

The following transcript of  
William “Bill” Edgar’s interview  
on

*Memories and Music*

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: Bill Edgar, 1906-	TAPE NO: 154
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THEME: - teaching in a one-room school - being elementary school principal in Sudbury.  
 - politics in Sudbury, latter 1950s & 1960s.  
 - projects while mayor 1961/62 - Brady St. underpass tunnel.

G.P. Hello I'm Gary Peck your host on Memories & Music, presented Sunday at one p.m. by Inco Metals Company. This week my guest will be Bill Edgar and we'll be talking about his career in politics. Bill Edgar was the mayor of Sudbury from 1960 to 1962, in addition he was on the board of control and also an alderman. Join Bill Edgar and myself Sunday at one o'clock when Inco Metals presents Memories & Music on stereo ninety-two point seven CIGM-FM . . .

G.P. Welcome to Memories & Music. Today our guest is Bill Edgar and we'll be talking about politics in the community of Sudbury during the latter part of the 1950s and the 1960s. Bill Edgar was mayor of Sudbury from 1960 to 1962. However before we begin our interview with Mr. Edgar we'll turn our program over to Doug McLaughlin our music host . . .

(MUSIC)

G.P. Welcome to the interview portion of Memories & Music. Our guest today is Bill Edgar and Mr. Edgar welcome to the program . . .

B.E. Thank-you.

G.P. Mr. Edgar you, as I indicated at the onset you were mayor of Sudbury from 1960 to 1962, but before we start talking about that, that interesting aspect of your career, could you share with us some of your youth, in terms of where you were born, education, activities etc.?

B.E. Well Gary I was born at Allison on a farm, my parents were farmers; and I went to a little red school house, like so

many other people; and after I got my entrance I went to Allison High-school; and then when I finished High-school I didn't know what I was going to do. I had no intentions of going to university. So I decided that I would go to Teachers College. Seemed to be the only choice. Either I go to the Teachers College or Normal School as we called it then or stay on the farm. The farming looked bleak.

G.P. There's quite a choice there. Isn't there?

B.E. There's quite a choice. So I went to Teachers College and when I finished that I got a job teaching and teachers were very very plentiful. It was something like it is today. More teachers than jobs. But I got a job teaching at a rural school, --the same school as I started to.

G.P. The one that you started attending. A one-room school?

B.E. A one-room school where I first went to when I was in grade one.

G.P. What grades would be in that school? One to eight as we would know them today?

B.E. Exactly one to eight, and about forty students.

G.P. Forty some students for the wide range of . . .

B.E. We had eight classes and yet it was fun. I don't think I can remember a year that I enjoyed as much--or I should say two years because I was two years there--as I did those two years.

G.P. Now where did you go to Normal School or Teachers College.

B.E. I went to North Bay.

G.P. To North Bay. Where were the other ones located in the province? There were others I believe probably at that time.

B.E. Oh, Stratford, Toronto . . .

G.P. London . . .

B.E. London, Ottawa . . .

G.P. So you did have a choice and North Bay was the one you decided to go too.

B.E. Yes, because they gave you a dollar a day and we didn't have much money. They gave you a dollar a day for going to North Bay . . .

G.P. That was to attract people there.

- B.E. That was, you had to either pay the money back or teach in northern Ontario. And that was silly because there were so many teachers begging jobs . . .
- G.P. Yes.
- B.E. They would have gone to the Klondike if they hadn't gotten anything. But I chose to teach in Southern Ontario and I paid the money back the first year.
- G.P. So that, that could be a fair amount of, a dollar a day did you say that was?
- B.E. A dollar a day. But a dollar a day then would board and feed you.
- G.P. Mmhh . . . yes. Now your, the one-room school house experience, would be the type of experience that would give you quite, quite an insight into education in itself. Wouldn't it? You had a number of different students as you said, with a wide variety of experiences and potentials I suppose.
- B.E. Yes, that's very true, and they seem to be much more manageable fifty years ago than they are today. But I suppose if you're back at it now, or if I were back at it now, I would enjoy it.
- G.P. Yes.
- B.E. Same as I did then.
- G.P. I would, I would expect that would be the, would be the case. Now in terms of a one-room school-house and I attended one-room school-houses and it wasn't all that many years ago. But what other jobs would you have as a teacher? Were you, were you responsible for, well in some cases bringing water to the school? I know that that has happened in some rural areas, where, where the well might be condemned. You probably had a wide range of jobs, getting the fire going in the morning?
- B.E. No.
- G.P. No?
- B.E. We lived in a more prosperous area than that. For instance T.P. Loblaw, just built a big home quite close by, and it was close by that Dr. Banting was born and raised. So that we were in a prosperous community; and we had somebody light the fire; and we had a pump there; and it was, it was really fun.
- G.P. How did you keep forty some students, from eight different grades, interested in one room? How did you keep them working?

