then it slides down these greased planks into the water. When it hits the water it makes a big splash. Then, when it's sliding down, there was a lady, a lady that had a bottle of whiskey, and she threw this bottle of whiskey to christen the boat... she broke it on the side of the boat. That's how they christened it, while sliding into the water. I never forgot that, I was just a kid. I can see the water splash yet.

S.R: Is there anything else that you'd like to mention about the Shipyards? Your dad used to peddle milk there, do you remember how much it was then?

R.L: Five cents a quart.

S.R: That was before it was pasteurized?

R.L: That was raw milk. It wasn't pasteurized, no.

S.R: How did they deliver it?

R.L: With a two gallon can. He took it in eight gallon cans in the wagon, and then he dumped the eight gallon... from the eight gallon can, he dumped it into the peddler can, they called it a peddler can, it held two gallons of milk. It had a long spout on it. The spout was about 18 or 20 inches long, and he'd just tip this up and pour out a quart of milk out of this spout, with a quart measure, and dump it into the people's containers, everybody had their own containers. If you wanted two quarts of milk, you'd just dump out a quart of milk and dump it in their container, then fill it up again for the second quart of milk. The quart measure hung on the... it hung by a handle, and it hung on the spout of the peddler can. You'd just carry the peddler out and the quart measure hung on the spout at the same time.

S.R: Did people pay their nickel when they got their milk?

R.L: It was cash, yeah. Everybody paid cash for the milk, there was no credit. If they didn't have the money they didn't get the milk.

S.R: You weren't getting other things in trade for milk neither?

R.L: There was no credit on the milk business in them days, it was cash or else you didn't get the milk. The only one that didn't pay in cash was the restaurant, the hotel... not the hotel but the boarding house and they paid every week, they paid by cheque, but all the other places, it was cash. The boarding house paid by cheque every week.

S.R: Almost right next to the Shipyards is Niagara Christian College, could you tell me what Niagara Christian College was before it became a school and anything about the casino that you knew about?

R.L: Well, they built the Biltmore Club House. That's what it was built for to begin with, but before they got into operation they ran out of money, they went broke, and then they were fined for something that they weren't doing according to the law right. Then they just closed up and they never operated. Then they put the building up for sale. It never did operate as a club house.

S.R: Was gambling legal in those days?

R.L: It wasn't exactly legal, that was the reason that the police came in there, they were gambling and that's what the charges were, illegal gambling.

S.R: Did you hear anything about call-girls there?

R.L: Well, they were supposed to have them but I never did hear whether they really had them or not. They didn't operate long enough to get it all set up for that, I don't think. But the charges that were laid against them were illegal gambling, it's what the charges were.

S.R: How did it become Niagara Christian College?

R.L: Well, the building was put up for sale. My dad heard about it and he called Bert Sherk and told him that the building was going to be sold. He said, "We should check into it and see whether we could buy it". So, they went to Buffalo to see the man that was in charge of it, and they found out how much the price was, what they wanted for it. Bert Sherk said, "We'll check it out with the trustees of the church and decide whether we can afford it or not". My father says, "No way". He says, "Have you got any money Bert? Have you got some money with you?" Bert says, "Well, I've got about 50 dollars". Well, father says, "I've got 50, so we'll put 100 downpayment

on it to hold it". He says, "So if we lose it, so what. If we don't put a down payment on it we'll lose it anyway, in case they do want to buy it". So they put a down payment on it to hold it. Then they came back to talk it over with the board here, and they decided to buy it. Then they went back to buy it and the agreement was that they didn't want any cheques, they wanted cash. They had to take cash in a suitcase to pay for the building. They took it in a suitcase and paid for it all in cash.

S.R: This is John Montana?

R.L: He owned a taxi business, I think, in Buffalo, and that's where they went to see him first, about buying the building, it was over there. The final transaction was done, I think, out here on Jarvis Street in Herb Guess' building. That's where they made the deal, finally.

S.R: Why Herb Guess' building? Was there a little business there or...?

R.L: Well, Montana was connected with the taxi business, and Herb Guess had had a taxi buisness over here, and I think that he was part owner of it, or something, part owner of Herb's taxi business, somehow. They were connected some way, anyway, or else he was connected with the... he might have been connected with the building. I think he was one of the ones that... the club, he belonged to the club I think, Herb Guess did.

S.R: Wasn't Herb Guess a Mayor around here?

R.L: Yeah, he was the Mayor of Fort Erie for awhile, yeah, he was the same guy, yeah. Herb Guess was very... one time when they used to have... he'd bring moonshine over the river. He was one of the... he had quite a set-up with smuggling moonshine across the river too. He didn't do it himself but he had a lot of men working for him that did the work, but he was the ring-leader of it.

S.R: What else could you tell me about smuggling around here?

R.L: Well, that was all I know about the smuggling, was the moonshine, mostly. I didn't know anything about the smuggling of the aliens around.

S.R: You had mentioned to me about someplace where they stored a lot of it and how they brought it in and where they hid it.

R.L: Oh golly yeah. They used to... when they were smuggling moonshine

over, they used to bring it in and store it, they used to store it in the barns around the area here, in the haymows in the barns. When they'd get ready to take a load over the river, they'd come up to one of the barns and take it on a truck, and take it down to the river, then take it across the river in a boat. They'd smuggle it over. But they had to have a place to store it here until they'd get ready to haul it across. There was only certain nights or something that they... they tried to buy the police off and they'd get them away somewhere, and when they figured certain nights were better than others to make it across, then that would be the night that they'd run. That's the way they used to work it. Of course in the meantime, they'd bring it in from the breweries and stuff, and store it around here, so they'd have it handy to shoot it across when they were ready to take it over.

