

## Wilmot Historical Society

### Reminiscences of Florence Langley (read by Judy Walker), Lida Gross, E. Campbell (read by Betsy Forsham), Lucy Hall (read by Donald Hall), and Fran Wilcox

**Judith Walker:** {Our program today is going to be } . . . about how things used to be in Wilmot. Some people will tell first-hand, and some will read, and I'll start things off by reading something that Florence Langley has written about the 4<sup>th</sup> of July as it used to be in Wilmot Center.

“How Wilmot Center celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July sixty or more years ago is best described by the term 'noisemaking.' It began by the ringing of the Methodist Church bell at midnight. About 1859, Minot Stearns circulated a paper to raise funds for a bell which was secured and placed in the bell tower. The bell was sounded in case of fire and also rung by the youth of the Town each year on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. At one time a Town ordinance attempted to stop the ringing for the latter purpose. Two young men were fined \$1 each for failing to obey the order. For spite, they stole the clapper of the bell and threw it into the brook at the Whitney Mill site. After a while the men revealed its location, and it was restored to its rightful position. The above incident was related in a book by Casper LeVarn, The Early History of Wilmot. Where he got the information, I do not know, but I have heard my father speak of the bell clapper which was stolen and returned. It would be interesting if one knew the men involved and when and how the clapper was returned to its original place in the bell.

"Even the young children were involved in creating noise. Any kind of a hand bell was rung—a school bell, cow bell or a team bell. All homes had pails, cooking utensils, etc. which could be pounded to make noise, or a horn could be purchased in the Village store and blown. The store also carried packages of torpedoes, and even a small child could safely use these. One simply threw a torpedo on a flat rock to produce a bang. Our stone step was perfect for this. The first firecracker which we were allowed to set off was an inch long.

**Judith:** Remember that, Frank? (Laughter)

"Several of these would be laced together with string to make a package and had to be separated into the individual firecrackers. They made little noise but were quite satisfactory for our age. A lighted match was considered to be dangerous, so what was called a “slow match” or “punk”, was used.

**Judith:** Remember that? I remember that.

"A parent would light the end of this. It would continue to burn a long time and there was less danger of setting our clothes afire. We looked forward to the time when we could use the larger

firecrackers. The price of firecrackers depended on their size and the larger they were, the louder the explosion. There was, of course, the possibility of injuries in their use. Because of this, in later years, their sale was prohibited, thus the 4<sup>th</sup> of July became more quiet, but less fun, for children of all ages.

"Part of the daytime celebration was what was called a "horrible parade". The name originated because participants dressed in all kinds of costumes. I never took part, but I'm under the impression that older children were involved. There must have been prizes for the best costumes for Amber Airey a cousin of mine, won a prize one year dressed as a male. I wish I knew who organized the parade, the year it started, the number of years it continued, the route taken, etc. No one living today can give information about this event. As daylight ended and it grew dark, noisemakers were discarded in favor of using sparklers. A sparkler was a device which was held in the hand resembling a thick stick, and when lighted, it threw off sparks like minute stars. It could be turned in any direction to make all kinds of figures. Sparklers were purchased by the box, which was fortunate, for an individual one did not burn very long.

"When it grew real dark, it was time for fireworks to be set off. My family, with the Tilton family who lived at the end of the Pinnacle Road, got together for this, both contributing fireworks, colored flares, skyrockets, and roman candles. My father and Henry Tilton would set them off. They made a pretty display as they shot up into the sky. One year, Mr. Tilton got careless and received quite a bad burn as I remember it. His son, Kenneth, spoke of it as I reminisced with him many years later so it must have made quite an impression on the two of us. I believe ice cream and cake were served after the display—a fitting end for a glorious 4<sup>th</sup> of July. This is the way our small village celebrated the fourth. Lida can tell you how it was observed in Wilmot Flat. I do know that one year the covenant meeting of the First Free Will Baptist Church was cancelled, "for the regular time being the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, it was thought best to cancel it." (Laughter)

**Now, our next speaker will be Lida Gross. Hopefully, she will include a little reminiscence of the fourth.**

**Lida:** In February 1957, my husband Paul was admitted to New London Hospital with pneumonia. We had a milk business—delivered milk every day from house to house, and three stores—Cutler's, Currier's, Howland's in Elkins, and we delivered 144 quarts a day. I took care of this for ten days all alone. At 5 a.m. every morning I was up, built my fires and put on cereal to cook, then out to the barn. First, I grained the cows, then cleaned them out, bedded them down with sawdust. We had a manure carrier that run on a track which made the work much easier. When filled, it was run out 12 feet from the barn and dumped. Then, I went out on the barn floor and hayed the cows. Then I came in and washed up, took hot water and cloths to wash the others. When finished, the first cow would be dripping the milk from the heat. We had a de Laval milking machine. The pail was stainless steel which held 15 quarts of milk. The pail had a

pulsator that vacuumed the milk through a tube into the pail. We were milking 12 cows--a mixed herd of Jerseys, Holsteins, Guernseys, and Ayrshires which gave us a better butterfat. We put the milk in a pail from the milking machine and brought it into our milk room, steamed and strained it into a pan 30 x 9 x 9. The milk dripped through a trough which had small holes that drained down over an aerator or coils, into a bottling bowl. We had an 11' milk cooler to store the bottles of milk in, into cold water just at freezing temperature. This water is pumped up from the cooler, down through the coils, to cool the milk. By the time we got to the village, the cream on the morning milk would be set. I then came in, ate, and changed my clothes. After bottling the milk, I filled my cases and loaded the truck and then went on to deliver the milk.

