Q. Today is August 5th, 1977, and I am talking to Mr. Geoffrey Vantreight Jr. and we are talking about some of his early recollections of Gordon Head. His father was a pioneer here. Maybe we could start Mr. Vantreight by telling me about your dad and how he first got started in the fruit-growing business.

G.V. My dad or my grandfather?

Q. Well, let's start with your grandfather.

G.V. Well my grandfather first came out here in 188.. He left Ireland in 1882 and I understand he got here in 1884, after two years down in California, but you know about that don't you?

Q. Go ahead.

G.V. Well, I wasn't down there.

Q. Tell what you remember from the family storys.

G.V. He did some farming down there, for a year and a half. He was down and around outside of San Francisco, and anyway he didn't like it down there because of the dampness or the cold, or it wasn't cold enough or something, and he always had his eye on coming to Victoria. So he sold out the land he had there and made a few dollars, he didn't lose any anyways. He got up here with less than a thousand dollars and he still thought he was a rich, retired man with a fifty dollar a month pension.

Q. That was from the Irish government?

G.V. The Irish government for being a civil engineer and he got sent back to war building bridges there, span bridges, he designed some. They let him retire... how old would he have been then if he .... he died in 1896.

Q. He was born in 1854 so he would be about..

G.V. 1844 wasn't it?

Q. Would it have been 1844 that he was born?

G.V. I think so, you'd better double check that one.

Q. He'd have been 40 years old then when he first came to Gordon Head.

G.V. Yes, because I understood...you could be right there. Because he died in '96 and I understood he was a little over 50, either 51 or 52. What would that make him?

Q. That would make him 45 years old when he died.

G.V. In '96? Well you just double check that, you can do it at the grave yard there at St. Lukes. But a guy wouldn't retire at thirty, would he?

Q. You wouldn't think so.

G.V. He did retire, well, to get a pension. To get a pension he must have been around forty or so. How old did you say he was when he came out here?

Q. 1882 he came to American and 1884 he settled in Gordon Head.

G.V. Yes, 1884. Well in 1882 he left the Irish government and he was born in 1844 so he would be about thirty-eight. That's still pretty early retirement, isn't it? And he got a fifty dollar a month pension. I think he was more likely that age than twenty-eight. I was just talking, we had a letter from a person, I think I must have left it up at the house. Isn't it funny you should talk about this.. look at this.

Q. There it is there.

G.V. I got that letter yesterday.

Q. It says here that'your grandfather, John Vantreight, was the brother of my grandfather Robert Vantreight, who was born on the 20th of July, 1843 and died on the 24th of August, 1925. Do you have any information about their father George Vantreight. I would like to know the date of his birth and death and where he died. According to an article I read in your very fine Archives in Victoria, Vantreight ancestor went to Ireland from Holland in 1812. I would appreciate any information you can give me about the father and mother of Robert and anything further back. I have also wondered if there were any sisters or brothers to John and Robert.' And that is from Mrs. Harvey in Berkley, California. So your great uncle Robert, did he come out?

G.V. We never knew about him. He was in California. I guess that's the California bit then.

Q. Why they went to California.

G.V. Yes, I wonder if he was there first. That's a little research for you to do. No, that was Berkley, California. I've often heard about this Mrs. Harvey and she is actually the same generation that I am.

Q. Yes, she'd be the third generation too.

G.V. No, she would be like my fathers generation. She must be quite old. She said her father, Robert Vantreight.

Q. That would be your uncle.

G.V. Yes. She must be some age.

Q. So that must be one of your aunts.

G.V. Well, aunt removed. She talked to Robert out here and Robert told me about her.

Q. So, your mother and father came then from Ireland and moved to San Francisco and then...

G.V. No, my grandfather.

Q. Oh yes, I'm sorry, your grandparents. And then they moved up here. So when they moved up here to Gordon Head they were responsible for starting the Vantreight Farm at the end of Gordon Head Point. How many acres did they first have there?