S.R: You own a business called Lichtenberger's Electric, right?

R.L: Yeah.

S.R: Could you tell me what got the business started, what got you into the electrical business, starting with the Superior Company?

R.L: Well, I worked for the Superior Grocery Store in Fort Erie, when I first started to work, as a boy. I worked for three and a half years driving their delivery truck, 'til they sold the business. Then I started peddling groceries on the road for a few years until Morley Spratt wanted to sell his meat market, and I bought his business. It was on Jarvis Street. I operated that for... oh, I think it was about four years, four years, and I sold it to Mr. Young from Toronto, he bought my business out.

S.R: Why did you sell it?

R.L: Well, it was in the Depression time, and I couldn't collect money, and I got too much money on the books, and I was losing money, and I had to get out of it. I couldn't afford to stay in it anymore. I was also having trouble with my refrigeration machine, and it broke down and I had to get a service man from Toronto, and for part of a month or more the one summer, I couldn't get the thing to work. Finally Mr. Spratt came in and said to me, "If you want to tear it apart I'll help you", he says, "I think I can help you out

and maybe we can get it going". So, he pulled it out and we found out what the trouble was and we had to get new bearings put in for the compressor. We took it to the machine shop and had new bearings made, new shafts, and we put it back together and we got it working, the machine worked alright then. There was a traveller from Canadian Refrigeration and he was trying to sell me a new machine because he knew I was having all the trouble and everything, and he thought he could sell me new equipment. When he found out that I had fixed it up he said, "You should be working in refrigeration instead of cutting meat". So anyway, I starting taking a home study course, and I took that and it took me about a year.

S.R: Where did you get that from?

R.L: From Chicago, U.E.I. in Chicago, it was. I took that for a year and I got an 85 percent mark on my final examination. I was to go to Chicago for my practical experience. When Mr. Towers found out that I was supposed to do that, he says, "Why there's no use in going to Chicago, I'll get you into Hamilton, at Canadian Curtis". So I went up there for part of a month for some practical experience, and I was all over the penninsula with the service men on service calls, and that's where I got my first experience in refrigeration. I came back home in January 1937, and I started to work in refrigeration then. My first job I did was Mr. Robert Ule on Jarvis Street in Fort Erie, an old Kelvinator sulphur-dioxide refrigerator, that was stinking gas. As soon as that stuff starts to leak, that will drive you out of the place. I repaired her refrigerator for her. I took the coil out of it, and I didn't know whether I should tackle replacing the valve so I decided that I had better take it up to Hamilton and let the boys up there do it, because they were experienced in doing it. I took it up there and had them to replace the valve, and I brought it back home and put it in the refrigerator and it wouldn't work, they didn't have it calibrated right. I knew how to calibrate it from my studies, from my course. So I decided, well, if I can do as good as that, I'll do as good as them guys, so I took it apart on my own. I recalibrated it and got it right, and put it in and it worked perfect. I never sent another coil in for repair, I did them all myself, after

that. That's how I started in refrigeration, and I'm still at it yet.

S.R: Did you ever have a refrigeration business in Fort Erie, or was it out of your home?

R.L: Well, I started on the No. 3 Highway, the Garrison Road, just out of Fort Erie. That's where I started in the refrigeration business. I used to do my work there in the basement of the house there, until we moved a few... we lived there for what-about a couple years, I guess, until we moved to Stevensville.

S.R: That would be about 1941?

R.L: It would be about 1940? First we moved to Bowen Road, to her folks house, then we moved to Stevensville after. It was about '41 when we moved to Stevensville. I did do service work when we were living on the farm, on the Bowen Road down there with her folks.

S.R: That was the Zimmerman's?

R.L: The Zimmerman's, yeah.

S.R: Then when did you start your store, you have a store here on Stevensville Road?

R.L: In '44 we were still down at the other store.

S.R: Where was that store?

R.L: Down at the corner is the one we had in Stevensville first. It was where Wale's Plumbing is now. That was my first store in Stevensville. We started up here in about... it's '46 I think, or '47, that we bought this place here. We bought this small store first and then we bought the other store about in '51 or '52, I think it was, we bought the building from Coulis, after they had the fire... J.R. Coulis. See, they had a fire and their store was burnt. I bought it after the fire and then fixed it all up, so now we have the two stores here.

S.R: You had something that you'd like to add about the Biltmore Club House?

R.L: Yeah, the basement of that building was dug with... Fred Lichtenberger and Paul Lichtenberger, that's my father and my brother. They did the building for that basement.

S.R: How was that done?

R.L: That was done with horses and manpower. They used plows and slue-shovels. That's all done with a team of horses. There was

no power shovels in them days at all, to dig out basements. The general contractor's name, that built that building, was Len Bowering, that was his name. There was two men there, the general contractor and his mason. I forget the mason's name. I know he was Scottish, but I don't remember his name. There was two, and they built a number of houses down there, in their time. My father and Paul, they did the digging for all the basements of all those houses. I think there was about five or six houses besides the Biltmore building, that they dug at the time. Those basements were all dug with horses, horses and slue-shovels.

S.R: Is there anything else that you'd like to add before closing?

R.L: I'm afraid that's about it?

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

R.L: You're welcome.