

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mr. William Robertson in his home at 17 Queensbury, Fort Erie, Ontario, and the date is September 11, 1985.

**R.H:** Good morning Mr. Robertson.

**W.R:** Good morning Mrs. Hearn.

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

**W.R:** I was born September 3, 1914.

**R.H:** And where were you born?

**W.R:** In a little place called Mount Albert.

**R.H:** Mount Albert? Where is that?

**W.R:** It's about eight miles east of Newmarket.

**R.H:** Did you grow up there?

**W.R:** Yes, my father worked for the Canadian National Railway there as agent, and I took my public school education in Mount Albert, and my high school education in Newmarket.

**R.H:** Did you go on to teachers college?

**W.R:** That's right, after grade 13 I went to Toronto's Teachers College.

**R.H:** Did you have to have grade 13 at that time?

**W.R:** Oh yes, you had to have that and that was compulsory for your first class certificate. If you didn't have a first class certificate, and wished the second class you just went to grade 12. And grade 12 then, you spent two years in teachers college, whereas with the... if you had your grade 13, you only spent one year there.

**R.H:** What college did you go to?

**W.R:** Toronto. It was called Toronto Normal School in those days, but it's the same as the teacher's college.

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

**W.R:** I went from Blind River where I last taught, and I came to Fort Erie in January, 1941, a long time ago.

**R.H:** What was your first school in Fort Erie?

**W.R:** My first school? My first school was Douglas School and I was hired to teach grade seven. At that time the principal of the school was Mr. Roy Sexsmith. Mr. Sexsmith was a very fine principal and he gave the teachers quite a break. I was a teacher of grade seven for five years.

**R.H:** What subjects did you teach?

**W.R:** All subjects.

**R.H:** Did you have to teach music?

**W.R:** Oh yeah, and I can't even sing.

**R.H:** Did you have a background in music?

**W.R:** Oh yes.

**R.H:** So you taught English, Math...?

**W.R:** Everything yes, history, geography, it was just a one man show.

**R.H:** Was that more or less the time when the kids had the one teacher all through school?

**W.R:** That's right, oh yes, for the whole time. A grade seven teacher would teach all the subjects and stay there for the whole year and the kids would be with the one teacher. Sometimes there was split grades which quite often happened, that is a grade four and five in one room. Some of the children could have the same teacher for two years, but they were lucky, in our days the teachers were really conscientious. I'm not saying they are not today, because they are, but it was a different type, it was more of a family type school. Everybody knew everybody, and the kids all knew each other and knew the teachers.

**R.H:** How large a school was Douglas?

**W.R:** It was ten rooms at that time when I came, and approximately 40 pupils to each room, which today would be out of the question.

**R.H:** So there was 40 pupils to a class?

**W.R:** Approximately yes. There was 36 to 40. The kindergarten usually had 12.

**R.H:** Oh, you did have kindergarten then?

**W.R:** Oh yes, Miss Everingham who's still alive today was the kindergarten teacher, and she'd have morning and afternoon classes. Approximately about 20 would come in the morning and 20 in the afternoon. That was a lovely time of day of opening school, to hear the children. Some of them were so happy to be there and others would cry their heads off, wanting their mothers.

**R.H:** Did they still have to be five years old to get into kindergarten then?

**W.R:** Oh yes, they had to be five, probably six, but we did take them in if they were five by the end of December.

**R.H:** Was kindergarten the same as it is now? Was it more education orientated at that time?

**W.R:** Yes, I would say so. Miss Everingham, she actually taught what I would consider to be a grade one. She also had wonderful times with the kids with their rhythm band music and so on, like Polly put the kettle on, and all those old songs. The kids loved them and she really had them well orientated for the grade one up to grade eight. She was a good teacher.

**R.H:** Did you have teachers aides at that time?

**W.R:** No, we didn't.

**R.H:** So that is something that came later?

**W.R:** That's right. It's interesting, I became principal of Douglas School in 1945, in other words, I was there five years as a grade teacher and then I became principal. I had approximately 40 pupils in my grade eight. I had no principal's relief. I was supposed to go around and inspect my teachers to see that they were doing a good job, with no time off whatsoever. So, you'd keep the youngsters busy in grade eight and then sneak off for half an hour to a room, to see how things were going. At that time the teacher did not promote high school. The youngsters had to try entrance examinations and those who passed the entrance examination, of course went on to high school. Those who didn't, repeated the year. Your idea was to get those kids ready for high school and you really had to work at it. The high school teachers or the principal of the high school set the examination. We didn't set the examinations at all so we didn't know what would be on them. We had to give them a real thorough education and besides that, I had to inspect my school. I had to enter reports on the teachers and send that to the School Board, which was a big job. We had no principal's relief, no nothing, were as, when I finished the senior school, I wasn't teaching at all.

**R.H:** You were just strictly the principal?

**W.R:** Just the principal.

**R.H:** So it was more or less administration work you were doing?

**W.R:** That's right, so there's quite a difference from when I started and when I finished.

**R.H:** Did you have a vice principal?

**W.R:** Not in those days.

**R.H:** What areas did Douglas School serve?

**W.R:** Douglas School served the area from approximately down to Gilmore

Road, up to what is now the Queen Elizabeth, down to the River Road and up to, taking in Amigari, that is Fort Erie west. We had all that area. When I took over, we had approximately about 400 youngsters coming to school.

**R.H:** Is Douglas actually in the South End or the West End?

**W.R:** It's in the South End. There was no west end school at that time, so they all came to our school. From Gilmore Road down, they went to Wintemute School. That would be down, approximately to Jarvis Street. The other side of Jarvis Street went to Rose Seaton School and of course at that time, it was called Phipps Street School. We had to divide it that way, whereas Queen Elizabeth Way over this way, they went to Mather School. Douglas School took in a big area.

