

May Jones Transcript

Memories of Wilmot with May Jones

In this documentary May tells stories of growing up, farm life in the early days, the roadway changes when Route 11 came through Wilmot, her 58-year career at New London Hospital, her three years as Wilmot Chief of Police, and how the argument of how to pronounce Wilmot is finally settled.

Two interviews were recorded by Wilmot Historical Society volunteers. The first interview with May was filmed on October 12, 2018 at Barbara Sanborn's home on Pancake Street and the second interview was on May 5, 2019 at Lindy Heim's home at 55 Campground Road. Barbara Sanborn was at both interviews and shared her stories as well.

Transcript of video

Lindy: Hello. I am Lindy Heim from the Wilmot Historical Society, here with Judy Hauck [videographer], to interview Barbara Sanborn and May Jones and to chat with them about their lives here in Wilmot. [This interview was filmed on May 5, 2019 at Lindy Heim's home at 55 Campground Road in Wilmot.]

Lindy: May, it's your turn to give us a little background.

May: I come from a family of nine, that would include my parents. Us kids all grew up together, and like all kids, we raised holy Cain. Had a good life. We weren't rich and we didn't know the difference. My dad worked hard for all of us. We always had a huge garden. Always. My mom—she lived to be ninety-six and my dad, who died at the farm had a heart attack. So that kind of left things a little on the sad side for a while.

Lindy: Was he young?

May: He had just celebrated his sixty-sixth birthday. He had just retired. He had gone out... He loved horses and we had horses of course, and we had the old tedder, the hay tedder, and you'd hook it up to the horse, and he wanted to do that. So we said, "go ahead." He went out to the field, and he was probably out there maybe half an hour or so. He come in he says, "I'm having a little difficulty breathing." And he said, "I don't know what's the matter."

I said, "Well, go to sit down." Then he started talking about a pain. So, I called the doctor, back then they came to the house, and they came to the house and gave him a shot and said, "now you've gotta stay put, no more horsing and whatever." And he did. But when he got up to go to Mass on Sunday morning, he hit the floor. It was quick for him.

When I went home for a long time, I'd see him walking across the floor, in my mind. It just was so quick. Several times I said to my mom, "Where's Dad? It was just part of the tragedies of a family and nothing we could do much about.

Lindy: How old were you at that time?

May: I was married, and I had my two small children, little tiny guys at that time.

Lindy: So your maiden name is..

May: Babine.

Lindy: What year were you were born?

May: 1929. I'm going to 90 this year in November.

Lindy: I'm looking at you two and realizing that you've been friends a long time. Can you take it back to how long ago that was?

May: I had moved into the farmhouse, and they were walking by and all of a sudden I saw somebody looking in the window, and I went to the window and you ought to see two girls run like hell down the street.

Barbara: We were peeking at this empty house. It looked empty. A big old farm. We had to go through, that was the road. It went right the property.

May: Yeah, that was the old road [Village Road].

Barbara: So it isn't as though we went off the road, we just didn't ask.

Lindy: So people from New London to get to Potter Place went right by your farm?

Barbara: Oh yeah!

Lindy: Well, through your farm essentially.

Barbara: And by our store. That was Route 11.

Lindy: So in the 50s and 60s you probably acted together in all those wonderful community activities.

May: Yeah we were in plays. She ran one. She was the producer of one.

Barbara: Well I helped Kay White and then she couldn't do it anymore and I did a couple more after that, produced and directed them. It was a wonderful bunch of people.

May: In the old building, there's something to be desired, because for us to do anything we had to get out ahead of like a ramp on the outside of the building. When we had to

go out to change or do something, we had to go out there. Pitch black as could be. We got back in, and Stanley Rayno, Glenn's dad, was playing a maid and he had a ...

Barbara: He had to put on his boobs...

May: He had a football in here right, and he lost the darn football. So we had to grab Kay White's pocketbook and stuck it in his shirt, so the two points come like this.

Barbara: There's something special about a group of people, year after year, after year, who raise money for the Community Center. That's what it was. And it was so much fun. The audience loved it, because the audience knew a lot of us, knew my actors and actresses, and if they did something ridiculous, the audience loved it.

Lindy: You can certainly remember the time when the highway came through in the early sixties?

May: Yes. All our cows were out in the pasture and they blasted at a certain time in the evening, and we had to bring all the cows to the upper field. We'd be out there pushing cows up and they were used to being in the barn just getting milked, getting grain, and then going out on their own.

Barbara: How much property do you own there?

