

# Eden assessor retiring after four decades on the job

By MARY MURRAY

He never went door to door to win re-election to his position, and admits to not ever putting up a campaign sign in the four decades running for office, yet he has outlasted supervisors, councilmen, and other elected officials in the Town of Eden.

But after 46 years on the job as an elected assessor, R. Ferris Randall says it's time to say goodbye.

He began his career as an assessor in 1955, when chairman Clyde Horton asked if he was interested in the office.

"I did have insurance background and I figured that it would fit in with knowing values of property," remembers Randall.

So, at age 28, with an annual salary of \$400, Randall embarked on his new career, working it part-time while running his insurance and real estate agency.

He says the job was much more informal when he first started.

"We just used the field book. We'd pack a lunch and go out on the road all day. Then we'd go to the chairman's house and put all the values on our assessment roll book, and that book would go to the county and the taxes would be made up."

After 30 years on the job, Horton retired as assessor and Alton Rockwood took the post.

"Sometime in the seventies, I became chairman after Rockwood retired," says Randall.

"Elton Palmerton and Howard Nobbs were assessors with me, and the office was moved to the Town Hall for the first time."

Randall says people didn't complain much back then. "No one bothered me at home. We didn't have any set hours. People just didn't complain in those days. I don't even remember having a grievance."

Randall remembers his total taxes in the year 1951: \$60. "How could you complain?" he laughed.

But then, Randall says, there wasn't too much new going on back then.

"The assessments were at a very low percentage, like \$4,000 or \$5,000 assessments. There was only one exemption, for veterans. We didn't have any farm or senior citizen exemptions. We got them later on, but to begin with, we didn't."

And there weren't so many rules, either, Randall admitted. "There weren't many regulations, there wasn't a lot of paperwork. Back then, to me, it was more simplified."

At times, over the years, his wife, Ellen, helped with the clerical work.

Born in Gowanda, Randall's family moved to Eden in 1930 when he was three. He served in the Navy for almost five years, and after his discharge, went into the insurance business with his grandfather.

"When my grandfather retired, I opened up a business here in

Eden. My grandfather had a location in Hamburg, above the theater. He had built up the Eden business while in Hamburg, so then I brought the Eden business home and left the Hamburg business to another fellow."

He started at home in his finished-off garage, then moved the business, which now included real estate, to where the current Eden bookstore is.

When Marine Midland built a new bank in 1965, Randall and his partner Don Spencer settled in the old bank building, where the insurance company still exists today.

Randall remembers some mishaps along the way. When doing real estate, he and his partner always wanted to check septic systems before listing a house.

"We poured this dye in this lady's sink upstairs, and kept the water running - and running."

The lady never told him the kitchen sink was plugged up. "That dye came up in her kitchen sink, down onto her floor, and the floor had enough cracks in it that it ran down into the cellar. We had a huge green mess to clean up," Randall laughed.

And there was the day he locked the keys in the car while measuring a home with his fellow assessors. And he laughs now about the day they forgot folders while doing roadwork. Randall returned to the site and found them — but not before a weedwacker had sliced through parts of them.



Randall does remember the time he wanted to become supervisor during the 1980s. That was the only time he went door to door for a campaign. He lost in a close race to Gale Denn. "He was a stranger, and I was an Edenite from way back," laughs Randall. "I don't even remember why I wanted the job as supervisor."

Randall has kept himself busy with other jobs as well. He has been an assessor in the Town of Portville in Cattaraugus County and the Town of Perrysburg. He also was a volunteer fireman for 35 years and been a charter member of the local gun club for 45 years.

An avid historian, he helped form the town historical society in 1962, and even served as town historian for a few terms. He still enjoys target shooting, and used to belong to a Civil War unit for competition

shooting.

When he's officially retired, Randall hopes to have more time for his hobbies, like genealogy.

Randall and his wife, Ellen, have four children, three daughters and a son, and ten grandchildren, the oldest of whom is 27.

A chapter in the town's history will come to an end with Randall's retirement. For over four decades, Randall, clad in his favorite plaid flannel shirts, seen stopping to talk to old acquaintances as he strolled the sidewalks to work, waving to many a familiar passerby, will be walking towards a new chapter of life — his retirement.

A special recognition reception, honoring the 40-plus years Randall was in office, will be held Wednesday, Dec. 12, from 5:30 to 7 p.m., before the town board's regular meeting.