**R.H:** In the wintertime, how was the attendance?

**W.R:** Excellent.

**R.H:** You mean they plowed through the snow to get there?

**W.R:** They plowed through the snow. Very seldom did we have to close the schools, whereas today if there is a little bit of snow, the schools close. But not in those days, they stayed open and the kids... I would say the attendance was almost perfect. Of course there was days when it was impossible to get out, that they wouldn't be there, but if there was anyway of getting out at all, they'd be there.

**R.H:** What do you remember about Douglas School as far a facilities, was there a gymnasium for instance?

**W.R:** Oh no, no gymnasium. You had your physical education out in the schoolyard, but there were no gyms in any of the schools at that time. Once a month we took our youngsters down to the high school and they used the swimming pool there. We had no facilities of our own.

**R.H:** And you still had physical education outside, but what about in the wintertime?

**W.R:** Yes, in the wintertime they would do it in the classroom. Oh yeah, we had our physical exercise.

**R.H:** How long were you at Douglas School?

**W.R:** At Douglas School, I was there 20 years. I went there in 1941 and 1945 I became principal of Douglas School. At that time Miss Rose Seaton who was the principal of Phipps Street School retired and

the principal of Douglas School, Mr. Sexsmith went down as principal of Rose Seaton School or Phipps Street as it was known in those days. When he went down there, I was appointed principal of Douglas School. That was 1945 and I was there 'til 1960. I had 15 years as principal.

**R.H:** Getting back to teachers aides, did you have any volunteer help at all, like mothers?

**W.R:** No. The only thing we had, we had a very active Home and School Association. We always did, and they did a lot for the school. We were one of the first schools in Fort Erie to purchase a moving picture projector, that is the sound system, and we raised some of the money ourselves by having candy sales, bake sales and so on. The Home and School Association had sales and at that time they were expensive, the movie projectors, but we were the first ones to get one. We were very proud to have it. We were able to get films from the Department of Education. Once a week we would order films and show all the school films.

**R.H:** Did you have a library in the school?

**W.R:** Just in the classroom.

**R.H:** What else did the Home and School Association do?

**W.R:** Well, it was mostly money raising for the school, that is sports equipment and so on. That wasn't supplied by the School Board at that time. We supplied our own bats and balls and things like that as far as excitement out in the schoolyard.

**R.H:** So that's what the Home and School Association did, was raise money?

**W.R:** That's really what they did, yes. Of course if they had problems then, they would discuss... We always had, just before Home and School, we had possibly half and hour were the parents could come into the classrooms and talk to the teachers and if there were any problems, they would discuss it. At that time very few people seemed to have problems so we were lucky that way, but it was open so the teachers could interview anybody who wished to come for a half and hour before Home and School.

**R.H:** Were you at Douglas when the bussing started?

**W.R:** No, I wasn't. When I was there everybody walked to school.

**R.H:** What about the teaching of religious education in Douglas School?

**W.R:** We had a half hour a week, and at that time we had the different

denominational... either the minister or the sisters came into the school and the pupils that belonged to the United Church would have the United church minister and the Baptist, and so on. Of course the Catholic pupils would have the sisters come in and that was usually for about a half hour a week. So that was the religious education at that time.

**R.H:** Of course there was no separate school then, but have you any idea when it was built?

**W.R:** I don't know just what year it was. It was during my term in Douglas School. It was built of course where it is today and it took quite a few of the pupils away, but a lot of them still continued to come to the public school.

**R.H:** It didn't affect the teachers as far as layoffs or anything, did it?

**W.R:** Oh no. We had enough pupils that stayed. Of course don't forget, the Catholic School took in the whole town. It took in not only Douglas School pupils, but pupils from Mather and all over the area.

**R.H:** So the loss to each school was very small?

**W.R:** It was very small, it was minimal.

**R.H:** When did the bussing of pupils start?

**W.R:** Actually, there was no bussing and as far as I'm concerned today at the end of the Douglas School, there still wasn't any bussing. The bussing was out in the Township in the No. 4 school, the Garrison Road School. They had to travel a long ways but in town here, there was very little bussing. It didn't start 'til about 1975 really, so it's something new here. The area was such that most youngsters would... Well, what would you want a bus for say to go from Forsythe Street up to Douglas School and so on, so there was no bussing really. The only time that there was bussing... Now, we had a bit of a break later on when I was at Douglas School. The children would go into the high school a half a day a week for industrial arts, and home economics, the grade eights only. Then finally we got the grade sevens and grade eights, and they would have to be bussed down to the high school, so that was the only bussing we had.

**R.H:** Was the bus rented then?

**W.R:** I suppose you could say that. It was rented by the board.

**R.H:** Was that a once a week trip?

**W.R:** Once a week. It gave them a taste of industrial arts, and home economics.

**R.H:** Where did you go from Douglas School?

**W.R:** I went from there to Rose Seaton School. I was there only five years at Rose Seaton School. Mr. Sexsmith retired as principal and I took over as principal when he retired.

**R.H:** Who took your place at Douglas School?

**W.R:** Harold Jackson. Harold became principal and he was my vice principal. Now, latterly, I did get a vice principal for the last three or four years I was there, and Harold was my vice principal at that time. When Miss Dunn, who was the principal of Mather School, when she retired, Harold became principal of Mather School. I had him for about four or five years as vice principal.

**R.H:** Did having a vice principal help quite a bit?

**W.R:** Well, a little bit. At that time, the only time you could get into your classrooms and see what your teachers were doing was when the youngsters were away for home economics and industrial arts. I would have a half day then to get into the classrooms to see what the teachers were doing. That was a big break then, a whole half day.

**R.H:** What about summer vacations, were they always at the same time then?

**W.R:** Oh yes, it's always been the same as it is now. We finished about the end of June and went back after labour day.

**R.H:** Did you have to take courses in the summer?

**W.R:** Oh yeah, we sure did. I took a number of them. You were expected to do that. I took courses on guidance and all the different things that you could... Health education was another one that we took courses on, and special education, that is dealing with the gifted pupils, and watching the marks they'd get.