May: I own 300 acres. Anyway, we had the cows up to the upper piece, up towards her [Barbara's] store and the upper part of the field and kept them up there while they blasted. Because they blasted right behind our house. At that time it was behind the house, where the new Route 11 was going.

Lindy: And you were afraid of them of being scared about it or being hit by anything flying...

May: Well we were kind of worried about it, because we'd seen rocks, big boulders, go right over the top of the house. They don't have a blanket out there when they're out in the woods, what they called woods, so we used to see big rocks come up over the top of the house and land on the old road. We did end up with a cracked chimney from the blasting.

Barbara: Also they're milking cows, you never know.

May: Yeah right – they were. And we'd have to walk them all back to the barn and get them in again.

Lindy: It must have been a pretty serious process just trying to figure out how to be reimbursed?

May: We didn't get reimbursed for the chimney. It was an old house and their excuse was it probably was already cracked.

Lindy: What I meant was the eminent domain process.

May: Oh! There would be, yes, if we didn't take what they gave us – the money. We had to go to every meeting, because if you didn't you had to put all your rights-of-ways in your fields. That's what we had planned on doing and one field has two rights-of-ways to it, because it's a big field, and then the upper field by the fire house had a right-of-way.

Barbara: Because they changed the roadway – how you get to your property.

May: They changed the whole thing. Then going up through the village, I didn't have to worry about that end, because where it forked there, that was all part of my property and we could go in there any which way. In the back of the house, well what was the back of the house then, there is a right-of-way that we asked for to go up to the woods.

Lindy: But you had to make some accommodation to be able to get your herd across the road.

May: We walked them across, but we let them know when they had to come or go. But most of the time that they were working we had them in the other field.

Barbara: But they had a tunnel.

May: They did that after. We have a tunnel they can walk under.

Lindy: And what's that like? The tunnel?

May: It's a great huge culvert. The only thing is a couple of horses would go through it and some of them wouldn't. It was too small for some of them, and they had to drop their heads.

Lindy: So it was mostly really for the cows?

May: Yup. And then my husband used to give the poor engineer a bad time, because he'd say, "I need lights in there." It wasn't working too well.

He'd say, "Mrs. Jones," when I came home from work, "Mrs. Jones your husband's being a pain again."

I said, "What's the matter?"

He said, "He wants lights in the tunnel."

I said, "You know darn well he's fooling."

And he says, "I know, but he aggravates."

Lindy: Good for him. I think the last time you and I talked you thought about 11 acres were taken.

May: Yeah, it was 11 acres taken. From the dump up to where the *shsssh* [sound made as May's arms and hands motions a split or divide] goes. I'm just this side of the firehouse. The Stonewall is just this side of the firehouse.

Lindy: Yeah, that's a big distance. Interesting.

May: Yeah those guys worked well and what was nice too, every once in a while, they lived in Boston and one of them ran a bulldozer, and he always said to Bob, "would you like some clams or something?" And Bob would say, "yeah." Then he'd come up with a big box of clams in metal boxes. They could get it right on the shore, so that worked out pretty good at times. It was really tasty.

Lindy: So, when you both were raising your families, there were a lot of farms.

Barbara: Oh yeah.

Lindy: In the Flat. Well, all over Wilmot, but in the Flat too.

May: One of mine was born in Winchester [Massachusetts], Bobby. When I moved up here I was pregnant with Bobby. I didn't know anybody, so I had a doctor back home and then Bobby was born Winchester, which his sister-in-law says, "oh, so you're not a native."

Lindy: That's right - Flatlander comes to mind.

May: Yeah she was born in New London [hospital].

Lindy: So one of Fred's questions, "who were the farmers in Wilmot early on?" Do you remember any of the names?

May: The Gross's

Barbara: Paul Gross and Lida up on Kearsarge Mountain. Ann and...Cloutiers? no, Davis, bought the property and took down the house. And even the Glidden's which were just on the corner of Kearsarge Valley...no, the French's, they had a daughter Glidden... and they farmed right up until they got too old to farm. They did it because that's all they had. They had to farm.

May: Where the restaurant is, the Jackson's had some cows. [La Meridiana, an Italian restaurant that closed a year or so ago, was originally the site of a farm located on Old Winslow Road before the new Rt. 11 was put in.]

Lindy: Miss May, I still would like a little more filling in on your growing up and education.

May: I got as far as High School and that was about as far as I went too. I have a brother that worked for NASA. I have a sister that was a nurse. And myself, I just was a laborer.

Lindy: Not just a laborer! You were not just a laborer – I know what you've done.

