

#15 Helen White Interviews Earle Chandler 5 10 1993

Today, May 10, 1993 I am having the pleasure of interviewing Mr. Earle Chandler, Wilmot Selectman. This is Helen White, and I am a volunteer for the Wilmot Historical Society, and this is a history interview.

Earle, I wonder if you could tell me something about yourself: where you were born, in what year, and some other things that you might like to tell us about your early childhood.

I was born in Bartlett, September 6, 1913 and I lived there through college actually.

Now, did you go to school in Bartlett?

Yes, I went to school in Bartlett through High School.

Now, as a young boy what mode of transportation was there?

In the summer and fall we went to the school with horse and wagon.

Who drove the wagon?

I did.

And how old were you?

7 years old.

And you could drive the horse and wagon?

In the summer and fall we had a surrey with the fringe on top.

My, that would have been fun to see. Now . . .

I made \$10 a week for my father for doing this. I took the neighbor kids to school so I was a school bus driver. In the winter we used sleighs, of course.

How many would a sleigh hold?

There were 5 of us.

Was it you and your brother and your sister at that time?

My sister and myself and three of the neighbors. And we used to pick up a kid along the way sometimes.

How far was your home from the school?

3-½ miles.

Oh, that was considered much too long to walk.

They rolled the roads in those days. Sometimes the roads weren't rolled so we had to walk.

Now did school continue all during the winter? And was there a time when you stopped during harvest time as I've heard?

No, we didn't do that here. Part of Maine they did it and still do it I guess. We never did it.

You had a school year until possibly...June was it?

The latter part of June.

What was your father's occupation?

He was a farmer.

How large was your farm? Have you any idea?

We had 500 acres.

Is that farm still in the Chandler family?

No. I sold it in 1965 to the Attitash Ski Area.

Did it become the Attitash Ski Area?

Part of it did—the housing complex and the meadows and fields are now where they hold their horse shows. It's in the flood zone, you can't build there.

You went through High School in Bartlett and then from there what did you do?

Yes, I did and then I went to Cannon High School, oh no, not Cannon High School . . . went to University of New Hampshire. The high school in Bartlett was moved to Cannon right after I got through. I hope that wasn't the reason . . . laughter.

And then you went to the University of New Hampshire and what did you major in there?

Business Administration . . .Accounting.

Then did you go into accounting after leaving college?

No, I didn't. Most of my life I spent in the lumber business.

You found you really enjoyed that more?

My whole family was in that more or less.

And I think you mentioned that you had graduated from UNH in 1935 and then you went, more or less, into the forestry field?

Yes.

And you ran your own businesses in effect?

Yeah. And we ran the farm all those years, too.

And now, did you have help at the farm? And how many cattle did you have or what types of animals were on the farm?

Yes, we had 60 milk cows. And I had one helper. He accused me of being always away so that he had to do all the work by himself.

And what about your brother—was he old enough to help?

He was older than I.

So he perhaps was not on the farm as much as yourself?

No, he hated the farm. Except to come live there. A lot of times he'd come visit but that's the only reason.

And then, during your time when you were in forestry, you worked all over the State of New Hampshire or mainly in the Bartlett area?

No, mainly in the Laconia area.

Now, so really this was, more or less your entire life—pretty much buying and selling land in order to lumber it—is that the proper way of saying it? I'm a novice on this.

Well, I don't approve of clear cutting much so we never clear cut any lots that we owned.

You did what they call "selective cutting"?

Yes, that's right.

Tell me something about your own family.

Well, I married Alice as everyone knows. I had 5 children—they're not her children. They're all living.

Do I understand one son-- is his name Rusty—is living in this area?

Yeah, he lives in Wilmot, and he's also the director of skiing at King Ridge.

You said, in one place that you sold some of your land in Bartlett, which eventually became part of the Attitash Ski Area, right? So, it sounds as if skiing was sort of in your family's blood—you might say?