Dan Rayno drove my truck to Potter Place, but when I left for Elkins, I went alone as I went to the hospital to visit Paul at the end of my route as I had to be home at noon to hay and water the cows. We had a tank that had to be filled as each cow had their own drinking cup. The bottles then had to be washed also milking equipment. Then at 4:30 p.m. it was time to start over again. When Paul got home, he would sit on the washing trough, and he would change the milker for me which was a big help as I could be bottling the milk. He was also able to drive the truck on the route. In 1941 we took on this route and in 1961 we sold the cows as it was too hard for Paul and then went to work to deliver the milk at Crockett's dairy. We enjoyed working together doing haying and so forth. I drove the tractor, hay truck, whenever I was needed. After the cows were sold, I went to work for the Ballins and Ohlers. Paul left me off when he went to work at Crockett's at 6:30. I worked there for 6 years and every morning I was there early enough to prepare breakfast for both families. (Applause).

**Judith:** I feel tired. (Laughter) I can't imagine doing all that. Well, if we would let Lida just stay up here all afternoon, she could tell wonderful stories the rest of the day. Our next speaker is going to be Betsy Forsham who now lives at Happy Acres in Wilmot Center, which was her grandparents' home.

**Betsy:** I'm afraid my grandmother started writing her reminiscences of Wilmot when she was a girl, and believe it or not, this was just a very small portion, but I fear I will maybe bore you since people aren't speaking as long as I thought they would; so I'm going to probably skip even more around. But, it's fascinating. I mean I got carried away just reading about it, and I think for some of you it's gonna mean a lot to, too. You're going to remember some of these people. So, if it's alright, I am going to sit down 'cuz I'm gonna throw the papers around otherwise. So this is entitled . . . unfortunately, she stopped before she got to our road, which is the North Wilmot Road; but she did manage to go up 4A, and down 4A and up Bunker Road, and I'm just sorry that she never got to the house I live in and clear on down to Wilcoxes' and beyond. But at least we have this much.

So, she had entitled this "The Wilmot Center of the 1890's" by Edith Goodhue Campbell:

“When seen through the eyes of maturity, the impressions of childhood may seem invalid. Yet a child sees people and places as they are, responds to kindnesses and attitudes without prejudice, and by the same simple ability to judge fairly, is repelled by unkindness and the cruelties which rarely, but surely, are woven into the fabric of life.

"The following tale will be imperfectly written, following somewhat the trail of a *will o' the wisp* as the fancies of memory flit hither and yon. For me, life began in 1889 in the “L” apartment of the home of Mrs. Asenath Upton Stevens. She was the widow of Amos Stevens and occupied the homestead for many years alone except for the tenants who lived in the pleasant apartment.

The “L” at that time was a one-story structure and was occupied by my parents, Fred and Josie Goodhue, for the first five years of their married life. In 1892 my father purchased a home on the Main Street [4-A] from Thomas Craigie, whom I remember well. In this house, my brother Harland was born and most of the memories of my childhood and youth cluster around this home in the 18 years my parents spent there.”

*Betsy: Okay, now I'm going to skip a little and we're going, now, up the Forth New Hampshire Turnpike which is 4A.*

“Continuing west along Main Street, or the Fourth New Hampshire Turnpike, what stood on the left was the home of George Whittemore, his wife, Julia, and daughter, Hattie. Mr. Whittemore was a jeweler and watch and clock repairer whose business was carried on in a small building west of the homestead. The entire Whittemore place was a model of neatness with well-kept lawns, flowers, and the biggest black cherry tree I have ever seen.”

*Betsy: Now I wish I could grow one, I mean if they grew then, why can't we do it now?--*

"How I loved those cherries. The tree embellished both the home and the very attractive jewelry store. I loved Mrs. Whittemore and Hattie, but Mr. Whittemore was a self-professed infidel and used to scare me to death while he also incurred my wrath by deriding my attendance at Sunday school. In the field beyond the Whittemore place was a small white building which housed the town hearse—a hearse of such fine quality, that when other towns, even New London, had to say farewell to one of their prominent citizens, the Wilmot equipage was always solicited.

**Betsy:** And I think this may be the one that Bill Kidder, Sr. had, is it not, who told me at a conversation not too long ago that he would love to return it to Wilmot. (Audience enthusiasm.) So, yeah, I think we should look into that. Okay, um . . . Alright, so I'm skipping over the George Patten family, and this family and that family and several places which were burned by fire, and I guess it was a pretty serious fire because it almost burned the whole town, evidently. It started up by what is now Joe Szylagyi's, took two houses there, and I guess the barns, and

started to move down, and it said, some quick work by an early Boy Scout troop and group of citizens forming a bucket brigade is what probably saved the whole town.