- B.E. Well it's just a hard thing to answer. You tried every scheme you could think of, and most of the time you would have the grade fours listening while you taught grade sevens.
- G.P. Right. By the time they made it to grade seven they had heard that course a few times.
- B.E. Yes that's true.
- G.P. You'd have some of the senior students. Would you have them helping you with a junior class at all, in terms of reading etc.?
- B.E. Yes I did.
- G.P. So you really had to be versatile, I, I would expect as a teacher then.
- B.E. Well, we had a lot of activities like concerts . . .
- G.P. Yes.
- B.E. And ball teams, that travelled from school to school, and well when you're twenty-one it's not difficult to think of schemes.
- G.P. No. No it wouldn't be. Now from the one-room school house what was your next step in education?
- B.E. In as principal of the Allison Public Shool, which was a five room school, which . . . .
- G.P. It's quite a change . . . .
- B.E. To me seemed like a very big challenge. It actually, it wasn't but I thought it would be.
- G.P. How many people did you have working for you then?
- B.E. I had five teachers.
- G.P. Five teachers.
- B.E. No, five teachers including myself.
- G.P. Including yourself. What year did you start at the one-room school?
- B.E. 1927.
- G.P. And what was your salary then?
- B.E. A thousand dollars.

G.P. A thousand dollars.

B.E. Big in terms of 1927.

G.P. Yes it would be. Now you were in Allison for what period of time?

B.E. I was in Allison for a year and a half. I came to Sudbury actually at Christmas, 1931.

G.P. Came there from, came here from Allison?

B.E. Right.

G.P. What prompted you to move to Sudbury during the Depression? Was the Depression a factor?

B.E. No actually it really wasn't a factor.

G.P. In terms of your moving.

B.E. No, I just thought that it's a move up the hill with new experiences . . .

G.P. A different challenge . . .

B.E. A different challenge. And I enjoyed every day that I taught school in Sudbury. I can't remember of ever going home at night but I thought to myself: "Gee I've done a good days work today," but never discouraged and hated to go back.

G.P. No. When you came to Sudbury is, was it as a principal?

B.E. Yes, as a principal.

G.P. Of what school?

B.E. Lansdowne.

G.P. Lansdowne. And what would you be earning then in 1931?

B.E. Eighteen hundred dollars.

G.P. Eighteen hundred dollars. So that's, that's a fair jump from 1927 to '31 I suppose.

B.E. Oh yes, it certainly was, it was up five hundred dollars and that was a lot of money then.

G.P. Right. Well Mr. Edgar if we could just try and gain an overview of your involvement in education. You were principal of Lansdowne I assume for a number of years in Sudbury, and your other involvements in education. Did you remain at Lansdowne

for example, throughout your career?

B.E. I remained at Lansdowne from '31 until '53.

G.P. Till '53.

B.E. With the exception of four years I spent with the R.C.A.F.

G.P. Right. Then after '53?

B.E. I went as principal to Prince Charles school, up on Van Horne Street.

G.P. Right. And were you principal of any other schools after that?

B.E. I left Prince Charles when I became mayor and two years later I went as Principal of College Street school. For one year.

G.P. Right. Was that the last school you were principal of?

B.E. That's the last school I was principal of. But I became the co-ordinator for the Manpower and succeeded the late Colonel David Younger. You may have heard the story . . .