Well, I was captain of the UNH Ski Team. And I skied all over the country. I used to race a lot before I got so I can't hardly walk.

Well that must have been very interesting and fun to do. And how did your team rate?

Well, we were the best when I was there. Then, a couple of years after that, Dartmouth started winning everything, and they still continue.

They probably have a lot more people that specialize in skiing.

They do.

Now after doing forestry in various areas around the State of New Hampshire—and you say under the Federal Government, you worked for a period of about 7 years—and then you went on your own?

Yes. Seven years.

Now can you tell me, when you first arrived in Wilmot.

I came to Wilmot in 1965. I came down here. Another thing I had was a little business that designed and built ski areas, and I came down here and had a contract to layout and build Ragged Mountain, which is still going. And I managed that for a couple of years, and that's the reason I came here. I thought I better move down here if I was going to.

Now when did you come to your lovely home on Kearsarge Mountain Road? Was that 1965?

It was about December 1, 1965.

To whom did that property belong before you had it?

When I bought it, it actually belonged to a lawyer in Bradford but it always had been a part of Morgan Farm.

And how old is the house itself?

Not so old. It was built in 1927. There was an entire group of buildings—house, barns, outbuildings, and everything burned in 1924. Children set it afire . . . the Morgan children.

Oh, they were playing with . . .?

Matches. And Walter Morgan, the father, . . . all the men were down in the sugar bush making maple syrup, so I guess it was gone before they even knew about it.

Now, was this all the outbuildings? I hope it didn't touch the beautiful house.

Oh, it burned the house.

So, the house itself was built in 1927. And how large an acreage is there, Earle?

184 acres.

It's a beautiful location, I know. Earle, you've been in public life most of the time since coming to Wilmot. Is that right?

Yes, and long before that. I was elected to selectmen in Bartlett in 1946. I served 18 years there. Then I came here and I was elected in 1967. I followed Donna Niles.

Donna Niles who was part of the Freedom Acres ladies. And you have been a Selectman ever since?

Going head's up to about 44 years. [the combination of the two towns.]

Now I understand that you've also been connected with the State Legislature.

Yes, I served 4 terms in the New Hampshire Legislature while I lived in Bartlett, and I'm in my second term here.

Now what years did those terms cover?

Well, Bartlett was 1955 till 1965.

And here in Wilmot?

Just the last 4 years.

This is the first 4 years—this is the first time you had represented Wilmot, was just these past 4 years?

Well, as a Selectman. I ran for the Constitutional Convention in 1984 and was elected for Wilmot.

You'll have to tell me what the Constitutional Convention was.

The Convention gathers people from all over the State, 400 are represented, but it's a different group. It's for the purpose of determining if the Constitution needs amending or not.

This is the *State* Constitution?

Yes.

And how often do they meet?

Well, they usually meet every ten years. But last year the legislature decided not to approve that so they won't be until the legislature approves it again.

It's entirely up to the legislature when that body will meet?

Yup. Should be in 1994 but it won't be.

You were elected as a representative of any particular party?

Republican Party. My district now . . . instead of it used to be that they had a 10-year rule, if a town was too small to have a representative every year, they would have one at least every 10 years. Well, Wilmot was in that classification and Arthur Thompson served the last time they had that, years ago. [Note from Charles Thompson, Arthur's son: Arthur Thompson was in the legislature for several terms but not on the ten-year basis one. He also served a district of combined towns, not sure if they are those stated by Earle.]

And then they had to send someone from someplace other than Wilmot?

No, you had the towns of Salisbury, Andover, Wilmot, Hill, and Danbury. And so, I represent those five towns. It's called Merrimack County District Number 1.

Since your being elected a Selectman, Earle, could you tell me some of the changes that have happened in this town, say, what was the population when you arrived in 1965, approximately?

I'm not sure, but I think it was about 600. Now, it's 935.

I had a feeling it was somewhere near 1,000. I think when we arrived in 1978, it was about 800 they told us.

But, Wilmot's rather a unique town. Everybody here, I think, and always have thought, tries to help others.