“So, we’re still going west to the home of Kirk Mason, who, in my youth, was Town Clerk. Kirk was also the most imaginative and spellbinding storyteller in the region. Every evening he entertained a circle of men who gathered around the box stove in the village store, a circle which broke up as promptly when the clock struck 9 as though the Trump of Doom had sounded. Just beyond the Mason’s was the Colonel Melvin Tenney homestead.

**Betsy:** Now, well, Starkweather’s, except it’s not anymore, but it at least places it for us.

"Just why Mr. Tenney was called Colonel, I never knew, in fact, I did not know him at all except from the picture I gleaned from the neighbor’s description of a strange person shrouded in a heavy overcoat and long wool entwining muffler who is wont to stroll down the Village street thus attired even on the hottest days of summer. The Colonel’s wife was named Sarah or Sal, and their children were Byron, Clara, Andrew Jackson, known as Jack, Alvin, a blue boy who died young, Charles, Rose, and Livia.

**Betsy:** So, he was busy, anyway. (Laughter)

"Across the bridge which was then a picturesque wooden structure known as Tenney Bridge and a little further west was the lane which trailed up, over and around the hills adjacent to Bog Mountain to the Silas Prescott place. A low, weathered Cape Cod house, and a large barn were surrounded by pastureland and a few well-kept fields. Here Silas lived with his widowed mother. I do not remember her, but I do recall my father relating the difficulties encountered when she died. No horse-drawn vehicle could safely transport a coffin over the narrow, uneven lane, so several men carried the casket on their shoulders to the home, and in like manner, brought Mrs. Prescott down to the waiting conveyance. Silas was a well-mannered and courteous man whose personality included a certain gentleness and pride in work well done. Wood sawed by Silas was a work of art, and the result piled evenly in the woodshed was a mosaic of closely fitted pieces. Silas was an authority on bees and kept many hives. He could work with them without protection and never acquire a sting. I have listened to his stories of bees with fascination and only regret that somehow this wealth of practical information was not preserved. Silas was one of the regulars who spent most evenings at the store, trudging home at 9 o’clock with provisions or a sack of grain on his shoulder, to me, a child, a little home near the foot of Bog Mountain seemed as far away from people as the mysterious North Pole.

**Betsy:** Now, let’s skip along a little more. We go by a blacksmith, who . . . it must have been quite a feat because he had only one eye and one arm. (Laughter) Okay, then a trapper who was

also the executioner of the pigs come fall. And okay, the Philbrick place . . . Okay, now we're quite a ways up 4A. Okay . . .

"We're now at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Dodge and his wife, Martha. Mr. and Mrs. Dodge maintained a wonderful home and large family of 10 children. They were industrious to the 'nth' degree and public spirited and hospitable. They were interested in all phases of community life, but especially the church and opened the doors of their home to Christian Endeavor Socials and other seasonal parties. They often filled two pews in church on Sunday morning and some of the young people were often in the choir. Mrs. Dodge was Sunday school superintendent for many years. One of the thrills of my childhood was to ride up to Dodges Mill with my grandfather [Seth Goodhue] when he went for lumber. The mill, upstream from the home, was really dual—a shingle mill and a sawmill. It was a busy place since Mr. Dodge employed several men at the mill and many others in the woods. Some of these were French Canadians whose use of English was, to say the least, unusual. Phrases often heard in my father's store were, "My wife, he . . .", or "My man, she . . .", I used to wonder who "he" and "she" really were. Above the mill were the falls—a cascade which, except in summer, furnished power to activate the whining saws. I held those saws in awe since once in a while an accident occurred.

"The Dodge house fascinated me. Two piazzas on the first and second floors encircled the entire house. I remember the thrill of standing on the upper one on the back of the house and following the course of the stream as it dashed over the falls, escape from the mill as if in a great hurry, and rush through a gorge far below only to finally become pacified as it strolled away to the quiet of the Philbrick Meadow. To have this family leave town one by one until the house and mill were deserted, then to see these memorable buildings fall into decay and crumble, was to me one of the saddest recollections of later years. Where there had been so much life, industry fun and laughter as well as serious moments, now there is no sound save the ceaseless murmur of the brook and the wind in the treetops of the encroaching forest. Sadly, the fate of Dodge home is being repeated in the lifecycle of many others.

**Betsy:** With which we can all concur. Now a little humor. She was good at that, too. She was also a bit of a poet. But anyway, we're going up now to Pedrick Road where there lived a character on some branch off the Pedrick Road.

"There was one other farm off the Pedrick Road branch, and that was of Isaac Tenney and his wife, Abbie. They were parents of three daughters. Isaac, or Ike, as he was called locally, had two passions: hard cider and Camp Meeting. He trafficked in former all winter to the distress of the wives of the area's younger men and was converted every summer at Camp Meeting. The conversion lasted until the next fall.