**R.H:** Was there a school nurse on the staff?

**W.R:** Oh yes, we always had a school nurse. Now, of course the school nurse was also hired by the School Board at that time. We always had one, and they would come into the... Of course they served the whole town then, that is all the schools and even the high school. We'd get them possibly a half day a week. If we had any cases that we felt the nurse should see, we would send them up to the nurse's room. So they did a good job. The first nurse that we had was Marg Philips. Marg was our first health nurse at our school.

She was there for a long time, that school nurse.

**R.H:** When you first started as a teacher, what about benefits such as medical, dental, did you have any of this?

**W.R:** Nothing, absolutely nothing.

**R.H:** What about paid vacations?

**W.R:** No, there were no paid vacations. Your salary ended the end of June, and you got nothing for July and August, so you had to save up for those, or you had to find another job somewhere.

**R.H:** So there was actually no benefits at all?

**W.R:** No benefits at all, no.

**R.H:** So, if you got laid off at all, then you had nothing to fall back on?

**W.R:** Nothing, absolutely nothing, so you'd better be a good teacher, if you weren't, you were out of luck.

**R.H:** Wasn't it hard to get teachers at that time too?

**W.R:** Oh yes, you see, when I went into the teaching profession, I went to teachers college in 1934, '35, it's a long ways back, and at that time, you had to supply everything yourself as far as that was concerned, and there was no benefits whatsoever. You had to take out your own hospitalization, usually it was Blue Cross that we had. Today you are pretty well looked after, but not in those days.

**R.H:** Was there a pension at all?

**W.R:** Oh yes, there was always a pension, there's always been. The way it works in the pension system in the schools, it's based on the number 90. That is your years of teaching plus your age, and when that becomes 90 then you can retire on what they call a May pension. That's a full pension. Fortunately for me, my time of teaching had to be at least 35 years by the way, I was able to retire at 58 years of age with full pension. I've been retired now for 12 years, and enjoying every minute of it. I liked kids, there was no problem there, it was the financial side of it. If you stayed on teaching after you got your number 90 total, well, you had full pension then, but if you stayed on teaching, you didn't get your pension, you just got your regular salary. It meant that you were teaching for just a pittance, 'cause you'd get your pension anyway, but not if you are still teaching. So, I retired at 58.

**R.H:** What about this thing called tenure they've got now?

**W.R:** Well, if you are... Do you mean as far as pension is concerned?



No, I think it's used for protecting teachers from layoffs after 10 years. Did you have a union when you first started?

**W.R.:** There wasn't when I first started, but after five or six years as principal of Douglas School they started the Mens Teahcers Federation. It was compulsory, but before that, you could join it but it was not necessary. It was a very poor system, but at that time when it was compulsory to join, it was a very good union. We call it the Mens Teachers Federation.

**R.H.:** When you say the Mens Teachers Federation, was that just for the men?

**W.R.:** That's right.

**R.H.:** So, that was just for men?

**W.R.:** It was just the men, but there was also a Womens Teachers Federation. There were the two federations and even to this day the women do not want the men.

**R.H.:** Oh, you didn't amalgamate then?

**W.R.:** No. There is still a Womens Teachers Federation and the Mens Teachers Federation. There is also what they call the Ontario Teachers Federation and that of course brings the two of them together. We still have a Mens Teachers Federation and a Womens Teachers Federation. We've tried to join with them, but they want to be by themselves, at least that's the way it was, I don't know what it is like now. I've been out of it for 12 years so I don't know what they do now.

**R.H.:** Before the union, what was the average wage for a teacher just starting out?

**W.R.:** Well, it would be interesting... When I started teaching, I started in a little rural school just outside of Newmarket and in that little school, I taught everything from the beginners up to... I had two in grade nine and two in grade ten, and my salary to start with was \$550 a year. I never worked as hard in my life, but you were lucky to get a school in those days, don't forget that was the Depression days. If you happened to know somebody, you could get a school. The funniest part in going to Teachers College, Mount Albert, where I lived, was about 40 miles from Toronto, so I thumbed my way home from Toronto, and one time just before Teachers College was let out, I was thumbing my way, and a car stopped for me and it happened to be the chairman of the School Board. He says, "We

need a teacher for this year and if you are available, we would like to interview you". I got that school for \$550, and the second year, I got a raise of \$50. So, my salary went up to \$600 whereas today, teachers wouldn't even consider taking a job or principal for less than \$35,000, \$40,000 a year.

**R.H:** So, that's what you got?

**W.R:** I didn't get that. I retired...

**R.H:** No, I'm talking about today...

**W.R:** Today! oh yes.

**R.H:** Yes, I'm talking about today, whereas you got \$550 a year to start, right?

**W.R:** Yes, and I was there about four years and then at the end of that time, I got a school in Blind River, which is between Sudbury and Saulte St. Marie and when I was hired there I got \$750 a year. I was there two years and then I came to Fort Erie and as teacher at the school there, I got \$1,000 to start with. When I became principal, I got \$2,000. I had the whole responsibility of a 400 pupil school at \$2,000, which was the salary for the principal. So, you see, things have changed considerably. That would be in 1945, when I became principal.

**R.H:** If you worked at some other profession, you would get more money, right?

**W.R:** Well, to make ends meet, latterly on, after I became principal, I went on the immigration for about 20 years in the summer.

**R.H:** This was just in the summertime?

**W.R:** Just in the summertime only. I was an immigration inspector at the Peace Bridge. Well, when salaries got better, of course then, I gave that up.

**R.H:** Were you tempted to stay with the immigration?

**W.R:** Oh, I've had the opportunities but I like the teaching you see. Yes, I had a chance to go to Ottawa as a... to the immigration department and turned it down.