This I have very much felt since coming here. I've learned a great deal about caring and sharing. This, I think, typifies Wilmot.

And I think it's a good thing because you don't have to be poor and down and out to get help. Because you get help meeting people, neighbors, . . . it doesn't mean financial help or anything, it's just help. I have a great fondness for Lida Gross. **(Don't we all!)** She's a great lady.

She certainly is. We've all learned a great deal from her, and I, of course, being a next-door neighbor to Annie Thompson . . . I learned a great deal from Annie, too, and of course, Arthur, too. I wish so many times they had a recording of his beautiful voice. To my knowledge it was never taped.

Don't think so. In the legislature, on my committee, is Annie Thompson's brother, Jim Whittemore.

I'm wondering now Earle if you could tell us a little bit of, perhaps, the changes that have occurred during your 28 years as a Wilmot Selectman. Has the Town changed for the better, for the worse, or how would you describe it?

Oh, I think the Town has changed for the better. We've got a lot of nice people that have moved in. Everybody says it's an expensive place to live, but it isn't any more expensive than anywhere else. I've always been concerned with the taxes. I don't think that anyone should pay more than what they can pay. We've tried to keep them down as best we could. But you've got to get some services to the townspeople—they've earned it.

I've always thought that Wilmot roads, particularly, have been very well kept up and maintained.

They have been. The Town has been lucky to have a fella like Henry Patten. And I don't know what we're gonna do when we lose him cuz' he's gonna retire someday, he can't continue to work like this forever.

When you first came to Wilmot, was it a different type of town? Were there more open places between homes—have there been any, what you call, developments, as such, in Wilmot?

Well, yes, there's been some—not a great amount. But there are developments that are now authorized by the Planning Board that will alter the Town quite a lot; for example, Stonebridge development over here on Pinky Rowe's property. It's gonna change the whole look of the Town when they get those houses all built over there.

Are those lots being sold to individuals?

Yes, they are.

So, it won't be a developer who will be putting a number of houses in at one time, is that the idea?

Not at the present that's the way it is. Local fellow owns the subdivision so I think he's probably going to sell off what he can.

Because of the economy, as we know, many properties are just not moving. Have you any idea, as of now, how many unsold properties there are in Wilmot?

No. I don't. There are a lot of them. But our taxes—they're high, but they're not higher than any other town that I can see. I like to state the fact that usually, over the years that I've been here, we've tried to keep the increase in taxes about the same as there would be in the increase in appraisals. In other words, \$2,000,000 increase in our valuation then we should keep about even with the taxes.

So people can expect that their taxes might remain approximately the same?

Approximately the same. They had one big increase a few years ago, but this last year, they went down a little; and I don't know what's going to happen yet this year.

Earle, do you have any particular reminiscences that you would like to tell us about—perhaps some things that you especially remember during these years that you have been our Selectman?

Well, I don't have anything right now that I can think of.

Perhaps you can tell me, when you first came here, where was the Selectmen's Office located?

The Selectmen's Office, for the first few years that I was a Selectman, was at the small room in the corner of the Town Hall in Wilmot Center.

Is that possibly where the Supervisors of the Checklist are—that tiny room?

Yes.

Did you have a secretary in those days?

No. We didn't have any secretary.

How were the minutes kept?

What minutes there were, we kept ourselves.

Was someone of the 3 Selectmen designated to take the minutes?

Yeah, the one that got in last.

How many years was the Selectmen's Office in the Town Hall?

Well, we rebuilt this for the Bicentennial. That was 1976.

When you say, "this," you're talking about the Town Offices, and where are the Town Offices located? (This is for history.)

Yes. The Town Offices are located in the Wilmot Flat School which was rebuilt by the Committee, I think they call themselves the Bicentennial Committee. They raised most of the money and rebuilt this into these offices now. And the Historical Society has one room, and the Tax Collector and Town Clerk has one, and Town Secretary has one and the Selectmen have one.