**Betsy:** Now shall I go a couple more or is this enough? Okay, there are just a few more that really interested me because now we're coming down to closer to where I live, so this isn't fair to some of you who live a little further beyond but . . .

"Returning to the Center Corners we cannot bypass the huge watering trough built and maintained by my grandfather. It was round and had an iron exterior. Inside was a wooden tub with insulating material between. On cold nights my grandfather placed a cover over the tub so a thin sheet of ice was the only obstruction in the morning. The tub was so large that it never froze completely.

**Betsy:** And I know we have some beautiful photographs of it in here. Where it was, was at the intersection of 4A and Bunker Road, right in between the gray apartment building and the little brown building. It is pretty incredible, but you can see the road widens there so it does make sense. I have some lovely photos of it at home as well. Okay, now we're starting down 4A toward Route 11.

"As you go downhill, we pause to contemplate the old Kearsarge School of Practice building which is now that gray apartment building, one of Wilmot's pride and joys. In my day, a winter term was conducted by various fine teachers. For a short time, Wilmot maintained a two-year high school there and the building became a private dwelling.

**Betsy:** Okay, we'll skip over the Farnums. Hearing you talk about milking, Lida, she mentions when my grandma's mother wanted her to go the Farnum's—they raised cows—for cream.

"My great grandmother sent my grandmother down, and to Ida Farnum's. Ida would take me into the sweet-smelling milk room and skim from the pans a large cup of heavy cream. The price was 5 cents. (Laughter)

**Betsy:** Okay, we'll skip to Mrs. Youngman because I thought this was pretty incredible.

"Right across from the Farnum's place...

**Betsy:** (and I think this must be where Russell Nietz lives so it's right on the corner of N. Wilmot Rd. and 4A)

...was the Isaac Youngman place—home of Hannah, widow of Isaac. Her constant companion was Miss Nettie Currier, daughter of John Currier of the North Road. Nettie was a very fine person and each Sunday faithfully took notes on the sermon at the Congregational Church for Mrs. Youngman. Mrs. Youngman was aged but alert, had been the moving spirit behind the establishment of the KS of P [Kearsarge School of Practice], and gave liberally to the churches

of the Center and North. She was a very large woman and always sat in the same rocking chair beside the right-hand picture window. The interior of the room was made fascinating for me by two large suspended domes made of mica. These were cut in diamond shapes, pierced with designs and sewed together with colored thread. These hung above each window like canopies. Beneath one of these domes, Mrs. Youngman reminded me of the dowager queens of history. She died in 1900 at the age of 83.

**Betsy:** But I would love to have seen those domes and mica, and we had the mica mines right up 4A so maybe it was even constructed from one of those. Okay, now let's skip to the end. Now we're down to what is now Dana Davis' place, but Mr. Seufert had a nursery for many years down on 4A on the left.

"Crossing to the left of the then country road, was the showplace of the town—the Parker Whittemore residence, now Mr. Seufert's. The grounds were elaborate judged by the standards of country village homes. A fountain on the side lawn played constantly. The water poured from the upheld hand of a bronze statue in the form of a handsome boy, into a pool beneath. Below the wall was a rose garden and flowers were abundant. Mr. Whittemore, with his wife and aged mother, comprised the human family, but a fine black horse and a King Charles Spaniel named Pansy, were important. Mr. Whittemore was a traveling optician and being a fine-looking man was impressive as he drove forth in his shining black carriage drawn by his handsome horse. He always wore a black suit and tall silk hat, and presented a truly stunning appearance, especially when accompanied by his wife. She had been an actress and was a blond of the type which caused raised eyebrows among the women of a more conventional cast. (Laughter) She always wore black silk, a black picture hat, and always Pansy sat in her lap with a supercilious expression of a King Charles Spaniel, seemingly turning up his nose at the rest of creation. In due time, Pansy died, mourning was in order and finally he was buried in a casket in the rose garden and his resting place marked by a small marble tombstone. The stone is no longer there, evidently, some later owner of the property refusing to perpetuate Pansy's memory. After Parker Whittemore's death, his widow left town, and having no knowledge of how to handle finances, died alone and in poverty--the end of a story which had its high moments, its humor, and its tragedy.

**Betsy:** Okay, this is the last one, but this is something, I think, that still goes on. I've never been to one and I would love to.

"Again, we take a diagonal course to the right in the home of Seth and Clara Maxson. Seth's father and mother lived there as well as three lovely daughters of Seth and Clara. The daughters were among my best friends. The Maxsons had a fine maple orchard, and one afternoon every spring, my mother, brother and I were invited for a sugaring off. Plain doughnuts and hand-spiced syrup boiled down to soft, creamy sugar and finally, leather aprons, sugar-on-snow, were

an annual treat as well as the visit to the sugar house. The elderly people passed on, and all too soon, Clara died. So, another family was broken, and eventually scattered.