**R.H:** So, this union was a good union?

**W.R:** Yes, it was good, there's no doubt about that. If you had grievances against your School Board or against teachers or anything, you reported it to the Teachers Federation. They also helped bring our salaries up by going to the School Board and having them change the salary

unless you worked in the summer you couldn't make ends meet.

After the federation came in, it was a different story.

**R.H:** Was that one of the things you fought for, was to get a wage for summer vacation?

**W.R:** Oh yes, we never did until, oh I forget... not too long after I became principal of Rose Seaton School, but they did then. Instead of getting ten cheques for ten months, they took your salary and divided it into 12 months. It was still the same salary, but you got 12 payments instead of ten. You only got paid once a month at that time.

**R.H:** Was Douglas School, I guess it wasn't air conditioned of course at that time, but what about heat, was it well heated?

**W.R:** Oh yes, we had good heat, we had no problem. It was steam heated, we had a steam boiler in the basement and it was always warm, no problem there. They later put in an oil furnace, but we started off with the old coal fire, with the stoker, and we had no problem as far as heat was concerned.

**R.H:** Did you have a janitor to take care of things?

**W.R:** Oh yes.

**R.H:** What about Rose Seaton School, was that a larger school?

**W.R:** Oh yes, each of the jobs that I got was a promotion. Douglas School was a ten room school. Rose Seaton, when I went down there was a 14 room school, so it was a promotion. When I went down there I did get a half day off a week to go around to the rooms and see the teachers. So, I felt I was pretty lucky.

**R.H:** Did you have a vice principal at Rose Seaton?

**W.R:** Oh yes, I finally got one, Charlie Davies. Charlie became my vice principal there and latterly he became principal of Garrison Road School. I was there five years.

**R.H:** Were the facilities better at Rose Seaton than Douglas School?

**W.R:** The facilities were about the same, there wasn't much difference. They were all nice pupils, the only thing down there was, that we had more of them. I liked Douglas School, Douglas School of course was my home school and my youngsters went there until we moved over on Queensbury, and then they went of course to Mather School. They were both good schools and the pupils were nice and the teachers were excellent.

**R.H:** Can you tell me anything about the Niagara South Board of Education, was it always there?

**W.R:** No, it wasn't. Actually the way it worked, when I was principal of Douglas School and Rose Seaton School, we had our own School Board here in Fort Erie. Each ward sent representatives, elected representatives to the school board, and it was called the Fort Erie Board of Education. Now latterly, until... a couple of years after I was in Rose Seaton School, we had then the Township Board of Education which included all of Bertie Township, and the board then was called the Bertie Board of Education. It included Fort Erie and all the area around, Ridgeway, Crystal Beach, and all those. They were all under the one area. Then finally, after I got into the senior school, there then was the large Niagara South Board of Education. I worked under three boards, the Fort Erie School Board, the Township School Board which included Fort Erie, and then the Niagara South Board of Education. They were all good boards but the only thing is, in the Fort Erie Board, it was more of a knit family because you knew your representative, whereas in the Niagara Board, they are from all over the Niagara area, you see. You never got to know any of the board members of course. Fortunately for us here, the chairman for a long time was Al Spear. I guess he is still on the board as far as I know, and of course he was good, he did a lot for the school board.

**R.H:** Were any of these members teachers at all?

**W.R:** No, there were no teachers on the board at all. The strange part, in the Niagara South Board, there are teachers who teach for the Niagara South Board who are members, who may live in Lincoln and are members of the Lincoln Board of Education, but they can't be a member of the Board of Education where they are teaching. They still can't.

**R.H:** Are these members always voted in?

**W.R:** Oh yes, they are always voted in. We have two representatives from Fort Erie, and two who represent us from all the different areas, and they were elected by the people of Fort Erie.

**R.H:** Is that a paying job, do you know?

**W.R:** It wasn't when I was there but I don't know whether it is now. I've been out of it 12 years, but maybe you get your expenses but I don't think they get anymore than that. I wouldn't want to say.

**R.H:** Would you rather see all teachers on the board?

- W.R:** Well, you know, that's conflict of interest if you have...
- R.H:** Yeah, but I don't mean that they... they wouldn't necessarily be where they are teaching, but wouldn't it be more appropriate and wouldn't they know more of the needs?
- W.R:** Oh yes, I agree with you, it would be nice if they did. Oh yes, it would be better as long as they lived in a different area. There's nothing wrong with that, in fact it would be good. How many people live in another area and teach in the Niagara South Board? It just doesn't happen, but usually your businessmen... But don't forget, the head of the Niagara South Board is a teacher and he's called the Director of Education. Mr. Mcleod was the director when I was there and he used to come around to the different areas and visit the schools, the principals, to see how things were going. There were also superintendents who also were teachers, so they were part of the Niagara South Board of Education themselves, whereas the board itself was made up of businessmen and women.
- R.H:** Did you ever have any strikes at all?
- W.R:** Never. Teachers in those days never even thought of strikes, that would be terrible. They are a little more militant today but not in those days. No, we never had that.
- R.H:** Now, you were the principal of Douglas School, then Rose Seaton, did any of these schools have any additions or alterations when you were there?
- W.R:** No, not when I was there. In 1965 the board, this is the local board, decided that they would like a senior school for all the grade sevens and eights in the whole town, to be taught something the same as the high school. You would have a math teacher, and a science teacher, and so on, so they decided then to build this new school at the corner of Wintemute and Central. Before it was built, I was appointed principal of it by the board. I had the opportunity of going around seeing all the senior schools in Toronto, Niagara Falls, and in St. Catharines and wherever they would be. For the last part, just before the school opened, I was given about six months off to plan my school. I was in on the planning of just exactly what the schools like today, whether we should have an auditorium, what it should look like, and a science room, and all these different things. I feel like it was almost my baby down there, that senior school.