G.V. They bought 125 acres. I know, for $375 because they kicked about the price. Do you want to go throught that again? When they came here it was actually the government they bought from. I imagine it was the government. They wanted $2.50 an acre then because it was on waterfront. Potentially some day they said people would be living out here and want a lot of property because of the beaches and waterfront property.
He kicked because the man in front of him was buying where the Hudson's Bay is today on Douglas Street there. There was a section of land near Government Street and it was all divided up into forty acre strips and this fellow was buying forty acres for eighty dollars right in front of him. But my grandfather kicked about the price for a day before he bought it because the man in front said 'Well there is a lot of rock'where the Hudson's Bay and the Curling Rink is today and Grandad was going to go pig farming there and he was going to have trouble, there wasn't too much arable land there. That's why it was two dollars an acre. Land further on Douglas Street was going for two and a half an acre too, where North Douglas and Princess now . That was better land and that was going for two and a half an acre too. But anyway they bought it and you know the land is just worth a fantastic amount of money. Of course, that was a lot of money in those days too.

Q. Even then the Gordon Head land was valued at a higher price than, say, some of the downtown land. It was recognized as arable land?

G.V. Yes it was all arable land. My ancestors, my Grandfather, he only cleared about twenty acres. My father did that too when he was a boy, because they just had down Vantrieght Point there where they built the house and everything.

Q. So, it was all heavily timbered at that point?

G.V. All heavily timbered.

Q. Was it Douglas Fir?

G.V. Douglas Fir, yes. And the other firs, Spruce and Arbutus were mixed with it, you know. Down there it was all very rocky. It was arable land but never has been as good as agriculture where the original Vantrieghts moved. But Dad moved up here in 1898 when he was eighteen. When he bought this land, Down there it was two and a half an acre and about twenty years later when Dad bought up here, about sixteen years later, it was ten dollars an acre and they thought that was pretty big inflation I guess.

Q. That was this twenty acre property?

G.V. This twenty acre property. Then Dad bought this twenty acres and then seven acres three or four years later up here. That was about 1900. 1898 or it might have been 1900. And about three or four years later he bought that seven acres

down there for fifteen dollars an acre, but part of it had been cleared. Amazing, only five or ten dollars extra for cleared land, but you wouldn't take one step up for a hundred dollars now. My Grandfather had quite a nice farm down there on the original piece and they did some farming, but more hobby farming until he died. My Grandfather's pension died with him in 1896 and so Dad then had to go to work at school. He only had three or four years at school. He had to make a living to support to support all his brothers and sisters and his mother. After that...

Q. How did he make a living at that point?

G.V. By cutting trees down and making them into cordwood and hauling a cord at a time with a team of horses down to James Bay people. It think it was three or four dollars a cord he got then.

Q. Did he sell direct? Was there a group that he sold to?

G.V. No he got orders from householders, you know. As he brought one load he'd get an order for another load. It was a long way to haul it but it was his timber and his brothers were trying to cut it up for him and he'd make a trip a day. He'd leave in the morning, cut the wood and load it in his wagon and drive into town with the team and deliver it and then he'd lay down in the wagon. He had a mattress in the back of the wagon and he'd go to sleep and he'd let the horses find their way back. Sometimes they'd find their way back to the farm and sometimes go off to another field in the early morning when it got light. That's the way they lived to make a living to buy food and after that...

Q. So that was pretty hard times then for your family?

G.V. Yes, apparently so. And after that they sold some land. Some of the Vantrieght land was sold to the Lieutenant Governor or the Lieutenant Governor's brother, I'm not sure.

Q. Which one was that?

G.V. Patterson. They sold about twenty acres or so at Vantreight Point down there to make enough money to look after my mother and bring up the rest of the family.

Q. Did the family continue to live at Vantreight Point then?

G.V. Yes they did, but after that Dad moved up here.After they sold. Dad bought a house down on Caledonia Avenue downtown. They moved downtown then, so the people could go to school. There were no highschools out here then for the sisters and brothers.

Q.

Q. Did they go to the Victoria High School?

G.V. Yes. My Auntie Evelyn and my Auntie Idy, she went into nursing at the Royal Jubilee around 1900. She graduated about 1900, I think. She trained to be a nurse and my other aunties trained to be school teachers and that. They were in town and Dad carried on farming out here and he went to town in the winter time before he was married and he lived with them in the winter time. Dad lived right on the farm here, actually his buildings were just burned down last winter. This barn up here and this other shed where he had his horses. They were just burnt down last year where he lived with his horses and that before he got married in 1914.

Q. Your grandfather did an awful lot of things for the Gordon Head Community. He helped establish the Gordon Head School.

G.V. That's right. With the Dean family.