Now this building that is now the Town Offices, this was a school until what date? (1963 or thereabouts)

Until the new Kearsarge Regional was built and I've forgotten the date of that.

If the Town Offices became the Town Offices, you say, in 1976, is that right?

That's when we rebuilt the building. The school district sold it to the Town for \$1.

In 1976 the children were then sent to the Regional School, is that correct?

That's when it started, I'm not sure of the date.

You mentioned something about that the Town had hoped that 6 grades...

The first six grades, they promised us, would have a new school, if we headed into this agreement to attend the Kearsarge Regional School and then the older children would go to the Middle School. But that never turned out, which I've always felt sorry for because I think it would have been good for the Town to have a school there—much better than not to have any.

And also, I think it would have been less expensive transportation-wise.

Yes. I opposed the building of the school in Sutton because just as you just said, everybody had to be transported. Nobody could walk. Whereas, if they had built it in New London--they had a chance to buy the Brocklebank property—and if they'd have built it there then, at least, the ones in New London, the children in New London could have walked to school—saved all the transportation money. Didn't happen that way.

The region consists of how many towns?

7 towns.

And apparently those 7 towns voted that it should be otherwise?

I guess so.

Earle, I'm going to go back to your childhood a little bit, because I know you've always loved skiing. When did you actually start skiing and what type of skis did you use?

Well, I started skiing when I was 6 years old. And they had nothing but toe straps on the skis in those days. And then we'd take rubber bands and put them around our heel to hold our shoe on the ski a little better. Then slowly things changed and in the 30's we got, what we called a "bear trap binding" on the skis. Then it changed pretty fast after that. They developed the new skis, the new bindings.

As I recall, even for myself, too, skis were a great deal longer when we first started skiing.

Yeah, they were. I had the good fortune of being able to ski without benefit of having the trails rolled like they do today. If we wanted to ski, we skied the Wildcat trail where the Wildcat ski area is now, before they built it . . . we skied up there. We had to climb up and we had to pack our own trail.

Do you feel that there was more powder-type snow way back when or is that just memories?

That's just memories, I think, I don't think it's any different. I skied a lot in Tuckerman Ravine. One year I skied up there every day for a month.

I walked in there twice, I believe, and I remember my legs ached for three days afterwards. I didn't go to ski, just to watch the skiers. But the beauty of that place was something I'll never forget. I would like to know, Earle, a little bit more about your farm—in what your produce is—do you specialize in any particular vegetables or whatever it might be?

Well, for a number of years after I came here, I raised potatoes and found a good market for them.

Where was your market?

Locally. People came from everywhere to buy home grown potatoes, I guess, they're all home-grown more or less, anyway. And pumpkins; I raised a lot of pumpkins.

Did you sell them, say, to Boston or someplace like that?

No, I sold them all locally. People either came to the house and bought them and for a number of years, I furnished all the pumpkins at Spring Ledge Farm. Then he decided he could do better, I guess, raising his own . . . he didn't buy them from me.

You, yourself, did most of the farming for a number of years?

I did it all for a number of years besides being manager of a big lumber company.

Now where was this lumber company located?

New England Lumber Company in Ossipee. We had mills in other places. The main mill was in Ossipee. I was the general manager.

So, you were a pretty busy person, I would say. Plus being Selectman all those years.

Well, I had about 30 cows besides that. I had to cut the hay for them.

I'm sure you've always gotten up very early in the morning.

Yeah, I always did . . . I still do.

What is early?

5 o'clock. When I worked for the lumber company, I had sixty something miles to drive, so I had to leave here at quarter of six in the morning. I had a crew of 90 men that started at 7 o'clock.

And you had to milk your cows before . . . ?

I didn't have any milk cows in those days. I had beef cows. I had to feed them. That's all. Although Alice took care of them if I couldn't.

And did you have your son, Rusty, here with you or was this more recently?

He came back here about 15 years ago; and he does all the farms now. I don't do any of it. I do a little. I'm not much help. I'm probably more of a hindrance than I am a help.