**Betsy:** Why is it leather aprons? Does somebody know the origin of that? Oh, I see, it's at the consistency . . . Okay, so it looks sort of like an apron. Oh, I know, it sounds wonderful. Alright, as I say, I could go on and on but another time, we'll save it.

**Judith:** That was wonderful. What a crime that Marion couldn't continue that. Walter and I were fortunate enough to know her. She was a wonderful woman.

**Audience member (Lida?) shares:** Judy, my first schoolteacher was Martha Dodge. She asked if I could go to school because she had one other first grader. I was 4 years old and I spent many happy hours. Yes, Mr. Gove.

**Mr. Gove:** Did Betsy have some information on the Gove place?

**Betsy:** Well, yes. Oh good. Is this the place right below Russell Nietz Yes, I do. Maybe after . . . all it said is that it mentioned the Goves that lived there and then it passed on to some other Goves, and then they left town, but never sold the house, it said, and that it was always kept up.

**Mr. Gove:** Until recently it hasn't been kept up.

**Betsy:** Right, but all through her adulthood and everything somebody it was; somebody was trying to . . .

**Mr. Gove:** My family spent summers, well, parts of summers there for many years. My wife and I spent our honeymoon there in February 1943.

**Betsy:** Well, I'll see. Are you local?

**Mr. Gove:** I'm from Laconia.

**Betsy:** Because if you want, I can Xerox the little section if I don't have it with me. See me after. Okay, next we will go to Donald Hall, who is antsy because he's missing the Celtics. (Laughter.)

**Don:** It's terrible to expose me.

**Betsy:** Donald is going to give us some of his mother's reminiscences of her childhood.

**Don:** I think, actually, I'll begin with something else, I'm going to read my mother's . . . it's not very long. But you mentioned the Kearsarge School of Practice—the mansard house up in the Center. My grandmother had one joke. My grandfather had a million, and he told stories and jokes all the time, and everybody'd laugh. We'd begin to laugh halfway through, and he'd continue, everyone else would laugh. He would go, (in a barking fashion) what, argh, (more sounds). He would make noises like he was a dog. And it was the way he would amuse us. But anyway, but she had one story-- she didn't like people telling stories—every time we would drive past the Center, and she would see the Kearsarge School of Practice when she was 90 years old, it was still the Kearsarge School of Practice, as far as she was concerned, she would start to giggle. And she would tell this story. She'd forgotten she'd told it, or maybe she just loved to tell it again. She went there. She was born in 1878, so she went there in the 80s, and in the winter when the little schools were closed because of snow, some people would live at the Kearsarge School of Practice for a term. The families would come on weekends and bring them food—come up on the sled. And one time, Kate, young Kate, was there, and one of the boys who lived there, ran out of eggs and borrowed an egg from her. So, she had loaned him an egg. The next weekend his family came by—so he was able to restore this. He was apparently a young man rather effeminate. She never said this, but when she he imitated him—she cantered, as it were. And so, she would begin to giggle now, saying, “And he said...;” “And he said...” (catching her giggling breath) “Kate, I just laid/layed an egg on your bed!” (Laughter) The Kearsarge School of Practice just completely pushes a button. My mother turned 85--it wouldn't qualify her for the Boston Post Cane, but last Saturday, a week ago yesterday, she turned 85, and she is not able to travel anymore, but she wrote this reminiscence of another part of Wilmot now—what was briefly going to be called “East Wilmot”, where we live on Route 4, a mile or so between Andover and Danbury—there is a little portion of Wilmot, which is where we live and where she was born, and where her mother was born on Route 4. My mother calls it Route 8 here, very strangely, she's exaggerating, you see.

“Wedged in between West Andover and South Danbury there's a one-mile section of Wilmot running north and south on Route 8. Back in the early 1900s the road was narrow and sandy. My mother was born in 1903. There were no cars, but it was well traveled since it was the main road between railroad stations. West Andover was a busy little town. There were two grocery and dry goods stores, a livery stable, freight and passenger stations. All goods and supplies were transported by Freighter Express. The stage for Wilmot Center and Springfield—a wagon or sleigh with three double seats, met every train.

**Don:** Back in the 1940's I used to talk with Mrs. Fortune waiting for the afternoon mail to come through, and we were waiting, also, for the "stage, to arrive from Springfield. That is what we called it. It was a green pick-up truck. We called it “the stage” in 1947.

"In the summer as the horses and wagons drove by, they always stopped and watered their horses at the big cement watering trough which my grandfather had built across the road from our house.

**Don:** still there without water in it. We have flowers in it now.

"For those days, it was especially busy in the summer. There was a butcher from West Andover who came around once a week. A fish man whose name was Joyce, and lived on the Cilleyville Road, came once a week with fresh fish packed in ice. The Grand Union man, which supplied my family with coffee for many years, he gave coupons with every purchase. My mother used to save these and get Christmas presents for my sisters and me—beautiful dolls and huge story books. She also saved coupons for Larkin's soap. We have a great mirror and a great desk with a fold down top that came from Larkin's soap coupon. We've also got one bar left of Larkin's soap. We don't use it. We're saving it for when we run out. The Raleigh man, who sold patent medicines, ointments, and so on for people and animals both. There was a man by the name of Hale from Potter Place who made tin pots and pans in his little shop. He would head north shouting his wares early in the morning. By the time he got back at night, his horse would be finding his own way home. His owner would be lying on the seats, sleeping off too much hard cider. My father would usually drive him home.