G.P. Most definitely. So you were co-ordinator of Manpower and remained in that position until.

B.E. Until . . .

G.P. Until your retirement?

B.E. No.

G.P. No?

B.E. I remained in that position until I think it was '67. And then I retired and the Cambrian College took over the manpo--, the whole manpower program, which before that had been actually under the high-school board, and I was the co-ordinator. But I asked to take my resignation and do the work on the Manitoulin Island of Manpower, which I did for seven years; and then I retired.

G.P. And then you retired . . .

B.E. Entirely.

G.P. From education. An interesting comment you made earlier when you look back on education and your involvement, you have no regrets.

B.E. None whatsoever. I can't think of anything that I would have changed if I had to do it over again.

G.P. It's a great feeling isn't it?

B.E. Yeah, it is a good feeling.

G.P. On that optimistic and positive note we'll, we'll end this section of our interview, turn the program over to Doug McLaughlin. When we return we'll, we'll talk about politics in Sudbury.

(MUSIC)

G.P. Welcome back to the interview portion of Memories & Music. Our guest today is Bill Edgar the mayor of the city of Sudbury from 1960 to 1962. Mr. Edgar prior to your becoming involved in politics--I think it was in 1955 when, you, when you first sat on council--I think you were involved with some community groups, community organizations.

B.E. Yes, for the four or five years previous to getting into politics, I had been the executive director of what is now called the United Appeal. In those days it was called the Red Feather Campaign, where all the charitable organizations, went out on one single drive; and that seemed to not answer the financial needs of all these different organizations and it folded up, about 1956; and that's when in 1955, I decided I was going to run for municipal office.

G.P. Right. You also had an association with Falcona.

B.E. Yes, after the war, Gerv Waddell and I ran the Falcona, boys and girls camp; and this was a camp run--and it's still run by the Falconbridge Nickel Company--and there were roughly about fifty boys and fifty girls. One for the month of July and one group for the month of August, and I did that for three, four years.

G.P. Forty-one to forty-five in that period of time.

B.E. No, not in forty-one . . .

G.P. No, no, that's right. You were in the air-force then so it would be after that.

B.E. Yeah, forty-five to fifty.

G.P. You were in the air-force was it from '41 to '45, Royal Canadian Air-Force?

B.E. Yes.

G.P. I would think that your involvement with Falcona and with Red Feather would certainly bring you in contact with many many people that would help you out in terms of politics.



- B.E. Oh, it certainly did, I mean the fact that you, I was tied up at the Red Feather brought me in contact with hundreds of people.
- G.P. You represented Ryan Ward in '55?
- B.E. That's right.
- G.P. Could you describe that area today. I know we now use a numbering system for the wards.
- B.E. Well . . .
- G.P. Northern part of the . . .
- B.E. It's the northern part of the city and includes Little Britain, the Donovan . . .
- G.P. Northern Hights . . .
- B.E. Northern Hights. Of course Northern Hights wasn't in existence then.
- G.P. No, but that general area . . .
- B.E. That general area . . .
- G.P. So certainly our listening audience would, would have an idea where Ryan Ward was if indeed, if they're recent to this community, 1955 you ran for council. What prompted you to run in '55? . . . Now, you were a principal had you had an interest in politics, becoming involved?
- B.E. Oh, I think Gary, I, I probably ran through curiosity and a challenge.
- G.P. Sure. There was a, you were alluding too earlier, a change in the Municipal Act which made it available, the opportunity rather for you to run, being a teacher.
- B.E. Yes, prior to '55, teachers were not allowed by the Municipal Act to sit on City Council and that was changed; and once that was changed, I then decided I'd take a chance on it and . . .
- G.P. Give it a shot . . .
- B.E. Give it a shot . . .
- G.P. You may have been the first teacher on City Council. I don't know if others were elected that year but you'd of been the first if, or one of the first anyhow.
- B.E. I think maybe I was the first teacher to be on City Council.