May: Then, of course when I got married, I was nineteen when I got married, and I was twenty-one when I had Bobby. Then after, the kids were just preschool when I started working in New London hospital, and that was fifty-eight years ago. Back then I was in the old hospital and the laundry was done, all the OR [operating room] laundry, which had to be sterilized and was washed by a little washing machine. Now we're talkin' - there was umpteen loads because of surgery, and get the blood out of it and all that stuff and then we'd hang it outdoors. Then we brought it in, and they folded it and did what they had to do with it and put it in through the autoclave so that it was all sterilized material.

Lindy: What did you say you put it through?

May: An autoclave.

Lindy: I don't know what that is.

May: Where they sterilized it. It gets very hot and you put the stuff all in there and it also gets it wet, but it sterilizes it. Then all that stuff comes out and we put it on shelves, so it's ready to go to surgery. That was our job as housekeepers, we used to do that wash. And finally in the old hospital, and this is where we were, they put in a washing machine. Now I'm talking about a big wooden barrel that would go around and it would wash and it would turn to go the other way. And to get it to come to where you had to get the clothes out you, you may have had to use your fingers to pull it down. You had two big latches, flop those up and took the clothes up. Now the clothes were soaking wet, but we had a spinner, and we took them from there dripping wet and put them in the spinner and only partial of them because you had so damn many. And you had to be careful, because they had a laundry chute, and if you weren't careful when you're reaching in there, something's going to hit you right off the head. It's could be a pile of you know what on that sheet. Anyway we got them all cleaned up and did all that. Another job of mine was to hold hips, hold traction on [patients'] hips when they get them, because we didn't have a fracture bed.

We did a lot of moving the bodies and stuff like that, that was part of our job too. Because we didn't have a place to keep them, we used to take them down the boss's office until they picked them up [laughs]. That's how the old hospital was run. I mean everybody had to work at something different down the line.

Lindy: Everybody pitched in.

May: Yeah. It was a big family. Then when we moved to the new one we were still doing okay, but it changed because new people came in and it got bigger.

Lindy: And you worked there how long?

May: Fifty-eight years.

Barbara: And then she retired and then she went on per diem and then she had to retire from that because they kept calling her. I retired when I was 86.

Lindy: May would you mind talking telling us about one other career you had kind of local right here in Wilmot?

May: Yeah. About three years I was Chief of Police in Wilmot. They had called and asked if I would take over after Bob died. I had helped him sometimes, so I knew a little. New London and the State helped me too, but the State told me they liked me because I took care of the small stuff. So that worked out pretty good, but that's just what they said. "We like you because you take care of the small stuff." And of course when my poor husband died, they knew he had pistols and those guys showed up at the house every time I turned around wanting to buy a pistol. I didn't sell them at the time. They were awfully good about things too. He [Bob] had a policeman's funeral, where they came down with state police and local police. The local police were a big help to me too.

Lindy: Did you find that you needed to carry a weapon?

May: I didn't carry it.

Lindy: Didn't need it?

May: Didn't want it.

Lindy: Your farm was it was kind of interesting. I keep coming back to your farm life, because I remember you telling us how collaborative and cooperative you all were locally when one farmer needed others help. Could you explain that?

May: It was Lida Gross and her cow had gotten into a porcupine and every time it tried to eat it couldn't do it. Fortunately it wasn't loaded with quills, she had a couple of them, well more than a couple, but I meant there was enough to bother. So poor Lida called up and she asked if we could go up there and help her. I said sure. Bob and I ran up there and they put a chain on her neck and we tied it around the tree so I could hold it, because I couldn't hold her by myself. Good Lord I'd be down the road with her dragging me. So anyway we did that and Bob pulled the quills out and as soon as we undid the thing she just went on about her business was eating her grass.

Barbara: But you'd help the Gross's sometimes.

May: Oh yeah several times.

Barbara: And Tori Bood's chicken farm, May was nearby so she would help.

May: Yeah and he helped us. He milked quite a bit like my husband did, you know very quick. And my husband every once in a while, got malaria, because he was in the Second World War, and he was over the war now, so every once in a while, he would come down with it. So he couldn't do much, he was weak as a kitten and of course sweating like crazy. So, I used to call Tori, but Tori had about two or three thousand birds in his bird house, so when he was in trouble he would call him and Bobby and I would come over because Wanda and Bob would say, "we can't breathe in here." So it was us who would go over and collect his eggs and do his things.

He had a feeder that came down and you could pull it fill the buckets. Well I pulled it. Wouldn't stop. So we had to run like crazy in the house to get him out there to show us how to stop it. He did come out. He went back in though, because he was sicker than hell. I had grain up to my knees, so Bobby and I scooped it all up and put it in the buckets and fed the chickens.