I was appointed as I say, to take over in September of '65 and I was there for eight years 'til I retired. We used it something the same as the high school. We had a science teacher and you went from class to class to the different rooms for your different subjects. We had a music teacher, we had a special education teacher who looked after, mostly the youngsters who found it hard to learn.

**R.H:** Did you have a school band there?

**W.R:** Well yes, Ron Gorham, who now is in the high school was the special education teacher but he was also... he started a band there, well, it was an orchestra as we called it. So, we played for open houses and so on like that which was quite interesting, although we did have a music teacher too. We had them change quite often so they'd get a promotion and they'd go to Niagara Falls or some other area. We had a good set up and in fact our set up was so good as far as the Department of Education was concerned, that three years after I came there, they televised a day in our school over the C.B.C. That was a big honour, because they came in with their set up and taped a days work in the school. They made it into a program and it was broadcast over the C.B.C.

**R.H:** It was an educational program then?

**W.R:** No, at that time, it was the C.B.C and that was one of the highlights.

**R.H:** What year was that again?

**W.R:** Oh, that would be about 1969, I guess it was.

**R.H:** They went all around the classrooms?

**W.R:** Yes, they did, they went into all of them. Of course don't forget the program itself would be taken apart because they were there the whole day. In fact, they were there two days and they would come in and tape all these different things. They took what they wanted and made a program out of it for half an hour. It was quite interesting. That was either '69 or '70, I'm not too sure.

**R.H:** That school of course was much larger, how large was it?

**W.R:** Oh yes, that was about a 20 room school at that time.

**R.H:** What changes did you have in that school that you didn't have in the others? For instance, did you have a fire alarm system?

**W.R:** Oh yes, every school had a fire alarm system. This is interesting, because they had fire prevention week and the idea was, the firemen would come in these different schools and ring the fire alarm.

We'd time the length of time it took the youngsters to get out of the school. Oh yes, we had fire alarms in every school. The firemen came in once a year during fire prevention week, and you never knew when they were coming. They'd just sneak in and press the alarm, and you'd empty your school. You'd be surprised how fast you could empty those schools.

**R.H:** What did you add then, that wasn't in the other schools?

**W.R:** When we got into the senior school, we got our own tape-recording outfit, we had our own cameras for tape-recording and so on. We had all kinds of equipment for audio-visual education, much more than we ever had in any of the other schools. We had televisions for every room, and we took special programs from the air, taped them, and sent them over the school.

**R.H:** And of course you added a library, right?

**W.R:** Oh yes, we had a beautiful library and we had a librarian.

**R.H:** Who was the librarian, do you know?

**W.R:** Miss Ineson was there when I was there. Doug Ineson's daughter Gail, Gail Ineson. She was the first one. Then we had Mrs. Sherk, Mrs. Claudus Sherk this was, she now lives in Grimsby, I believe. She was the librarian, so we had some good librarians. They had a library period each week for each of the grades. Have you ever been in the library down there?

**R.H:** I've been in the school and I think it's a nice school.

**W.R:** Oh, it's a beautiful school but you see, it's no longer a senior school. Last year they decided to make it a... I guess it's one to eight now or something like that, which kind of spoiled it. I thought it was so much better because you had your grade seven and eights together and it prepared them for the high school. I didn't approve of that but of course I've got nothing to do with it now. It was too nice a school to turn back again. It had a beautiful auditorium and it had the tables that came down from the side, they ate lunch there you see. We only had a short lunch hour and in fact we had two of them, we had one from 12 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and from 12:30 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. because we had so many pupils. The tables all came back down from the walls with the benches and so on. The caretaker would have it all ready and of course we had milk machines so you could buy milk from the machine, for your lunch. Everyone

or every once in a while, we'd have the Home and School Association come in and put on a hot meal for the youngsters. It was an awful change from when it first started, just to compare the two. The back part of the school, the east part, are new wings that were put on after I got there.

**R.H:** I was going to ask you about additions...?

**W.R:** Yes, there was an addition put on there, two huge rooms. They were open concept rooms, they were big rooms where you could bring in half the school and get them in there. This is what you call team teaching, were you could bring two or three teachers in and have a whole group of youngsters in there and teach say... You could have two science teachers, or one that is interested in it, come in with another teacher... This is what we called team teaching. That went on then, but it doesn't today, I don't think, at least I don't know.

**R.H:** So you didn't do any teaching at that time?

**W.R:** I started off... The first two or three years I taught math and geography to all the grades. It became an overwhelming job, the amount of work I had to do, as far as principal of the school. Of course, at that time you went in to see the teachers work and so on, but before that, we used to have an inspector. An inspector would come in twice a year to these different schools and inspect the teachers and then report what he found to the school board. When I became principal of the senior school, I was head of my own school, and I had to do all the inspecting. I had to report any difficulties to the school board.

**R.H:** Was this inspector, was he a teacher?

**W.R:** Oh yes, he had to be a teacher. We started off with a man who was an excellent... A Mr. Wightman, who was the inspector of public schools in this area and Crystal Beach, and just this area around Fort Erie. He would come in and spend a week in each school, the big schools. He was good, because actually the principal couldn't get into the rooms to do much work and it was pretty well left to the inspector and his recommendations. The recommendation could be to fire a teacher, or give them a raise, or keep them on. They were a very important person in those days.

**R.H:** Do they have them anymore?



**W.R:** They don't have them anymore, we have superintendents. Now, the superintendent of the schools when I left was Bill Smith. He was a former principal of the high school and he was our superintendent. He actually took the place of the inspector though he didn't do any inspecting. He was there the length of time I was there, and of course he's retired now too.

**R.H:** Did you start getting teachers aides then?

**W.R:** No, actually in the senior school, we made it so that the teachers would have spares, where there were periods when they could do their work in the teachers room. So, there were no teachers aides as such, we gave the teachers spares, maybe two spares a day of a half hour each, where they could prepare their work or do anything they felt was necessary as far as the classroom was concerned. I believe now today there are teachers aides who come into the school for lunch hour supervision. When I was there the teachers had to supervise the lunch, they had no time off for that.