"Photographers would hire a horse and buggy and drive to the various farmhouses, taking pictures of the houses and families.

**Don:** I have several of these photographs. I remember this. They would actually develop them right there and printed them while you waited.

"But we always looked forward to having the organ grinder come by with his monkey. After playing a tune or two, he would send his little monkey to the door with his hat in hand, and mother would give us pennies to put in it.

Then, there were the gypsies. We had heard that they stole children, so whenever we heard them coming, my sisters and I would scurry for the house. Once when Mother was selling millinery, the caravan stopped, and a young woman came to the door to sell a picture frame. She wanted to swap it for a new hat. So, my mother let her choose a pretty straw hat, trimmed with lots of flowers. After she went back to her wagon, we heard lots of shouting and arguing. The next day, my father found the hat, torn to shreds, up beside the road.

**Don:** We still have the frame in the house that came in that trade.

"The parents came by, usually alone, nearly every day in the summer. My mother always gave them a sandwich and a glass of milk. They used to leave chalk marks on the stone walls or on the house to indicate to others that they'd get a handout.

"Before the State road was put through, my father was the road agent for our part of Wilmot that consisted of the main road, now Route 8, (this she says), the Eagle Pond Road to the South Danbury Line and the New Canada Road to the Danbury line. He had a small snow roller that could be drawn by two horses. He and a hired man would go out armed with shovels for deep drifts` and pack the snow down so that the sleighs and sleds could get through, sometimes working all night. Well, the milk had to be shipped in the morning to Manchester and Boston. His pay was one dollar a day for each man and one dollar for the roller and horses. In the spring, during the mud season, they would take loads of hardpan from a bank on the New Canada Road and fill in the ruts and holes or mix with sand and smooth off and firm up the roads. "Hardpan" is a layer of subsoil that's very hard to work but makes a solid base for a road when it's well packed down. Wilmot used to buy this hardpan from him for 25 cents a load. He always worked on the roads enough for the year to pay his taxes. In 85 years almost everything is changed. Roads are being kept clear for the cars with huge new snowplows. Oil has replaced wood stoves. No home would be complete without a telephone. Electricity has replaced oil lamps, brought us washing machines and many other work-saving aids. The little neighborhood school is gone and [so are] most of the small local stores where we used to visit our neighbors and get the latest news. We don't depend on church suppers, local dramatics, sings, and socials. Now we have radio, television or we can drive 15 miles for dinner. Who's to say what's best?" Lucy Wells Hall-

**Judith:** Now, you may think that history is a hundred years ago, but we have living proof, sitting right in the second row, that history is not too many years ago. And Fran Wilcox will wind up our afternoon for us.

**Fran:** I didn't know Don Hall was here and I didn't ask his permission, and it took me at least 20 minutes to find the quotation, because in '53 when we first came here, I discovered his book called, String Too Short to Be Saved, and I made quite a reputation because in New Jersey we lived in suburbia, and I taught sociology. And some place along the line I found a clipping in the sociology book which described life in Las Vegas versus life in a New England town. So, what I did, was I taped—I guess it's illegal—but I taped certain sections of Don's book and then I took pictures, and I gave a presentation of life up here as compared to life in suburban New Jersey. And it was absolutely incredible because it was just as if I was an anthropologist talking about life in New Guinea. So, I read to you just this section marked: People from Boston, boarded for taxes and after the war they rebuilt it and they and their children go there now in the summers and talk as if they were born there. That's the Wilcoxes.

This is an informal, verbal snapshot of the near past. We came in '53. And I think we were probably among the first of a huge increase of flatlanders, or as Don calls them in his book, "summer people." And sometimes I think he's not being very flattering either. But that's alright. The Town, if you do not know, where we live—we live in the red farmhouse on the North Wilmot Road, and I brought you a picture that was taken the first year. You can't see it, but you can look at it later. The water came from the front entrance way. This, of course, is the old woodshed, and we have started painting the house red, but you can see up here where it hadn't been painted for years. And this is our daughter, who was about 5, and my aunt who had never been out of New York City and who had been conned up because I thought it was so wonderful up here, and she couldn't get out of the place fast enough. We were sort of camping out, as it were, and we thought this was the most beautiful place in the world, and she'd want to know how far it was to the store and why we didn't have a bathroom. We were happy even though she wasn't.

The Town was different, and even in my lifetime, we had a Post Office in Wilmot Center then until the government got economically wise. It was very small, and Mrs. LaJoie ran it. And our children would go up every morning to get the mail; and in addition to that they would sit around and listen to all the older people coming in for the gossip. So, I kept track of what was going on by just listening to our children.