Well, I'm sure you have a lot of good advice for him.

No, I don't give him any advice at all. I learned that years ago. They don't want any advice.

Now, Rusty, did he go to the University of New Hampshire?

No, he went to the University of Colorado. He went out there to ski. When he was in college and for the next 7 or 8 years afterwards, he was one of the world's best skiers. I have one son that's still racing. I tell him I don't think his judgment's very good but . . .

He's getting a little bit older, shall we say?

He's in his late 40's.

Earle, I'd like to ask you who the other Aldermen were who—no, selectmen, you can see I come from down below, as they say—who the other Selectmen were that served with you during these past 28 years.

Well, John Morse for a number of years. Jim Rayno served one term. Dick Bacon served two or three terms. Ernest Patten served. Course, recently, Bob Tawney, and Nelson Chitterling—two excellent selectmen.

And they have been in office for how many years?

I think Bob has been in office about 12 years and Nelson, I think this it's been 5 years, his first year was an appointment for one year.

In your time here as a Selectman, can you tell me what particular changes you've observed here in the Town—now you did say something about the area where you live up on Kearsarge Mountain Road has changed quite a bit, and why has that changed so much?

Oh, I guess, because people wanted to live up high, you see, so they could look off. When I first came here, which wasn't actually too many years ago, I was the only family—my family—was the only ones that lived up there all winter. The other places were just summer places. And then slowly they started down . . . I guess everyone lives up there now year-round.

Pretty much I understand . . . cuz' many people come here not only for the beauty during the summertime, but they like the winter and many people, of course, enjoy skiing, just as you do. Here down in the Flat, would you say that there have been changes in the Flat area?

Well, not as many changes because there haven't been as many new buildings built here. It's pretty well filled up anyway. Of course, now we have a commercial area in town, and we don't have to accept the building of business building in the residential areas, which is good.

Now actually, do we have many businesses here in Wilmot?

We have many small businesses. That's all. We don't have any real employment opportunities. That's one thing we don't have.

Most businesses here in Wilmot are probably just a family-owned business, would you say?

Yes, one person business . . . maybe he hires a couple now and then to help. They're mostly construction, of course, that hasn't been too good for the last few years.

Can you tell me, Earle, were there any businesses and have any been established since your being a selectman? And have there been changes in regulations as far as businesses are concerned? And when would that have happened?

Well, when I came here, the Freedom Acres was in business. The Della Robbia Wreath House was in business.

Where were both of these businesses located?

Freedom Acres was up on Mt. Kearsarge and Della Robbia Wreath House was on Cross Hill. Now it's a home occupied by Mrs. Berkey.

Were there any other businesses in existence when you first came here?

Cioffi's Restaurant was a popular place to eat. I guess that's about all. There was a business across from the church—the Baptist Church here in the Flat here. I've forgotten what the business was, but they did have a small business in there.

Where the Post Office is now located?

No, where the Smith's live.

Oh yes, I recall that because when we came here it was a shop where people could bring in various crafting items on consignment—I think it was called something "Goose" [the Wild Goose]. As of now, are there any businesses here in Wilmot that might have changed the area somewhat?

Well the Planning Board, I think, did a good job when they set up a commercial zone. That's on Route 11 from Winslow Road to the end of Village Road.

Is that both sides of Rt. 11?

No, that's on the east side only.

Now are there any businesses within that area as of the present date.

Yes, the Walker boys, Nathan Walker's Garage. And we used to have what we'd call "the Rug Merchants". Now that they've gone, that cannot be reactivated as a business.

They were in existence prior to the Planning Board's Zoning for Commercial?

Yes.

I believe we have only one restaurant in Wilmot now. Is that within that area and by whom is that run?

Yes. La Meridiana run by Piero Canuto. He's been getting a lot of publicity lately.

Oh, really.

PHONE RINGS and interview ends with:

The foregoing winds up my interview with Earle Chandler.