- G.P. Now you were on the Board of Control for a couple of years, I believe . . .
- B.E. Right.
- G.P. Is that correct? And Deputy Mayor; and then ran for Mayor in what the fall of '59 for the term of 1960, '61.
- B.E. That's correct.
- G.P. Your first Mayor was? The Mayor you served under when you were on council in '55?
- B.E. That was a Mr. Justice Landreville.
- G.P. Leo Landreville. And then you served under Joe Fabbro?
- B.E. Yes, I was deputy mayor to Joe.
- G.P. You were deputy mayor to Joe. Joe, was Joe appointed after Fabbro (he meant to say "Landreville") became a judge? Was that the way that worked?
- B.E. No, we had prior to Mr. Landreville leaving, we had passed the motion in council that whoever headed Board of Control automatically became Deputy Mayor. Joe had headed the Board of Control prior, at the previous election . . .
- G.P. Yes.
- B.E. And that moved him up to Mayor and I followed him. I moved up to Deputy Mayor . . .
- G.P. To Deputy Mayor. Now you ran in '59, and what motivated you, to go, to go for the Mayors position? . . . It's not an easy question.
- B.E. What motivates anybody?
- G.P. Yeah, it's not an easy question is it?
- B.E. No, it isn't. You don't know. I don't even know why I decided to run.
- G.P. Did you . . .
- B.E. I know that my wife when I told her I was thinking of running, she said: "Once, and once only!" So she wasn't too anxious. So that, plus the fact that I had to get back to maintain my pension position at the school board, I didn't run for mayor the second time.

- G.P. No. When you ran in 1959 you had an opponent, a very formidable opponent. Joe Fabbro.
- B.E. Yes, and a very likable opponent. I can truthfully say that neither one of us ever criticized each other or said unkind things about each other. And I always liked him and I think he did for this city a remarkable job, in the years that followed.
- G.P. What your saying is that both of you ran a, a clean campaign as we know the term . . .
- B.E. It was an exception you see.
- G.P. Well I think, that's, that says something for the, for the system in the process when two, when an opponent is able to say that about another opponent, that indeed you know, there is that respect and admiration there, respect. Did, did you know that Joe would be running? That Joe Fabbro would be running? Or were you just doing (unintelligible).
- B.E. No I thought he wasn't going to run. He had indicated that he wasn't going to run but I guess he had a lot of pressure put on him and he decided he would run.
- G.P. So that, so there was, there was going to be a contest in that year.
- B.E. That's true.
- G.P. And you knew you were in a contest I'm sure.
- B.E. Yes we sure did.
- G.P. What would it cost to run for mayor back in 1959?
- B.E. I don't. I never went out and campaigned for money, anywhere, at any time; and I got by with the minimum I think, I would think that no more than two thousand dollars.
- G.P. To run for mayor in 1959. That two thousand dollars would be spent on would you send out a flyer or a leaflet?
- B.E. I sent out flyers and I paid boys to have them delivered; and I phoned; and phoned . . .
- G.P. And phoned . . .
- B.E. And phoned; and there's a real knack in phoning--I think one phone call is worth a dozen pamphlets.
- G.P. That personal touch. Were you also on the radio?

- B.E. Yes, on the radio. My daughter who was only twelve at the time was learning to speak French and she was very good for a twelve year old, to speak French the way she did. I don't speak French but we asked many people how she did, who'd understood French and they said she did real well; and I think that that got me a lot of French votes.
- G.P. It's something to be bilingual when your in politics. Isn't it?
- B.E. Oh, there's no doubt about it. But it's not, it's not impossible to get by without the . . .
- G.P. No. Both my son and daughter are learning French and she's ten; and it's going to be quite an asset for them I'm sure. Just in everyday life. So you became mayor in for 1960, 1961 and who was on your council and who was on your Board of Control?
- B.E. Well the Board of Control consisted of four people: one was Bill Ellis one was Peter Guimond, Mrs. Grace Hartman and Bill Inch.
- G.P. Two future mayors there . . .
- B.E. Yes, that's true.
- G.P. Bill Ellis and Grace Hartman.
- B.E. That's right.
- G.P. And your council.
- B.E. We had six wards at that time. Fournier Ward, Hugh Guenette, and Alphy Thériault; and the Cormack Ward was Jack Hawkins; and Duke Jarret; north McKim was Gerry Barbeau, and Harris Moore; north McKim was Neil Burning and Steve Wilson; Ryan Ward was Bill Baby, and Gerv Waddell; West Neelon was Riel, René Riel rather and Luke Scott.
- G.P. So you had twelve councillors.
- B.E. Right.
- G.P. And four on the Board of Control?
- B.E. Right.
- G.P. Now what's the difference. What exactly is a Board of Control in comparison to a City Council.
- B.E. Well the Board of Control Gary, is somewhat resembled the Cabinet in the province, they are the financial body, that a, the watch-dog, who are supposed to look after the spending of money and