**R.H:** How were the pupils then?

**W.R:** I never had any trouble. Of course, I was rather a strict disciplinarian and in all my teaching career, I had absolutely no trouble with discipline. It was a little tougher when you got into the senior schools because you had all the grade sevens and eights coming in from all the Town and also at that time they were coming in from out in the Township. You had to be stricter than you would in the junior school, but I never had any trouble and of course if I got angry at them, you could hear me all through the whole school. Just by hollering at them, I could scare them into submission.

**R.H:** What about the strap, did you use that often?

**W.R:** The strap was only used on the rarest of occasions, when nothing else would work. It was used once in a while but not very often. Once in a while in the grade seven and eights you'd get a toughie that you really had to give it to, but not too often.

**R.H:** But don't they seem to have more discipline problems now?

**W.R:** Well, I think in the whole system, not just in Fort Erie. I wouldn't want to be teaching today to be honest with you. You see, when I was there in the seniors, you didn't have any trouble with drugs. Drugs and all that came in after I retired, but I don't know if they have any drug problems in Fort Erie.

**R.H:** Do you know anything about the Bertie Fair?

**W.R:** Bertie Fair? Oh yes.

**R.H:** Didn't the schools take part in the Bertie Fair?

**W.R:** Oh yes, they did. We gave the youngsters a half day off a year to go to the Bertie Fair. Now, the Bertie Fair was held up in the Racetrack, right where it is today. That was one of the highlights of the year and you could bring vegetables or whatever you wanted to be judged. Bertie Fair of course took in the whole Bertie Township, but we gave the youngsters... the school board did, a half day a year to go to the Bertie Fair.

**R.H:** Did they take anything from the school that they had worked on for...?

**W.R:** Oh yes, for instance those who got home economics down for the half day in the high school, took their knitting and some of it would be put on display.

**R.H:** What about science projects?

**W.R:** Oh yes, science projects. We had... Our teacher of science, Mr. Sauder was our science teacher and we would send science projects to the Science Fair in St. Catharines, and quite often we would win prizes on the projects. I believe we won two or three firsts. I think the Science Fair still goes on down at Brock, where all the schools can enter projects.

**R.H:** So, the Bertie Fair was quite a big thing then?

**W.R:** Oh yes, it was a big thing in those days. You see, I go back quite a ways.

**R.H:** Well, I wasn't sure when the Bertie Fair ended, do you know?

**W.R:** I don't know just when it... Well, it went into the Welland... The Bertie Fair no longer existed and then it went into the County and then they had the Welland County Fair. We used to get tickets to give to the youngsters for the Welland County Fair. For one or two years after it started, we did give them a half day but it was too difficult to get up to Welland.

**R.H:** Well, the Racetrack was so close, wasn't it?

**W.R:** It was on when I came. I don't know when the Bertie Fair started.

**R.H:** Oh course that was after the racing season was over that they had this?

**W.R:** Oh yes, it was in the fall, just about this time. I believe the Welland

County Fair starts tonight. Ours was about the same time, the Bertie Fair.

**R.H:** How was it when you were dealing with the school board, did you have a hard time getting funds from them at all?

**W.R:** It all depended on what you wanted. You had to put up quite an argument and usually I got what I wanted but not always though. The school boards I dealt with were excellent. I pretty well got what I wanted for my school. You had to fight for it as you do anything today.

**R.H:** Did you sometimes get a refusal?

**W.R:** Oh, sometimes they said no, sure, but most of the times they said yes if it was reasonable and anything I asked for was reasonable.

**R.H:** When did you retire?

**W.R:** 1973, and at that time the new principal was Bill Pasowiski. Bill was principal of Garrison Road School at that time. He was transferred from there to... as principal of the school.

**R.H:** Is he still there?

**W.R:** No, he was there for quite a few years but last year they decided to move the principals around so they wouldn't be stuck in one place. So, Bill was sent back to Garrison Road School, so he's principal of Garrison Road School now. My vice principal who...

**R.H:** Charlie Davies?

**W.R:** No, Charlie was principal at Rose Seaton. He's now principal of the school in Ridgeway. It used to be the old Bertie Senior Elementary School. He's principal there, but Mr. Sauder who was my vice principal is now vice principal of Garrison Road. So, they move them all around, I don't even know who the principal is down at that school now. The strange part is that all the schools that I have been principal of, have been ripped down. Douglas School is gone and then for a while before the senior school opened... The senior school was in Wintemute School. Of course, Wintemute School was ripped down. They weren't quite ready to open in September, so...

**R.H:** Oh, there was a school there before the new one?

**W.R:** Oh yes, Wintemute Street School. It was right on Wintemute Street right next... Well, part of the school, the senior school is on the grounds where the old Wintemute School was. So, we moved into the Wintemute School, say for a month 'til we were able to get

into the Senior Elementary. When we moved into the senior, they ripped that Wintemute School down.

**R.H:** Was that a large school?

**W.R:** Oh yes, that was an eight or ten room school.

**R.H:** And that was a senior school?

**W.R:** Oh no, that was just an ordinary public school. You see, the public schools in Fort Erie, when I started, were Mather, Douglas, Rose Seaton and this Wintemute School. There were just the four schools. Later on, General Vanier opened and they call it Torrance Street School now. We still have of course, the senior school now as a regular school. Rose Seaton is quite a large school and then we have General Vanier which is still going strong. So, we only have the three whereas, when I started, there was five schools. Wintemute was an old school, it was actually a continuation school where the kids went to continuation school. That would take you up to grade 12. Mr. Thompson was the principal at that time, and he became principal of the high school after this school closed as the continuation school. That became a public school then,, that is grades KP to eight. Harvey Priddle, when I came, was the principal of that school. Now, Harvey is no longer with us, unfortunately the summer Harvey retired, he died. He was a good teacher too.