Q. Can you tell me a bit about that?

G.V. Oh, I don't remember too much about it other than I heard he was one of the original school trustees. They negotiated with the Provincial Government to put a school on this property in the Municipal or Provincial Government's name so they could get the school teachers out here and have a school. Houlihans were here. They came in the same year as my parents did, in 1894, as I understand. And Watsons were here too, they lived over here and I remember all those people. Have you talked to Marjorie, Mrs. Watson?

Q. I'm going to visit her.

G.V. She was the generation before me. Let's see, I'm fifty-three and she must be seventy three or four, isn't she? She was a generation before me.

Q. She was one of the early school teachers at Gordon Head.

G.V. She taught me in school for five years. Grades 1 to 5. That's when Gordon Head School was a two-roomed school. I often think, lets see I was born in 1924 and I went to school in 1929, thirty-five, that's when only twenty-two pupils were going to Gordon Head School in two rooms. A lot of people had moved away because of tough times or something. That's when they were worried about it being made into a one-roomed school. Down to twenty-two, there were Vantreights, Lambricks and Grants. They were over half the population of that school, and Marjorie Goodwin was teaching then. She brought up that school. She'll tell you that herself, and left there in Grade eight and two years later she was back there as a teacher. From grade eight she went to one year in Normal School, I guess, or one year at High School, I don't know what it was, but she'll tell you the story. It was just a few years and she was back teaching at the same school.

Q. What kind of teacher was she?

G.V. She was a very good teacher. I liked her and she taught me for five years. It was grades one to four and then she got grade five in there somehow. And she taught

grade five that year too.

Q. Where was Gordon Head School at that time?

G.V. On the corner of Tyndall Avenue and now Grandview.

Q. But Grandview wasn't there at that time?

G.V. No, it wasn't. And it was about one hundred yards north of where we are today. That school was built in 1891 and I can remember that school still being there and there was another two-roomed school built after that, I don't know when it was built. But, when I went there in 1929 or '30, they were using the old original school for the woodshed and on wet days we used to play in there, the old school. It wasn't torn down until the forty's or fifty's. The forty's, I guess it was torn down.

Q Who donated the land then for the Gordon Head School?

G.V. That was Mr. Dean, he donated the land for that first school because he had a family here too.

Q. Do you remember what Mr. Dean's first name was?

G.V. I'm pretty sure it was John Dean. As I saw again, Ursula Jupp will have that, all those books will have that down pretty accurately, you know.

Q. There was some controversy then, when the school was moved. When Mr. Dean donated the land he had special terms and conditions, did he not?

G.V. Yes, that land was supposed to be given to the Municipality for ever. And I can remember Ursula Jupp talking to my Dad about it, and why was Saanich able to sell that land because John Dean had given it in good faith for community purposes And this was for ever. Of course, I don't know what happened, but the land was sold for housing in the Fifty's I guess.

Q. Who bought the land originally?

G.V. From who?

Q. From the Municipality.

G.V. The Municipality sold it to a builder. They subdivided off into four or five lots down there. You remember that being done. They sold it and got a terrific price for it. That's the critism, for Saanich doing that. It wasn't big enough for a park, it was a small piece and I guess Saanich did the right thing at the time, because there is other land that has been allotted to parks all around here. And that was the end of the old Gordon Head School site, When I was going to school there was twenty-two pupils going there, that was in 1932 or 1933. Those people came as far as .... Frank Hobbs School was built up out of that and Oakcrest School here, Torquay School, the Gordon Head School. I figured it out a while ago, there are about three thousand pupils in this same area now, where there was twenty-two when I was a kid. That's three or four hundred times more kids now.

Q. When your father was working out at Gordon Head Point then, clearing timber, when did he first start planting the fruit trees? Or berries?

G.V. What, down on the Point?

Q. Did he ever plant on the Point?

G.V. Oh yes, they had a good farm down there. My dad farmed down there, that would be ....oh Dad would be twelve or thirteen years old because when he was sixteen he was working full time as a man to support the family. That was in 1896. He worked two or three years down there and then they sold the property and he went on his own up here.

Q. How many acres did they have cleared?

G.V. Down there on the old farm? I rented that land ten years ago from Stan Moore, just for the fun of it. Well, he wanted it rented or to do something with it. I planted daffodils in there and I farmed that same piece. There's about eighteen acres there. I farmed that for about four or five years.

Q. So eighteen acres was what your father had cleared?

G.V. Yes, and I farmed it again. Well, my father and my grandfather. I was a kid then.

Q. Your grandfather, through his work as a Civil Engineer in his background there, helped to bring the Gordon Head Road up.