- the collecting of money; and almost everything goes to Board of Control before it goes to the whole council.
- G.P. Regarding money or all items. Just money.
- B.E. Regarding money.
- G.P. Right, any financial expenditures. So a fairly influential group, I would think.
- B.E. They were an exceptionally good Board of Control, I thought.
- G.P. You felt you had a very good Board of Control.
- B.E. I did.
- G.P. Did you have a Deputy Mayor?
- B.E. Yes, Bill Ellis.
- G.P. Bill Ellis was your Deputy Mayor.
- B.E. By virtue of the fact that he had gotten the most number of votes.
- G.P. Then he came in as Mayor the following year, wasn't it?
- B.E. Following two years.
- G.P. Yes, following your two years in office. Alright were going to take a break now and when we return I'd like to talk about some of the projects associated with your two years in office as mayor. First we'll turn the program back to Doug McLaughlin.

(MUSIC)

- G.P. Welcome back to the interview that we're having today with Bill Edgar, mayor of Sudbury from 1960 to 1962. Mr. Edgar during that two years in office, what were some of the major projects associated with Sudbury?
- B.E. I think there are two that stand out in my mind, and one is the Brady Street underpass. Prior to 1960 the cars had to cross the railroad tracks and this caused a hold-up for both trains and cars. So the idea had been brewing that we build a Brady Street underpass that would cut down through Minto Street and come up onto Riverside. This was a very controversial item. We had half the council in favour of it, half the council opposed to it. We had an awful lot of adverse criticism. People said it's gonna cost far more than we can afford, and yet we went ahead. I think it cost the city in the neighbourhood of a million and a half; and in about a year's time, that Brady Street underpass and the pedestrian underpass--from, for the walkway from Riverside down to Elgin--had all been completed;

and when you look at it now; and when I think of the time that was saved; and the gas that was saved, by that underpass, I'm sure that it paid for itself many many times. Of course now, twenty years later it's entirely different you've got the approaches at both ends, which probably should have been done long ago. But I think road-wise and street-wise we've got a pretty good city. Now the other thing . . .

G.P. Just before we, we leave that overpass. Was council as evenly divided half and half was it, it was that contentious an issue.

B.E. Yes, it was.

G.P. Over the financing of it I expect.

B.E. That's right. And we had to get approval by the Ontario Municipal Board . . .

G.P. For that . . .

B.E. Before we could go ahead with it . . .

G.P. You'd be experiencing pressure groups for and pressure groups against and lobbying . . .

B.E. Absolutely. And . . .

G.P. You look back upon that as one of your major battles and struggles.

B.E. I think that's one of the major battle struggles. Now the other one--and the credit for this must go to the late Duke Jarrett who was a member of council--he brought up the idea of a tunnel underneath the ground. About maybe a hundred feet down and about seven feet by six feet and that runs about five mile, from out by Lasalle way, right through to . . .

G.P. Kelly Lake?

B.E. Kelly Lake. And later on after that the treatment plant was built at Kelly Lake. I don't think half the people in Sudbury realise that that tunnel's there . . .

G.P. And being used.

B.E. And being used. And that I understand there's they're building a further tunnel.

G.P. What was the reaction when that suggestion was raised? Of a tunnel?