Lindy: Was their emergency one time too, when the firehouse siren would go off?

May: Yeah the chickens would gather in one corner but you know five or six of them would die.

Lindy: Stampede.

May: Yep. They'd smother. They'd go into a corner and we'd lose them. One time we were debeaking them, it was at night, because they get cannibalistic. Otherwise they'll pick on one bird and pick it to pieces

Barbara: It's a treatment for new birds.

May: It was a hot wire, the was hot you, could see it was hot, and you would take the bird, we would pass, Bobby and I again, we pass him the bird, and he would put it on that and would debeak it just at the end. He always chewed a damn cigar, always chewed a cigar, and of course, poor Bobby, it fell out of his mouth and went into the hen shit of course.

Barbara: I bet that smelled good!

May: Well, no, he picked it up and put it right back in his mouth. And my son I thought was gonna die. And when we got outside he said, "Ma did you see what he did? Did you see what he did?" I said, "yeah I did." He said "yuk."

Barbara: The chickens need that [beak] to break the egg. That's a little thing, see and, that's how they get out of their egg. But after they're born that's also a weapon so they debeak them.

May: And it's easy to do at night because they're all sitting on the roost. All I had to do was grab the bird and then debeak it, and he'd pass it to me and I'd put it back down.

Barbara: Yeah and they're sleepy on the roost. They're easy to handle once they're on the roost.

May: Yep. That's why they did it at night.

Lindy: Well it's fascinating to hear how things were done back then. You know we're all pretty separated from our food supply, and we don't know that.

May: I had two bulls and of course you had a ring in their nose when they were two. So we had them in the pasture and well, we had to take them out of the pasture and keep down around the barn. One of them got out and got into my clothesline [May makes bull sounds and moves her head to show how the bull rubbed up against the clothes] and I took the broom and I went out the door and my husband's screaming at me, "don't do that he's gonna kill you." Boy I whopped him one good one right on his butt and he went back to the barn and Bob's looking at me like, "God, I hope she doesn't hit me" and he went back to the barn. But we had to be careful with the bulls, as I said they have to be two years old to get the ring in the nose. Once they got the ring in the nose you've got to keep them where they can't be seen and they can't be out there.

Lindy: You had one other creature who was very big but not so ferocious. George.

May: George, piggy piggy. I hated to see him go. Bob knew he was going to die, so he arranged to have all the animals go. I had the pigs, and I had the female and we had little suckers we used to sell. When George would get out and I'd call him and he'd come. He wasn't so big so he fit under my arm and we'd walk back to the barn. And again, Bob would have a fit, because he thought the damn thing would turn on me. Never did, but he told me I had to get rid of those, because he said, "you're the only one here, my kids were married by then when he died, you could get hurt and nobody would know where you were."

Barbara: But there are some people, like my daughter Judy, liked this ram with the big horns, he would backtrack and then he'd nail anybody, but not her. It's interesting.

May: Yeah they know. They know.

Lindy: Cross-species friendship is it is it's amazing.

Barbara: It is. It is amazing.

May: But the trouble with them being out is they would dig up the lawn because they're looking for grubs. They'd go out there and there'd be big spots all over my nice lawn. I'd have to go back out there and put them all back. But we did okay.

Lindy: Maisie do you mind taking a look at some of these pictures... [Lindy shows photos on her tablet for Barbara and May to identify]

May: Oh – Mrs. [Lou] Atwood. Remember we used to play baseball? See, that's me up at bat and her as catcher.

Barbara: Yes! She was 80 wasn't she? And she was running the bases. She was short and stocky, and she would run those bases.

May: This is Route 11 and of course this big shed was there.

Lindy: This picture here of the side...

May: That's the barn and yeah, there's the milk house. This is where the horses were, and this is where some horses were put, and no cows in here.

This is Bobby [held in somebody's arms] and they're bringing the cows in to be milked.

And of course there's three stories to the old house. We had the one fireplace and we had two wood stoves. We used about ninety cord of wood a year.

Lindy: So this was your old farmhouse that is now across the street from today's...

May: Yes, that's my new one.

And there we are...

Lindy: And there you are...

May: This one here is a craft's fair

Lindy: This was the Ladies Aid Society.

Lindy: Settle the argument once and for all: is it "Wilmot" [silent "o"] or "Wilmot"? [pronouncing "o"]

Barbara: Wilmot [the "o" is silent].

May: We get a lot of them that say, "Wilmont"

Barbara: They put the "n" in it.

Credits

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