G.V. Yes, the Gordon Head Road came from the south way and Ferndale Road joined up with Cedar Hill Cross Road. He was a pretty community minded man and was one of the leaders. Of course there weren't many around here, you know. Well, there were Dunnetts, they all came after. Houlihans, Grants and Vantrieghts were some of the first.

Q. There's a story that Mr. Houlihan tells about his father when there was a great snow. I think it may have been around 1916 or earlier, the great snow. There was a noise that the Houlihans heard up to the north from your place. And his brother Patrick was there, this was James Houlihan's brother, and he walked over...

G.V. Patrick?

Q. Yes, or Mike?

G.V. He had a brother did he, I didn't know that.

Q. He walked over to your place, or your father's place, or was it your grandfather's place still at that time.

G.V. No, my father's place. That was this place here.

Q. And, that the family was out of wood and everybody was sick. Did you ever hear that story?

G.V. I think I did, yes. In 1916. Yes, I remember that, because Dad told that same story because Dad had to walk to town from ... 1916? Yes, that's when they were up in this house here and Houlihans were living in this bush here. They were

living in this bush here. And they walked to town, they said it was a bad night, that was the snow of 1916. Dad said he walked right across the fields and there was over six feet of snow here and they didn't even know where the fence lines were. They walked right over the fences. They saw the odd post I guess, when it had blown I guess. And he remember carrying twenty loaves of bread, it was twenty loaves for a dollar then. Dad carried out groceries here, the horses couldn't make it through the snow. And I know they said there were some sick people here, because they just couldn't get the food. Houlihan helped my family then did he?

Q. Apparently they were out of wood and Mr. Houlihan brought over some wood,for the family, because everyone was ill.

G.V. I remember they were always good friends even though they were alway competitors in farming and that. But they were always good friends, the Houlihans and Vantrieghts.

Q. There was a good community feeling here then.

G.V. Oh, yes. Oh I can remember being a kid up here, Well I can remember when we knew everybody in Gordon Head. If there was a new person come in they would all go to his place on a Friday or Saturday and all the women would help to set the house up. They would do the cooking and washing and help the people to set up. There was a real community spirit here. And now a days, you hardly know your next door neighbour. I can remember when they'd have a party about the second night at the new peoples place. They'd set them up and then they would have a party and a good sing song and this and that. Different parties than you have now a days. Of course, there was no such thing except the fathers would have a little drink before they went home or something. But it was all sing song or games, all good fun, you know.

Q. There was quite a temperance movement here, was there not?

G.V. I guess there was. You know, my dad had a bottle of liquor in the house for years just for medicinal purposes, you know. Actually talking about that, my wife was Jean Beckwith and her father, Harold Beckwith, and Miss Nellie McLung, who lived down here. You remember Nellie McLung? You've heard about her, the great writer? They started the temperance group in Victoria here. And he was Baptist, Mr. Beckwith was, and they started the temperance movement out here. I don't know what year that was, before I was born I think.

Q. Well, I think when Mr. Grant donated the land for the Mutual Improvement Society at the Gordon Head Hall, there was a proviso in there that never liquor should be served.

G.V. Is that right? I had forgot about that.

Q. That was in 1898.

G.V. Two years before the turn of the Century, I know that, it was directly across from where we are now. I can show you the exact site. Well there's a house right behind the corner of our barn there, right where that tree is. The first Gordon Head Mutual Improvement Society Hall was built right there.

Q. That was the first place, right on Tyndall Avenue?

G.V. Yes. And then it was moved down there.

Q. So, when did they move the Gordon Head Community Hall?

G.V. 1932 as far as I know.

Q. What was the purpose of moving it?

G.V. It had gone bankrupt and Mr. Lambrick had bought it, I understand, for the taxes owing on it, which was about two hundred and fifty dollars. The whole hall and two acres. There's a controversy...I can remember Renaldy moving it there for one hundred dollars they got from Colonel McMillan down there and twenty-five dollars from Skillings or Dad or somebody put up the rest of it. It was a community effort. Renaldy moved it for the one hundred and twenty-five dollars down on to Lambrick's property and eventually they used it as a community hall. He rented it out trying to make money out of it but he couldn't make anything out of it and so he eventually gave it back to the Gordon Head Community Improvement Society who was renting it from him at the time. Going back on the history of that there was Mr. Grant....there was a big controversy. Lambrick got the hall and two acres for two hundred and fifty dollars and he sold those two acres to somebody for two hundred and fifty dollars and of course everybody was mad about that because he got the hall for nothing and the community had moved it down there for nothing. He'd made a deal to give it to the Community Hall Association for a very reasonable price and so on. But anyway, he gave it back to them in the end. My Dad was on that committee too. Dad and Grants were trustees of that hall when it was built in 1898 up until 1952. I took over my Dad's trusteeship and Bee Williamson took over her Dad's trusteeship and Bee Williamson is still a trustee of the hall. Have you been able to get hold of her?