B.E. Just about the same as the underpass. Half the people thought it was wonderfull and half the people thought it was terrible; and some of the councilmen thought it was terrible and some

- really fought for it; and I know that I had a hard job, making up my mind whether to have ~~two~~ treatment plants: one out by Lasalle and the other at Kelly Lake or one. But we eventually went for the one treatment plant.
- G.P. You said it was difficult to make that decision--was money a factor?
- B.E. Money was always a factor.
- G.P. Always a factor in those situations. Ideally have two but too expensive at the time.
- B.E. Exactly.
- G.P. Now Duke Jarrett was on council--was he a geologist was he associated with one of the mining companies?
- B.E. Yes, he were, he was (unintelligible) engineer and worked for the Nickel Company.
- G.P. And hence he would have some idea as to the feasibility of that tunnel.
- B.E. Oh, he certainly did. He was the one that persuaded the . . .
- G.P. Non-believers.
- B.E. The non-believers.
- G.P. So he could talk as an expert in a sense, in terms of it occurring. This is a tunnel right through rock with no capping inside whatsoever.
- B.E. No capping whatsoever.
- G.P. No. Was it an exceptionally novel idea in terms of world developments? Or had this been tried elsewhere? Was that ever offered as a defence?
- B.E. I think it had been tried. Now I've forgotten where it was tried before. But certainly Duke knew a lot more about it than anybody else.
- G.P. I would imagine, I would think that the cartoonist at the time would be able to get some excellent mileage out of a project like that.
- B.E. I have cut out most of the cartoons and most of them look rather weird.
- G.P. They had an altogether different point of view as to what was going to happen. So when you look back on the period '60, '61, you, you see those as the two main projects while you were

mayor.

B.E. Yes I do. Besides I think we were very carefull with the money and the taxes; and New Sudbury and the part of McKim that we took in, had water where a group of people decided to put the water in; and pay for it themselves; and this was another thing that came up quite strongly. I maintain that once we got amalgamation you took the good with the bad, and everybody in the city should pay for these water areas, not just the people . . .

G.P. In those areas, yes.

B.E. In the area; and we did that; and I think that most people out there don't even realise how much money they saved . . .

G.P. By coming in . . .

B.E. By coming in.

G.P. Yes, so you fought for that principal?

B.E. Yes.

G.P. And that would not be an easy struggle either I shouldn't think.

B.E. No. It certainly wasn't, I didn't meet with the approval of our own top people. They thought that they built the area and they got the water let them pay for it. I maintain that we are all one now and we take the good with the bad.

G.P. Undeveloped with the developed.

B.E. Undeveloped with the developed.

G.P. That's a, I think that's an important principle, and I can anticipate the problems you would run into. It must have been quite a battle. We're going to have to turn the program back to Doug McLaughlin. When we come back in a few minutes we'll wrap the program up. First, first we'll hear some music.

(MUSIC)

G.P. Welcome back to our interview with Bill Edgar today. Bill we're, were just about ready to wrap up the program. One, one last question what was it really like to be a Mayor? Now you've, you've shared with us some insights in terms of projects, but what's it like to be Mayor of the city?

B.E. Well Gary, it was very interesting, very diversified, it was amazing the number of meetings you were called to go to, the number of times you had to represent people. I can remember one of the highlights that we even missed was the visit of



Governor General Vanier and Mrs. Vanier. They were two of the most remarkable people that I had ever met. Just as easy to talk to as any person. And I always appreciate the fact that my wife had to attend a lot of meetings, pour tea and she, I think at the time, enjoyed it. But nevertheless, I wasn't very anxious that she would do it for more than two years.

G.P. No. What what's your wife's name by the way?

B.E. Margery.

G.P. Margery. So a wife can be quite an asset in that kind of position as mayor, I should think so.

B.E. Oh absolutely.

G.P. It, it really would disrupt family home life I would expect.

B.E. I remember one week when we went to the Legion five nights in a row, to a turkey dinner. Every night from Monday night to Friday night. So I appreciate what she did and what family all did, and all my friends, and I'd just like to take this opportunity . . .

(END OF TAPE)