**R.H:** So, all in all, how many years did you spend in the school system?

**W.R:** 39 years.

**R.H:** Would you do it over again?

**W.R:** I'd do it over again. I had a real variety. I started off with a one room school, I taught everything, then I went into this Blind River School which was a six room school where I taught grades four and five for two years. I then came to Douglas School from there so, I've had a good diversified type of educational background as far as teaching is concerned. It's all been worth it, I've enjoyed every bit of it.

**R.H:** Gettin away from schools can you tell me anything about the organizations that you belong to?

**W.R:** Well, I belong to... I started off here in Fort Erie, I joined the Kinsmen Club. I was a member of the Kinsmen Club up until I became 40 years old, and of course don't forget the Kinsmen Club is made up of young people. When you became 40, you dropped out of the

Kinsmen Club. It's a little different today, you have what they call a K40 now, where you're a Kinsmen after 40 but the actual Kinsmen Club runs up to 40 years of age. Before I came to Fort Erie, I belonged to the Oddfellows Lodge in Mount Albert. I transferred my membership then to Fort Erie Oddfellows. It was called Pinkerton Lodge at that time and it used to be held down where the legion is today. I was a past, a Past Noble Grand, which was as far up as you could go. My father was always a Mason and he suggested that I try to get into the Masons. It was a good organization, but I belonged to the Oddfellows and I figured that was enough. Then, when my father died, there was a Masonic funeral and the number of people that turned out was unbelievable. Of course, as a family member you sat in on their program that they had. Well, after that it so impressed me that I joined the Masons here in Fort Erie, Fort Erie Lodge. I went through all the chairs and became what they call a Worshipful Master of Fort Erie Lodge, of the Masons. After I became Worshipful Master, I decided I wanted to go on further, so I became a Scottish Rite Mason. They meet in Niagara Falls. I went up to what they call the 32nd degree Mason. That is in Niagara Falls but it takes in the whole area from Fort Erie right down to Beamsville. At the present time I am organist of the Lodge of Masons which you call the consistory. That's where you go to get your 32nd degree. For consistory, you have to go to Hamilton to get your 32nd degree but in Niagara Falls there are two lodges called the Lodge of Perfection, and Rose Croix.

**R.H:** That is French, Rose Croix, isn't it?

**W.R:** Yes, it's a French name but there isn't much French as far that's concerned. I am at the present time, organist of both the Lodge of Perfection and Rose Croix. I am also organist of our Fort Erie Lodge here. So, I keep myself very active as far as... If you don't after you retire, you don't last too long.

**R.H:** Why do they say Freemason or Mason, is there a difference?

**W.R:** Well, it goes away back to the time when the Masons joined a union so to speak. This goes back hundreds and hundreds of years ago and they formed what they called a union, I don't know what it was called in those days, but the Masons had a union. You had to be a mason, that is a stone mason to join. It all originates back there.

Freemasons, later on, meant that the organization would accept people who were not stone masons, so that's where you get the Freemason part. You don't have to be a mason to be a Mason. That's the origin of it but it goes away back to the time where the early Britains were conquered by the English, so it goes back that far. There was these... Well, you had to be an apprentice, then you went from an apprentice to the secondary type, then into a master. That's the way we call our degrees. There's the apprentice degree, the second degree, and your third degree is your masters degree. It goes away back to that time, and the only thing is, there isn't that much masonry in being a Mason and making anything.

**R.H:** Do they do a lot of charity work?

**W.R:** Oh yes. The Masons, they do everything very quietly. the Masons today, and the Shriners are responsible for all the burn centres in all the areas. All our money goes into that. They don't do any bragging about it. That's one of our big projects. Masonary is just not for Ontario or Canada, Masonary is spread over the whole world. There are French Masons, English Masons and there are even Masons in Saudia Arabia. To become a Mason, you have to believe in a supreme being. If you are a Hindu or... as long as you believe in a supreme being it doesn't matter what you believe in, Mohammed or what ever it may be, you can became a Mason. The stipulation is, you've got to believe in a supreme being.

**R.H:** Weren't some of the Royal Family Masons?

**W.R:** All of them. They are all Masons, King George, all of the Kings, were. You have to be at least 21 before you can join the Masons. They all belong, and they are Past Masters, a good many of them, of the lodges.

**R.H:** There are no women allowed, of course?

**W.R:** No, it's not a womens organization.

**R.H:** Is there another organization that's part of that for women?

**W.R:** No.

**R.H:** Some of them do have those and I wondered if your organization did.

**W.R:** Well, yes there is... The Eastern Star is the... but I don't know what goes on. You see, it's two separate... It's made up of the wives and relations of Masons. But the Masonic Lodge itself, really is

is just men. The strange part is men can belong to the Eastern Star.

**R.H:** Is that right?

**W.R:** Oh yes, a lot of them do.

**R.H:** Of course you are talking about men who are Masons, right?

**W.R:** Oh yes, they only accept Masons. It's really masonic to the extent that you have to be a Mason or a relative of a Mason to join the Eastern Star. There are different phases in the Eastern Star... I forget what they are... Oh, Ladies of Jerusalem, I think is the name, although I'm not sure. There are different phases of it, but it's all Eastern Star. The women in the Oddfellows are Rebecca's.

**R.H:** As you work your way up, are you given any regalia?

**W.R:** Yes, you have regalia. You have different ones for different degrees. Of course, don't forget there are two phases. You can go up to the 3rd degree as a regular, we call it a Blue Mason, that is a Blue Mason... Blue Lodge, it's called. If you want to go on you can be in either York Rite or Scottish Rite Mason.

**R.H:** What is the difference between Scottish Rite and York Rite?

**W.R:** I'm not a member of the York Rite so I can't tell you too much about it, but it's equivalent to it, and only the degrees are different.