Q. No, I'll have to check her out.

G.V. She used to live right up by Gordon Head Hall you know. By Gordon Head Store. On San Juan. We had a lot of good times at Gordon Head Hall there, badminton and all that. Well it is still going strong, rented out for community projects and all the kids, scouts, girl guides and so on. Its still going strong.

Q. So your Grandfather helped to start St. Luke's Church in this area.

G.V. He was the original...I've seen the document down there at St. Luke's, where John Vantrieght guaranteed the stipend for the minister for fifty dollars a year. Plus he had a home and I don't know if he had any food etc. I guess he wasn't paying too much income tax on fifty dollars a year at any rate. That was the first on-

in 1884, that my grandfather guaranteed that with two other people.

Q. Do you remember who they were?

G.V. I think it was well known families, it could have been the Tolmie family. You could get those records from St. Luke's Church if you want to. It was an offshoot parish, St. Luke's Parish, from the Anglican Church in Victoria. This was the first country parish. We went to St. Luke's up until three years ago when St. Dunstan's Anglican Church was built, and it was an offshoot of St. Lukes. He helped start that. He laid the corner stone. He did the actual laying of the corner stone while some other official did the corner stone laying of the church. Around 1884, I don't know. And he was the first organist of the church, right up until the time he died he was organist and choir master of the church.

Q. The original Vantrieght home was built with wood from the Island.

G.V. The Chemanus Mill was then going strongly and supplying all of Victoria with lumber then and lumber for our original home in 1884 was brought down here on a sailing ship, from Chemanus to Gordon Head Point here. The boat was tied up,.. he got in close to that Bay down there and they built a scaffolding from the front of the ship up to the land and Chinese coolies carried the lumber up and put it right on the site where he was building the house.

Q. And who built the house?

G.V. My grandfather built it. My grandfather, of course he was an engineer, so I guess building a house wasn't too hard. But he built it himself, I know that, built the barns and everything around.

Q. So your father then, with his fruit, when did he get into the daffodil business?

G.V. 1912 or 1913. Apparently Mr. Edwards had just bought the farm next door here. And he brought out five or six sacks of bulbs and he was a little short of money or short of something. I don't know maybe they did some trading for a plough or something. There's a story about that. Maybe Mrs. Jupp will know something about that. And they passed two sacks of bulbs over the fence then when Mr. Edwards was planting and he said he was sure they would grow well here. Dad planted these two or three sacks of bulbs and he built it up to ..

Q. That was on this twenty acres?

G.V. Twenty-seven acres.

Q. Yes, by that time you had the twenty-seven acres.

G.V. He built it up to four or five acres and he gave me a couple of acres in 1940 or 1941 when help was hard to get. He wanted me to plough them under. And then he said I could have them. And that's when I started on my own, I was sixteen years old and I had a little venture of my own working with my dad and had my own project at the same time. I built my project up and when dad bought me that

sixty-five acre farm at Saanichton and there was about ten or fifteen acres cleared and I built that up to about a three hundred acre farm now. Cleared it up and bought it. I built up those two acres of bulbs and bought Dad's four or five acres after too. During the war years we built them up. Bulbs were hard to get then.

Q. Yes, and there was no shipping across from Holland.

G.V. No Holland bulbs and no Japanese bulbs coming in then. So it wasn't a bad business. We still grew an awful lot of fruit and vegetables during the war years. To get the rations of gas and tires and every thing we had to grow fruit. But I remember the head of gas...Mr. Cotrill, he was the controller of gas and rationed goods during the war. And he came out to this farm during his holidays and wanted to see it. We had applied to him to get tires and gasoline. And I was out of the Army too and we were still allowed to grow these bulbs.

Q. Mr. Vantreight, lets talk about the Fruit Growers Association and how that got started in the development of the fruit industry here in Gordon Head.