We never went to New London. I don't think—the road was dirt. We didn't even seem to think it existed. We went to Cutler's store [Wilmot Flat], and I always can remember that Mr. Cutler knew I liked Pepperidge Farm bread and not many people did, but he always put it in the freezer for me. And, of course, we thought the hamburgers up here were *much* superior to any other hamburgers we ever had. Whether it was a State law regarding the fat content, or what, but we loved it.

The population was about 350 when we came. There was no Route 11 as you people know it. We went through the Village Road. That was the main road, and that's where Cutler's store was. And when you go to R.P. Johnson's, and Son, we go to Amos'. Now I don't why, but we say we go to Amos', and to go there we went over the covered bridge and up 15 rickety wooden steps that I couldn't even navigate together. His sister ran the business, and one time I arrived and there were about five around and I said, 'Now, I want some red paint to match what was . . . we got some for the front, maybe we can get to the back this summer.' Well, you should have heard them laugh at me. They said what you always read about in magazines, 'That's the trouble with the summer people, they want to paint the back of the house.' (Laughter)

North Wilmot Road where I sit and glare at all the heavy traffic and the speeding traffic and get angry about it, and especially people whom I don't know, was a dirt road and you knew practically everyone that went along the road, to the extent, you know, when they say about little

country towns being “nosy”, we’re nosy. We know everybody’s business, but it’s a concerned nosiness. And I could always remember that during the years we lived here, a certain man that I lived with had a habit of ‘weekending’. And why he ever did it—we wouldn’t do it today—but he would arrive at 11 p.m. on Friday night. One night, he drove in the driveway, and some of you remember Cappy LeVarn. Cappy came by, stopped the car, never said a word, but waited to see whether the man that drove in my driveway at 11 o’clock at night, was a legitimate arrival or whether I was in trouble. And it was so kind, you know, because, he didn’t bother, he just stopped carefully and watched to see what was going on.

One of the first people we ever met in Wilmot was Arthur Thompson because when we bought the house, we didn’t even know where it was. We had to have the real estate woman draw some maps so we could go back to look at it after we bought it. On the way we wanted to go to New London that particular day. Somebody said there was a town over there, and we were going down a very steep dirt road, which you now call Cross Hill Road. And halfway down, there was a man standing in front of his house and we stopped, and we said, “Is this the way to New London?” And the answer in a glorious voice—do you remember Arthur’s voice? He always made me swoon, and we called him Anthony Eden—the answer was, “It tis and it t’isn’t.” And if you know your map, that’s absolutely true. We were on our way to New London, but it wasn’t the way to go, we should have turned at the birches.

It was a different world too. The church was never locked. Kathy, our little daughter, would go up and practice the piano up there and just walk in and play the piano for a while and come back. The day of the auction—the good auctions are gone, because I kept a record one year. When we bought the farm, it was empty. And we furnished with contributions and \$50 from auction money. Carolyn LaJoie thought we needed something, she was throwing out a pine cabinet with a couple of broken doors, she sent it down for us. We went over to Warner one time and bought 3 oak chests. And, of course, my husband wasn’t around but my sister and I were there, and the men all loaded it up on top and padded it on top, and we took the back road from Warner. I don’t think they use it anymore, but you ought to go and look at it sometime.

Then one day, Reverend Campbell—now this would be Betsy’s grandfather—and her grandmother made a stately visit, which meant they walked down the hill and her grandfather was a *very* serious man, and he explained to us that he had come down because he was well aware of our ignorance. Our chimney needed attention. Of course, neither one of us ever thought of looking at the chimney. They’d had two chimney fires and when Ollie and I finally got around to taking it down, you just knocked apart. It just fell, you know, it wasn’t too hard. But I always thought that if it weren’t for Mr. Campbell, we’d probably all been burned up.

These were the days when we still had house calls by the doctors. Dr. Clough--now this is not the surgeon Clough, this is his father—drove over with the old medicine bag, and Kathy got red pills

for a sore throat right out of the bag. It was also the time when every summer we were all fearful of infantile paralysis—you remember that—and I can remember John Ohler, who retired today, driving over, looking at our Kathy and saying she had a fever of undetermined origin. He said, “Put her under the maple trees. Keep her quiet, and if it doesn’t go down, we’ll have a spinal tap tomorrow. And then, Mrs. Call, who lived at the Center, arrived in her pick-up truck and said, “I’ve come to sit with you.” I was alone, I had a child who was very sick, but down she came to be with me.

The hospital had just been built. Our Susan went over there to work, and then had the nerve to report the food was better over there than it is home, but it was! Because the people were still bringing food in to pay for some of their bills and it was all hand cooked. Marge Tooken cooked there, I think, and Carolyn LaJoie cooked there.

We were ignorant; completely ignorant. Ollie wasn’t, because he came from a farm, but my sister and I stripped wallpaper and went out in the yard and burned it without a permit in the middle of summer, you know.