**R.H:** Do you have a choice to be either a York or a Scottish Rite?

**W.R:** You can be both.

**R.H:** You can be both?

**W.R:** You can be both if you want. You can join the York Rite and the Scottish Rite, lots of our people do. York Rite is something the same, only different. There's really nothing Scottish about a Scottish Rite, it's just that you go on from the 3rd degree in both the York and Scottish. I mean, it just carries on with the degrees based on something the same as the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd degree.

**R.H:** Do you all wear a special ring?

**W.R:** Not necessarily. The ring I have there (points to the ring on his finger) is the Scottish Rite ring. That is Arabian for God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It's based on religion, though it's not a religion. I mean you still have to go to church, you can't say because I am a Mason, I am a religious person. You have to be a religious person to belong to the Masons.

**R.H:** I've heard that your organization has a secret handshake, is that right?

**W.R.:** Well, no, not to my knowledge. Well, there isn't as far as I'm concerned. There's really no secret to them because you can get a book out of your library down here that tells the whole story of Masonary. So, it's not a secret organization as such. To be able to get into a lodge, you have to know passwords and so on, but no secrets.

**R.H.:** Is it one of the biggest organizations?

**W.R.:** Oh yeah, it's all over the world.

**R.H.:** I guess the one on par with that would be the Knights of Columbus then?

**W.R.:** Yes, that right. It's interesting you know, the Knights of Columbus of course is a Catholic set up, and we quite often get together, the Masons and the... In fact they do, for the blood donors clinic and so on. You have both the Masons and the Knights working together on that. We have golf tournaments, we have banquets were the two get together. They are most cooperative, the two groups together. There is no animosity whatsoever.

**R.H.:** Have they had this lodge in Fort Erie for a long time?

**W.R.:** This lodge? There are two lodges in Fort Erie, two Masonic Lodges. The Fort Erie Lodge which originally was the South End Lodge and there's Palmer Lodge which was originally the North End Lodge. You can join Palmer Lodge or Fort Erie Lodge. They are both Masonic Lodges and they both carry on the same work.

**R.H.:** How often are the meetings held?

**W.R.:** We meet once a month, and they do the same and if there are extra degrees to put on, you can have what we call an emergant meeting. But actually, one regular meeting a month and that's all the way up to the 32nd degree.

**R.H.:** So, you said you very impressed with your father's funeral, why?

**W.R.:** That's one of the main reasons I joined the Masons. My father's funeral was a Masonic funeral and the way it was carried on by the Masons so impressed me, that I made my mind up that I'm going to try to get in to the Masonic Lodge. I was never sorry I joined because it is a beautiful organization.

**R.H.:** Is it because of the closeness of the members?

**W.R.:** Oh yes, it's a brotherhood really. I mean you go by the name brother so and so. It's a closely knit organization and the only way you can get into it, is to be nominated by a member of the lodge and



they vote on it to see... and if they find anything against you, morally particularly, you don't get in. That's the way it should be.

**R.H:** So, what would you say is the main purpose of it's existence?

**W.R:** They do all charity work, that is the main reason, one of the reasons it exists.

**R.H:** Gettin back to school, did they have a lot of school trips then?

**W.R:** They had school trips when I was there, yes. We had school trips that were just... Well, we'd take them down to the glen, the gorge in Niagara Falls. We had a school day where they brought their lunch and we went down. We also, when I was there, we took the youngsters to Toronto and they went on the subway, this was just after it opened, to see what the subway was like. We took them to the museum, there always was a trip to the The Royal Ontario Museum and there still is as far that goes. Today, the trips now, are to England. Some of them go to Ottawa, all over the place but ours were just local trips. Toronto would be the furthest, a one day trip. That was always the highlight, it wasn't all the kids, it was just the grade sevens and eights that went. You had to get up there before you went on a trip. Now, it's a different story today, even the younger kids go on trips, that is local trips.

**R.H:** Did you have to do then what they do now, like sell produce or have raffles to pay for these trips?

**W.R:** No, I would never have a raffle in my school.

**R.H:** And you didn't sell this produce, like crates of grapefruit, oranges...?

**W.R:** No. It was paid by the school board. Today it's not, kids sell chocolate bars and go bother... In my day, I wouldn't have that for the simple reason, why should they bother the people. You buy a chocolate bar that's maybe worth 50 cents and you pay two dollars or two dollars and a half for it, and it bothers the people. I don't like kids coming to my door selling stuff. I said "We won't have it in the schools", it's that simple. They could have a chance... they could save up... You know this is something interesting, when I first started down in Douglas School, speaking of saving money, we had what we'd call a banking hour. In that banking hour, well, it wasn't an hour, it was 10 or 15 minutes after school, we had actually, what we call a banking, the youngsters brought their money in and then we took the money and put it in the bank and they got interest on it.

So, every day, we would have what we would call a 15 minute banking hour, where the kids would bring in their pennies or their nickels whatever, and we would give them a receipt or bank book. They had a bank book and they would have interest on the money, that they saved. That stopped after about three or four years but I thought that was dandy. It gave the kids a chance to save up their money for these trips or whatever they wanted. Some of them would have \$20 or \$25 by the time the end of the year came along, by putting in their pennies or their nickels, or whatever.

**R.H:** Who was in charge of taking this money to the bank?

**W.R:** The teacher was in charge and then you would have one person who would take the money down to the bank. The bank would have records for all the different kids. Each kid had a regular bank account but it was handled through the schools. You'd take anything, two pennies, three pennies, whatever they had, then at the end of the year, they could draw it out and get what they wanted.

**R.H:** Why was it stopped?

**W.R:** It became rather a nuisance. It wasn't stopped by the teachers, it was stopped by the bank, although I'm not sure. It was just too much of a nuisance but in those days it was quite a thing. That was the way they saved their money in those days.

**R.H:** Well, I'd like to thank you for the interview Mr. Robertson, it was really a super interview.

**W.R:** Well, I appreciate you coming and doing this, I hope it's of some value to you.