G.V. The fruit industry was a big industry, at least I can remember it being a big industry when I was a child. My Dad was the strawberry king here for many years on this farm here and later on I was the strawberry king with about forty acres of strawberries. I was farming out in Saanich in the fifties and sixties. But the strawberry industry is dead now because of the cheaper price of labour down in California, but we were supplying all the Prairies then with their fresh fruit and locally in Vancouver and Victoria. The strawberry was a big industry here. The first fruit grower association was the Gordon Head Fruit Grower's Association It was in the barn right behind this building here, not a hundred feet from this building here was the first Gordon Head Fruit Grower's Association's office and shipping center. My Dad started it in our barn.

Q. What year was that? Any idea?

G.V. I couldn't be sure. I've heard talk about it. I imagine it would be around 1910 or so. Could be '10 or '12. But some of these other ladies could maybe tell you. Ursula Jupp has a lot of these things at her finger tips. But that was the first. Then they built one right across from Gordon Head Store. They bought less than an acre of land there and had the regular Gordon Head Fruit Grower's Association down there. And it was going right up until about 1950 or so, and people were growing a fair amount of fruit in Gordon Head here still. Now there is no fruit grown in Gordon Head here, there's a certain amount grown out in Saanich. I grew a lot of fruit out there too but this labour is too high to make a living out of it now.

Q. What kind of labour did you use at that time?

G.V. There was a lot of white people working for you, but there was a lot of Chinese and in the last 15 or 20 years we have had a lot of East Indian people out here.

Of course there were a lot of Chinese around from the building of the CPR. They were out of work in the early 1900's and they were looking for work. So they were the main stable labour and they were good labourers too. They were trained for hard work.

Q. Did your father build the labour houses at the end of the property here?

G.V. Yes, I can remember all down the south border of this house there were small houses.

Q. That's along Kenmore?

G.V. No right along Tyndall Avenue, this side of Hillcrest here on the edge of property here. There were shacks for the Chinese men to live in and they very seldom had there wifes. The odd one would have his wife, but if they had wives out here they would leave them downtown. They lived and cooked in these houses here for about ten months of the year and they would go to town for a couple of months in the winter time. A few of them worked right around the year out here but in the summer time he had barnlike houses here, where they just had a place to cook outside under the trees and just laid down. There would be a lot of Chinese ladies out here then. Of course, they disappeared and the white kids started picking Friends of mine and my sisters would come out here after school to pick fruit. I can remember that. I went all through that. The fruit industry was a big industry. It's the climate here on the southern part of Vancouver Island that makes it an ideal place for fruit growing, but labour now is too high to compete against the United States.

Q. Being heavily timbered here with the Douglas Fir, would the acid in the soil make a difference to the berry growing?

G.V. I think it actually helped it. I think you'll find that some people say that the pine cones and that helped the acidity to grow good strawberries. But you can still grow good strawberries here now and its been some time since we had Firs. Of course now its chemical fertilizer and trace elements that compensate for it. When you cleared land the first crop you always put in was strawberries and you would have a bumper crop.

Q. Could you tell me about the battle with the strawberry weevil When it first came?

G.V. I can remember that, well it was actually before my time when it first started. The first experimental farm, the Federal Government Experimental Farm, was in the bottom seven acres of this farm here. That's where the first strawberry weevil was found heavily infested, in Dad's fields. And they took it over and rented it for an Experimental Farm here, to kill the strawberry weevil with the old tar... what do you call it? They had these boards here, the trough. Tar in the trough, tonque and groove and they kept the weevil from going into the fields. They darn near had to kill them by hand. Then they got this poison that they mixed with

apple pulp and they fed the weevil and killed them. That was the weevil bait right up until I grew strawberries. I grew strawberries for ten or fifteen years and used that same weevil bait and now they are using Hepaclor for fumigating the ground with fumigating machine to plough it under.

Q. Before you had this machinery though, how did you get weevil bait out?

G.V. You'd put it on by hand right in the crown of the plant. I remember doing that for about twenty years.

Q. Every plant?

G.V. Every plant, yes. That was a big battle. That nearly broke my Dad, until they worked and found a cure for it right down on this farm here. Strawberry weevil was found here and there was a lot of bad crops. I remember seeing pictures of the crops and I can remember when I got older when they were just overcoming it. They were very thankful to get a cure and kill them. But it's still hard because some of these insectacides and drugs they are using to kill it are harmful to human beings and they won't let them inject some of them now. They are having trouble finding something to replace Hepaclor.