Then, it was very different. It was train service. Ollie used to sneak away at 3 p.m. from New Brunswick, but at 5 p.m. in New York City at Grand Central, he’d get on the train and he would come up the Connecticut Valley, and I would go over to Claremont about 10:30 and pick him up. Except the time that they had a whole bunch of campers that were supposed to be met, and somebody from the camp failed to meet them. So, the train waited there till they got hold of the camp director to come back over and get the kids.

Potter Place still operated in my lifetime, and there was no Route 89, no Route 91. We went home to New Jersey on Route 5 down to Connecticut. Today you’d make it a two-day trip. There were very few outsiders, especially from New Jersey. One woman from New Jersey got lost one day in front of our farm and she stopped and asked for directions; and of course, I said, “Oh, you’re from New Jersey? We’re from there.” And she looked at me and she said, “You’re from New Jersey? How did you ever get here?!” (Laughter)

Then, perhaps, those of you know Mildred, perhaps remember Channing Sawyer. Channing died recently. I had always said, “Channing is going to be my second husband.” He was so handsome and so lovely. But he delivered milk, and in those days, we never locked the house so every time I would go swimming or go off someplace for the day, Channing would come in, open the door, put the milk in the refrigerator and go on his way.

Our dog that we lived with for 15 years, has Wilnot roots. She was called “Princess” and was one of the last puppies that the Campbells had. And our daughter, I guess, protecting her family, brought her home—a little bundle and looked and said, “They said if she’s spiked, she’ll make a

lovely pet.” You can think what you want there. And Princess became Stan and commuted between Wilmot and New Jersey for 15 years.

Telephone calls—that’s another journey. Mrs. Campbell, Betsy’s grandmother, was the first consumer advocate I ever knew because telephones and the telephone service left much to be desired. Half the time it was on, half the time it was off. I had five phones that were blown out because they failed to ground it, you know. And so every time we had an electric storm, my phone blew--one time, all over the room. Now, on the other hand, one time Mrs. LaJoie came down. For two weeks we hadn’t been able to communicate outside of Wilmot, and my sister, who had been grounded at Omaha Air Force Base, put 50 cents in the box and she got through to Mrs. LaJoie to tell me she was grounded.

Forest fires—we had those one summer, and I looked up and the whole horizon—I forget what year that was—was all red, and I remember getting frightened about it and someone said, “Don’t worry. We’ve got you marked on the map and we’ll come and get you, if we need to.”  
(Laughter)

Then, if you’ve ever been in back of our house, there’s about a five- or ten-acre beaver pond; and I have a little tin rowboat—aluminum. It was given to me as an anniversary present when I was married 25 years. Next time I’m going to ask for something else, (laughter) but anyway, I used to take the boat and the collared dog and go out and read. Now this was the day before the bikini, so I would get out in the middle of the lake—of the pond—and take off my jacket and sit there and have a sunbath. Now I did have something on, more than a bikini on, too; but it was not the proper attire. And one day I went out to see Rick Duchene, who was May Jones’ uncle, I believe, and we said, “How do you do?”, you know, and “How’s the day?”, he said. And he looked at me and he said, “You have your boat out.” And I said, “Oh, yes.” And he said, “I have my binoculars out.” (Laughter)

Then there was Nelson’s Department Store in Franklin and believe it or not, in my lifetime, they still had the little cash things and wires and they went swooshing around, you know, with the change. And going to Franklin was a big deal because we’d go there and there was a little bakery there and we’d start out early in the morning; and my daughter always called it the “smelly bakery” and by that she meant it as a compliment. They would be baking doughnuts as we came along.

And then Art Coves lived up where Morses live. I used to have to keep peace there because Art always wanted us to have turnip greens. And our kids hated turnip greens. I think she’d never met them.

**Judith:** Would you hold it a minute?

**Fran:** You want me to shut up?

**Judith:** No. (Turns tape over.)

**Fran:** I'll finish it now.

This is what I was reminded of yesterday because yesterday was the deadline for us who owned dogs. Remember that? And we just sat there, and we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and the young woman next to me said, "Well, it was much better when Lou was around". You know what she was saying? Lou Loomer, when we came to town, was the Town Clerk; and it didn't make any difference if you needed automobile registration, dog license . . . as long as you didn't go when Lou was taking his nap. That was the only restriction so that when you wanted to go to the Town Clerk, you just went down to Dr. Kirk's house, and Lou lived there then, and you just got what you wanted. Yesterday, I think it took an hour and a quarter to get a dog license.

Life was slower, quieter, no keys, very little furniture. We didn't care if the wind blew in. We just had a wonderful time. So, we thank all of you who were here when we came, who welcomed us, and have now labeled us "old timers". We have arrived! (Applause)

**Judith:** Well, that is our program, and I just want to say two things.

This Nelson's Department Store that Fran talked about, started the whole thing; and it was a chain throughout the United States—started right up here in the little store up in the Flat, the little 5- and 10-cent store. And also, we got our milk, when we first came to town, from Channing Sawyer also--got gallons of skim milk. And Channing's idea of skim milk was that much cream on top.

I hope you've all enjoyed it, and is this something that you would like to have us do again?  
(Audience: Yes!)

Alright, we will do that. Thank you all for coming.