Q. You don't want to go back to the tar and tongue and groove though?

G.V. That would be impossible. It's just not profitable to grow strawberries here now anyway. There are a few people growing a small amount and making a living out of it, but any volume now you'd lose money on. It's pick your own business now, and get away from the labour in picking them, it makes it a profitable business. That will be overdone in a few years.

Q. How did you get into the flower business? The bulb business? Was that your responsibility then or did your father start it?

G.V. Yes, I built that up. My dad was doing very little of that before I took an active part. He didn't like doing correspondence and writing for orders, doing any bookkeeping. Of course, he didn't have the education to do that correspondence and I built it up as I took an interest in writing to people seeing if I could get any orders for Easter, flowers and all that. I had my own flowers during the War. Then I started the greenhouses here, I started forcing in the greenhouses. I started my first flowers by taking them to town on the bus. I'd pick them before I went to school in the morning. I'd force them in the greenhouses between Dad's tomatoes and I'd pick them in the morning, put them in water and get a box and get the quarter to four bus into town after school and sell them and come back and do my chores after supper at night. That's when I first started selling flowers, and now of course I sold twelve or fourteen million in this last year. Quite a difference, we have trainloads and truckloads going out now.

Q. And a boxfull on the bus.

G.V. Yes, that's right. My personal line on the bus.

Q. Did your family keep many animals?

G.V. Dad was always a lover of animals and horses and he always had a cow, pigs, chickens. I was brought up with animals. Of course that was the way a farm was organized in those days, you had your own chickens and pigs, bacon and cows and beef and ducks and turkeys and everything. You grew them all here. I grew up with them. Dad was never commercially in that line of business. He was a fruit farmer and bulbs. That was his line, he wasn't a dairyman or cattle man.

Q. So, the Fruit Growers Association then. Where did the fruit growers sell their goods?

G.V. I can remember in the '50's putting strawberries in the first railway car, refrigerated railway car of berries for the Praires and I can remember putting them in the 76th railway car and that was in the late '50's. The big crop of strawberries and loganberries, the market was the Prairies. And of course, the canneries. We had a Gordon Head cannery down here actually, Dad bought it after and we sold it a few years ago. There was a cannery out at Sidney that we sold to and we sold to Vancouver, we shipped them over on the boat every night to be canned. Twining started this Gordon Head cannery.

Q. Did you do that from Victoria harbour?

G.V. Yes, Victoria harbour.

Q. How did you get the fruit down there?

G.V. In the old truck. My old truck would go down there every night, there in the '30's We'd put them on at ten o'clock at night. Be up at six o'clock in the morning again and thought nothing of it. Of course, the winery took a lot of the loganberries then. That was the main market for loganberries in the '30's and '40's. The Winery. But all that has disappeared now. Cheaper labour in other countries.

Q. So there isn't much of market in Canada anymore?

G.V. Oh, the market is still here, people still buy strawberries and loganberries, but a lot of them buy them in canned goods and they can them in Mexico, you know. They are cheaper there than California. That's where the fruit comes from now. There is a certain amount in the Fraser Valley, but mostly from the States where the labour is cheaper.

Q. I guess we are coming to the end of our session today, is there any other story that you would like to relate at this point or things that you remember?

G.V. Oh, there are so many things, like I pioneered farming out in Saanich and my Dad pioneered farming here and my grandad pioneered farming down over there. I've actually owned and cleared around three hundred acres of land in Saanich. I've

done it all with bulldozers. I still have a bulldozer clearing land and fencelines out this week. My son was. Clearing some of these fields, making them bigger and leveling them off. It's a pioneer game and it's been very interesting going back the years you and I have been talking about, how they used to clear land then. If they cleared one acre of land in a year that was really going something, well now with a bulldozer to clear a couple of acres it takes a couple of days. Of course there is still a lot of hand labour picking them up, the roots and rocks, but we have machines for that too.

Q. Better days now, Mr. Vantrieght?

G.V. Oh, I don't know. Of course my sons are taking on now, another generation, Ian, Michael and my daughter Gail in the office down there. They are doing a lot of the work now. I'm taking it a little easier. I enjoy it though and Jean is kind of enjoying it now too. I don't have to work so hard. I'm always down here in the morning when they start to help them but I used to do all that myself and it was interesting. I liked it then and I like it now.

Q. Well, thank you very much Mr. Vantreight.

From an interview with Geoffrey
Vantreight II by Sharon Manson
on August 5th, 1977